

Putting
Summer
to Work

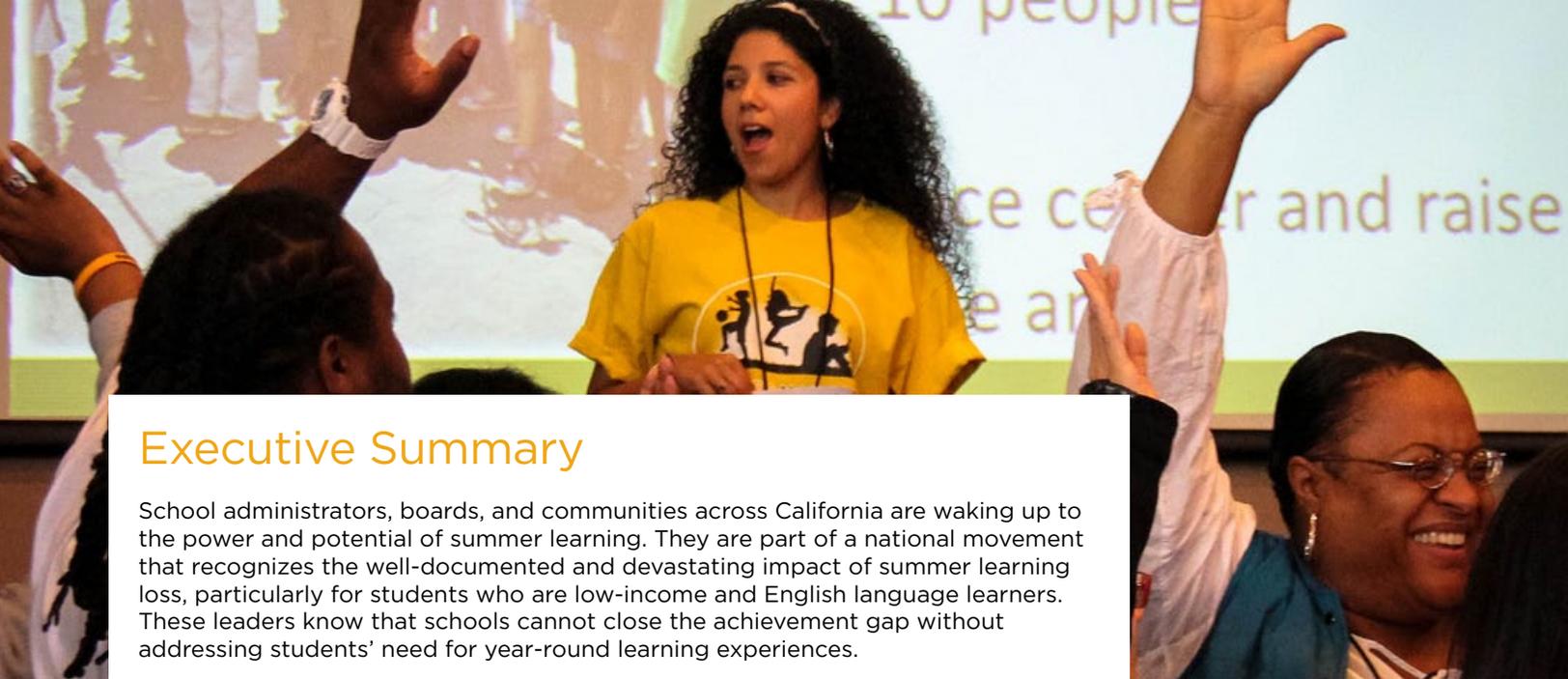
LCFF Leveraging Summer for Student Success

A guide to help school leaders understand why and how summer learning is an essential strategy for implementing the Local Control Funding Formula

Partnership for Children & Youth
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SUMMERMATTERS



Executive Summary

School administrators, boards, and communities across California are waking up to the power and potential of summer learning. They are part of a national movement that recognizes the well-documented and devastating impact of summer learning loss, particularly for students who are low-income and English language learners. These leaders know that schools cannot close the achievement gap without addressing students' need for year-round learning experiences.

The significant changes in school financing and accountability systems under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) provide educators, school leaders and communities a new opportunity to reinvent and reinvest in summer. To yield improved student outcomes, schools and communities need to consider new and different solutions that reflect recent research about learning and teaching. District plans and priorities will also need to meet the new mandates and requirements of the Common Core State Standards and of education finance reform, including targeted support for low-income students, English language learners and foster youth. Given all the tasks at hand, education leaders are recognizing that schools should not work in isolation, but rather should both utilize and learn from their community partners to maximize student outcomes.

This paper outlines how high quality summer learning programs meet district and LCFF priorities by:

- Boosting **student achievement**;
- Supporting students, teachers and staff in the rollout of the **Common Core State Standards**;
- Building **student engagement** in their own learning and their school and community; and
- Improving **school climate** with year-round relationships and new teaching approaches.

“We will leverage the unique advantages of summer learning programs to provide the kinds of activities and projects that get students working together, having new experiences and building 21st Century skills.”

- John Deasy, LAUSD Superintendent 2013

This paper also provides guidance about best practices in developing summer learning programs, including leveraging resources and expertise from existing initiatives and programs in the district and in the broader community. Research and practice demonstrate that if schools and districts are serious about closing the achievement gap (a fundamental driver of the LCFF) investing in summer learning strategies must be a top priority.

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Why Summer Matters



Research shows that summer learning loss is measurable and quantifiable. The cumulative effects of summer learning loss contribute directly to a widening of the achievement gap between low-income and middle-income students.

- Unequal summer learning opportunities during elementary school years are responsible for about two-thirds of the ninth-grade achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth.¹ As a result, low-income youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enter college.
- Most students lose about two months of grade level equivalency in mathematical computation skills over the summer. Low-income students also lose more than two months in reading achievement, despite the fact that their middle-class peers make slight gains.²
- Low-income children are nearly three grade equivalents behind their more affluent peers in reading by the end of the fifth grade due to summer learning loss.³ (see Figure 1)

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Figure 1⁴



Summer Matters Campaign

Summer Matters is a statewide campaign focused on expanding access to high quality summer learning opportunities for all California students through innovative partnerships between school districts, county offices of education, after school providers, and community organizations. **Summer Matters' focus is on expanding access to high quality summer learning opportunities that support year-round learning and well-being for K-12 students with the greatest needs and fewest resources.** These programs create an intentional synergy and balance between the remediation often found in traditional, district-run summer schools and the new and active learning experiences of summer camps.

Summer Matters promotes quality summer learning programs that:

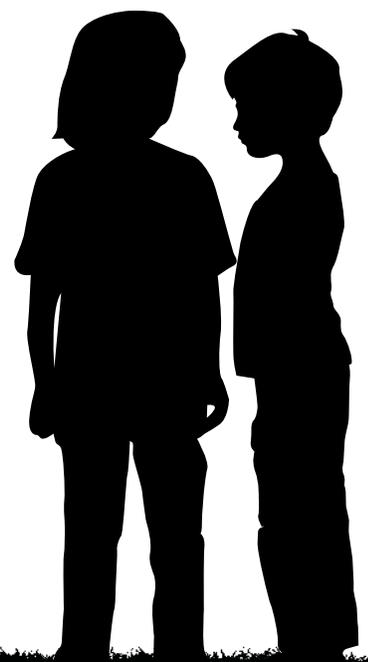
- **Broaden children's horizons**—by exposing them to new adventures, skills and ideas.
- **Include a wide variety of activities**—such as reading, writing, math, science, arts and public service projects—in ways that are fun and engaging.
- **Help children build skills**—by helping them improve at doing something they enjoy and care about.
- **Foster cooperative learning**—through team projects and group activities.
- **Promote healthy habits**—by providing nutritious food, physical recreation and outdoor activities.
- **Last at least one month**—giving children enough time to benefit from their summer learning experiences.

The campaign includes coordinated policy and advocacy strategies—including school leaders, the California Department of Education, community organizations, city and state agencies, foundations and business leaders—to raise awareness about the value of summer learning programs and expand access to, and improve the quality of, programs statewide. Concurrently, the campaign is piloting and expanding programming on the ground in 12 summer learning communities: Concord, Gilroy, Glenn County, Fresno, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Francisco, San Jose, Santa Ana, and Whittier.

What is the Local Control Funding Formula?

California has recently enacted significant changes in how schools are funded and held accountable, known as the Local Control Funding Formula. These changes are rooted in decades of research and practice on school finance in California. The driving ideas underlying this policy shift are two-fold: 1) students are better served when local schools districts have more funding flexibility to respond to local needs, and 2) funding should be allocated more transparently and equitably, specifically acknowledging the additional resources needed to serve students with greater barriers to learning including students in poverty, English language learners (ELL), and foster youth.

With increased funding and flexibility, school districts are required to develop a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) that outlines how they will achieve local and state priorities. This plan lasts for three years and is updated annually. The eight state priorities include Common Core State Standards (CCSS) implementation, student achievement, student engagement, school climate, parental involvement, course access, degree to which teachers are credentialed, and student outcomes in other subject areas. LCAPs will address how funding



matches the proposed local goals and activities, as well as how funding directly supports specific populations and schools with large numbers of low-income, ELL, and foster youth students. School districts are required to solicit and respond to district staff, parent, and community input on the development of the LCAP. The LCAP must be adopted by the local school board and approved by the County Office of Education.

For more information on the LCFF, go to:

<http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2013/edu/lcff/lcff-072913.aspx>

Investing in summer learning addresses state priorities and improves student success

The Summer Matters campaign's vision is that all children have access to high quality summer learning opportunities. Its focus is on low-income, ELL students, and foster youth – student populations that often do not have access to summer learning experiences due to financial barriers. The intent is to level the playing field by providing all students with learning experiences that we know are necessary for their educational success. This vision is catching on across the state. Despite significant cuts to school budgets and the closure of traditional summer school programs across the state, there has recently been a growing interest and investment by local school districts in summer learning programs due to the compelling research and the urgency to close the achievement gap.⁵ In 2013, over 45 superintendents signed on as summer learning champions ([see their letter here](#)). They include leaders from many of the largest districts serving some of the lowest income communities across the state--Sacramento, Fresno, Oakland, and San Francisco--and range from rural Glenn County to suburban Mt. Diablo to highly urban Los Angeles.

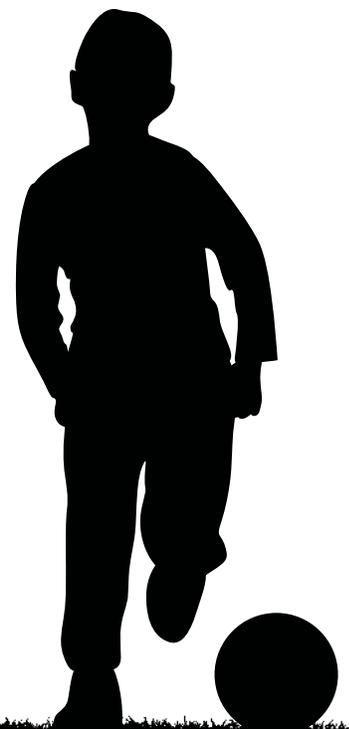
Every idle summer widens the gap by about three months in reading and language achievement between middle and low-income students.

Across the state, summer learning programs are demonstrating multiple positive impacts on students, parents, teachers and staff in ways that map directly to the state priorities that districts are required to address under the LCFF. Outlined below is evidence of how summer learning programs contribute to the LCFF priorities and most importantly the success of students.

Student Achievement

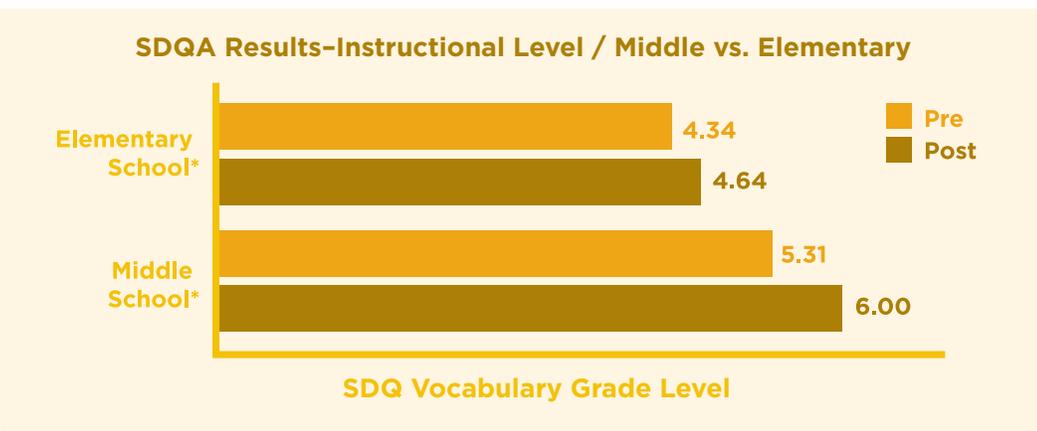
Research has unequivocally demonstrated that the lack of new experiences and opportunities to keep learning throughout the summer creates a gap of about 3 months in reading and language achievement between middle and low-income students.⁶ Without addressing summer learning loss, schools will never be able to get their low-income students caught up. Summer learning programs have been able to bridge the gap with gains in a range of academic measures. Research highlights include:

- A national multi-city study by RAND found that “summer learning programs can mitigate summer learning losses and even lead to achievement gains.”⁷
- A 2012 evaluation of summer learning programs found that:
 - Students who were the furthest behind in reading increased their instructional grade level by over 1/3 of a grade. (See figure 2)
 - English language learners demonstrated significant increases in their grade-level vocabulary, a gateway to English language fluency.
 - Students in Fresno and Los Angeles summer learning programs reported improved academic work habits and reading efficacy, both key contributors to academic achievement.⁸



- THINK Together, which provides summer programming to 7,000 students in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Sacramento counties, improved student growth in math vocabulary from pre-test to post-test in approximately 90 percent of their program sites.⁹

Figure 2¹⁰



Source: San Diego Quick Assessment, July 2012-Aug 2012, total n=403
 *Statistically significant change at p<.05

Implementation of the Common Core

The Common Core State Standards are new for everyone working with students in our public schools. Summer is proving to be an excellent time for teachers and expanded learning program staff to work together to figure out new instructional strategies and project-based approaches.

With flexible schedules, time and student groupings, summer learning programs are regularly promoting collaboration, communication, critical thinking and creativity. Group projects, presentations, open-ended questions and debriefs of learning are standard practice in high-quality summer programs. As such, the programs

have given students - particularly those farthest behind - a leg up on the new learning environments they will soon be facing. They have also proven to be excellent training grounds for teachers and youth development staff, allowing them to employ different methods of teaching.

A 2013 report from the Summer Matters campaign documents how students, teachers and staff are all gaining valuable experience with the Common Core.¹¹ Some examples include:

- The use of open-ended questions and inquiry-based learning were integral to the summer program elementary students in Whittier City School District. At one site, the theme for the summer centered on the book, *How to Eat Fried Worms*, by Thomas Rockwell which provided a catalyst for children to think about something they do well, write “how-to” books and teach their peers the skills.
- Opportunities to support student voice, facilitation, and listening skills were built into the design in Fresno. Staff were trained to prompt students to “stand and deliver,” requiring that they speak loudly and clearly, and think through their responses before speaking. In Sacramento, daily community circles were facilitated by students, and visitors were guided through classes by student ambassadors. These kinds of activities have particular value for students who are learning English.

“Working as staff members in the summer program gave the school’s credentialed teachers a chance to plan and implement project-based approaches that they could use during the regular school year and share with other teachers.”¹²

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Student Engagement

Summer learning programs get students excited about learning and increase their attachment to school environments. They do this by blending academic and enrichment activities that are intrinsically interesting to students and therefore motivate their learning. For students transitioning to new schools, these programs provide an introduction to their new building, staff and students, which instills a sense of belonging with their new community.

These practices yield tangible results in student engagement. Research highlights include:

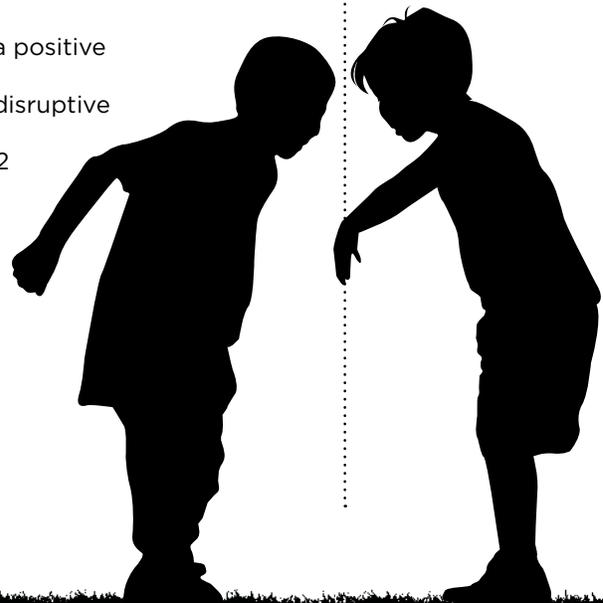
- In Fresno, summer program participants were one-third less likely to be chronically absent in fall 2012 than their peers, indicating much greater engagement with school.
- Summer learning program participants demonstrated high and sustained school day attendance rates, which are critical for youth to succeed in school.¹³
- In surveys in the summer of 2013, about 85 percent of students reported that their summer program helps them to enjoy learning, learn things that help with school work, feel ready to go back to school, and to like school.¹⁴

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School Climate

Positive school climates have been shown to support student achievement through intentional strategies to promote high student expectations, school safety and connectedness, student motivation, and social-emotional development. **Summer programs allow staff and teachers the time and flexibility to develop positive relationships with students that carry over into the school year.**

- Putting Summer to Work, a series of reports on the impact of summer learning, found that summer learning programs were successfully implementing practices that engage students in learning experiences and positively affect their sense of themselves as capable learners who belong and can succeed in a school environment.¹⁵
- In an evaluation of three summer learning programs, nine out of ten parents report that summer programs help their children to make new friends and get along better with other children.¹⁶
- The same evaluation found that the overwhelming majority of youth surveyed reported that they have positive relationships with adults in the program and enjoy their summer program activities, reflecting the engaging design of the programs.¹⁷
- Staff in six programs report increased skills in creating a positive classroom environment.
 - The percentage of staff who felt they could calm a disruptive youth jumped 12 percent (from 79 to 91 percent). Among new staff, the jump was 30 percent (from 62 to 92 percent).
 - The percentage of staff who felt confident about their ability to enforce classroom rules jumped from 83 to 94 percent.
 - The percentage who felt they could help their students value learning jumped from 81 to 91 percent.¹⁸



Broad Course of Study

One of the LCFF state priorities is ensuring that students have access to, and are enrolled in, a wide variety of courses such as STEM, art, physical activity and the associated student outcomes. Summer learning programs address this priority by providing a full-day of programming (5-6 hours) covering a wide array of subject areas that are often not available in the school year. Some examples include:

- At Central Unified School District in Fresno, 6th to 8th graders spent 30 minutes each day reading and discussing *The Hunger Games*. With classes representing “districts” from the book, they did sports, art, fashion, and plays related to themes and artifacts from the book. In the afternoon, they chose from electives like robotics, engineering, cooking, gardening, theater, dance, and art, as well as tennis, basketball and yoga.
- In Sacramento City Unified School District, the theme for the district’s summer program was Summer of Service, and a key objective was for students to give back to their community through projects aligned with areas of interest chosen by students. One teacher integrated history, science, nutrition, writing, and art into a gardening project that ended up with the students translating what they learned into lesson plans for other students.¹⁹ High school youth in Sacramento translated their service learning experience directly into internships at City Hall, working side-by-side with city hall staff on real-world service projects.
- A national study found that body mass index (BMI) gains were more than twice as large during the summer than the school year.²⁰ Access to nutritious food and physical fitness is a key component of the summer learning pilots.



Best practices to implement effective summer learning programs

As schools and districts think about their use of resources in this era of greater local control and flexibility, summer learning programs are a cross-cutting strategy with a high return on investment. Most districts are taking a long-term approach, building summer learning into their year-round plans and growing the investment each year as their experience, their funding and local demand increases.

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School districts do not need to reinvent the wheel as national, state and local initiatives can provide a head start for thinking about alternatives that make sense in terms of the economics, operations, and learning results. Programming in California and national longitudinal studies by the RAND Corporation have identified the following key principles and conditions that exist in quality summer learning programs:²¹

1 Summer learning programs are responsive to identified local needs, and operate differently in each community to meet those needs.

The Summer Matters partner programs vary significantly in terms of their structure and operations based on existing community organizations and school partnership structures, student needs and target populations, and the preferences and priorities of local school agencies. In San Francisco Unified School District, each school designs its own program with schools opting into the pilot. In Whittier City School District, the district manages its own afterschool and summer programs, providing a consistent approach across all its elementary and middle schools. Similarly, curriculum and skill development priorities vary depending on local needs. The Summer Matters partner program in San Jose, for example, focuses on STEM education, while the program in Fresno focuses on improving literacy skills.

2 Summer learning programs address multiple facets of student learning and development that can support year-round learning.

Though program curriculum varies across the state, summer learning programs provide students with learning that is aligned with the CommonCore State Standards and instructional strategies. In quality programs, goals are clearly defined and directly linked to program activities, staff development and resource allocation. The goals also create consistency across summer and school year learning, in ways that are complementary, not repetitive. That strategy includes making sure that activities are multi-disciplinary, combining content areas and blending enrichment and academics, to make sure students are engaged and find learning relevant. RAND research has found that blended academic and enrichment activities have the most success in retaining and engaging students.

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3 Summer learning programs are data-driven and rooted in continuous improvement.

The Summer Matters partner programs set up specific student outcome goals such as improved reading fluency, stronger information gathering skills, greater nutrition awareness, and practice at public speaking. All of the programs use a common tool to assess their quality, the Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs (CASP), which provides data that program directors and evaluators use to continuously improve program planning and implementation. The programs work closely with a growing network of technical assistance providers around the state to get training and coaching to improve specific practices identified using the CASP. This quality improvement process has a spillover effect in building more effective and intentional programming and staff capacities throughout the school year.

4 Summer learning programs leverage resources and expertise from existing school, after school and community initiatives.

Many districts have after school programs through After School Education and Safety and/or 21st Century Community Learning Center grants that provide an excellent platform for summer programming and lower operating costs. A district's general fund investment can be leveraged with after school supplemental funding, Title 1, Title 3, Migrant Education funding, private foundation and corporate grants, and, in communities with socio-economic diversity, sliding scale fees. In Oakland Unified School District, more than 50 principals each year choose to invest their limited Title 1 dollars in summer learning.

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5 Summer learning programs deepen community engagement and partnerships.

Organizations and institutions in the community—recreation and parks departments, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA's and other youth serving agencies—may already be doing summer programming, and may be excited about partnering with the district. Many programs find that combining credentialed teachers and staff from community-based organizations leverages different types of expertise, and is a cost-effective way to extend program hours. Many youth serving organizations, such as LA's BEST, have staff that are hired from within the communities where the young people live and who understand the challenges and opportunities that LA's BEST youth face. In most cases, they work with LA's BEST throughout the school-year and summer, and build skills through LA's BEST's year-round training and coaching.



Next Steps to Summer Learning

As outlined above, the most effective summer programs are built and developed with a range of stakeholders including principals, after school providers, parents and others. Though school districts are not required to submit their Local Accountability Plan (LCAP) until July 1 for 2014-15 school year, there are essential planning and decision-making discussions that should be happening now. Next steps at the local level may include:

- Identify existing and potential summer programs and infrastructure.
- Identify existing and potential resources for summer funding including general fund, Title 1, school improvement grants, city or county youth funds, and 21st Century Learning Center/After School Education and Safety Supplemental grants. (See funding and sustainability resources at <http://summermatters2you.net/district-leaders/>.)
- Review school and individual student data to identify targeted needs and areas of focus for summer learning programs.
- Create or use existing planning teams to promote a multidisciplinary approach including district staff, teachers, community partners and possibly other stakeholders, like parents and older youth.
- Develop a clearly-defined, shared vision and organizational goals for the program as well as learning goals for students. These strategies and goals should be aligned and a part of the LCAP process and content.
- Use the vision and goals to set a concrete action plan, with tasks, timelines, people responsible and meeting dates that will drive the rest of your planning process.



Conclusion

No matter how well teachers, schools, and districts facilitate learning during the school year, the gains and strides in student knowledge and skill development are undermined if students do not have engaging summer learning opportunities. We know that low-income students are the most vulnerable to summer learning loss and that over time, the lack of engaging learning opportunities leads to widening gaps in achievement that take significantly more time and resources for students and the systems serving them to overcome.²²

Summer learning programs that are rooted in research and best practice make sense for districts in multiple ways when considered from a “cost-benefit” point of view.

- Teaching practices and learning opportunities are consistent with and can support the Common Core State Standards.
- Programs are effective in stemming summer learning loss and engaging children and youth in positive learning and skill development activities.
- Programs contribute to professional learning for credentialed educators as well as after school staff.
- The cost of programs compares favorably to a traditional summer school approach, thanks to the staffing mix and the contribution of resources from outside agencies and partners.

Additional resources and tools:

Districts interested in doing summer learning don't need to reinvent the wheel. There are tools and resources available, model programs to learn from, and experts to provide advice. Much of this information and the opportunity to connect with successful programs can be found at the Summer Matters campaign website at www.summermatters2you.net.

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¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 28.

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²¹ Augustine, Catherine H., Jennifer Sloan McCombs, Heather L. Schwartz and Laura Zakaras. *Getting to Work on Summer Learning: Recommended Practices for Success*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013

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