

Summer Learning – A Smart Investment for California School Districts

Mary Perry, Nazaneen Khalilnaji-Otto, Katie Brackenridge
Partnership for Children & Youth (PCY)

Summer learning loss contributes significantly to the achievement gap between low income students and their more affluent peers.

That makes high quality summer learning programs a smart investment for school districts concerned about success for all students. Such investments have become easier thanks to the flexibility built into the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).

The most promising programs are not traditional summer school. Instead, they look and feel like summer camp while incorporating learning goals aligned with district priorities. Summer learning programs

- Offer an innovative approach for engaging young people and inspiring a love of learning throughout the year.
- Include camp experiences such as chants and rituals, cabins and teams, games and sports, and experiments and experiences.
- Integrate intentional learning goals, lesson plans, and evaluations of learning into an engaging program environment.

California's new accountability and continuous improvement framework relies on district and school leaders using multiple measures of school performance to identify where change is needed, and to monitor carefully the development, testing, and evaluation of improvement strategies over time. This process of continuous improvement requires that local leaders have access to research-based evidence and strategies that they can implement in their schools and opportunities to learn from one another about what works, under which conditions, and for which students. PACE's series of Continuous Improvement Briefs aims to support education leaders at all levels in learning how to improve the performance of their schools and students.



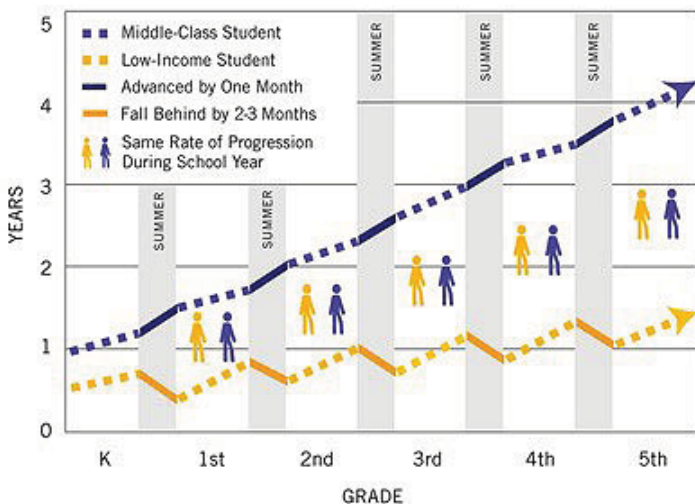
Summer: A Great Time for Learning in Many California School Districts

Many California school districts are investing LCFF funds in summer programs as a strategy to prevent summer learning loss and advance their Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) priorities. These districts:

- Support high need students directly, through allocation of their concentration and supplemental grant funds.
- Provide extra learning time for students that strengthens academic outcomes, student engagement, school climate, and access to a full curriculum.
- Create powerful professional development opportunities for teachers and after-school staff to support implementation of state content standards.

Summer learning loss disproportionately affects students from low-income backgrounds.

Low-Income Students Fall 2.5 to 3 Years Behind by Fifth Grade



Source: Cooper, H., Borman, G., & Fairchild, R. (2010). "School Calendars and Academic Achievement." In J. Meece & J. Eccles (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Schools, Schooling, and Human Development* (pp. 342-355). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

While students progress at about the same rate during the school year, the achievement gap grows every summer when middle income students participate in learning activities that low income students can't.

Summer learning programs keep high need students on track

Equity is one of the core principles underlying LCFF. Extra funding for high need students is accompanied by

the expectation that school districts will provide those students with extra services and learning opportunities.

Adding extra learning time in the summer for high need students is clearly an appropriate use of these targeted funds, and it sends an unambiguous message about a district's commitment to equity. To maximize the impact of their investments, districts often combine their LCFF funds with other funding sources such as Title I, summer food programs, expanded learning, and Migrant Education.

Local success stories show positive student outcomes aligned with state priorities

School districts are using summer as a pivotal strategy for addressing many of the state's LCFF priorities.

Academic Outcomes

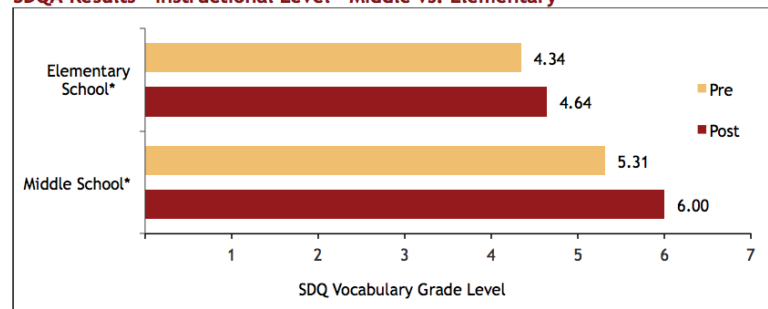
Districts find that they can move the needle with their high need students by aligning their summer programs with specific, targeted academic goals. In Gilroy Unified School District, for example, the goals of the summer learning program were to increase students' engagement with STEM topics, and their ability to identify the components of design thinking.

In rural areas the County Office of Education often takes the lead in summer programming for multiple districts. In Glenn County, for example, county staff met with each district to identify academic goals and designed the program to meet those goals.

An Example of Measurable Progress on Academic Goals

Summer program participants from Fresno, Sacramento, and Los Angeles demonstrated statistically significant increases in reading fluency.

SDQA Results - Instructional Level - Middle vs. Elementary



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

Comparable data from other districts is described in *Summer Matters: How Summer Learning Strengthens Student Success. Research Summary*.

Student Engagement and School Climate

When it comes to voluntary summer programs, kids and families vote with their feet. Districts that integrate academics and enrichment in a camp-like atmosphere see strong program attendance from beginning to end. It's even true for middle schoolers. More importantly, improved attendance carries over into the school year in positive ways.

Concerned about the challenging transition from 5th to 6th grade, Sacramento City Unified School District created a summer program to help introduce students to their new middle school communities. Students came to school in the fall more comfortable in the new environment, familiar with peers and staff, and aware of expectations and opportunities in middle school. All these factors contributed to improved school climate.

Districts throughout the state report similar outcomes when summer programs go beyond academics or remediation to focus on strengthening students' collaboration with their peers and confidence in their own ability as learners. A program director in Fresno described the long term result for participants: "They make better decisions. ...they are doing better during the school year. ...They actually want to come to school."

Moving the Needle on Student Engagement and Attitude Toward Learning

Surveys of parents confirmed the positive outcomes that summer program leaders observed. The parents reported:

- Their kids improved their attitude towards reading (68%) and reading ability (62%).
- Summer programs helped their kids make a new friend and get along better with other students (90%).
- Summer programs gave their kids opportunities to develop leadership skills (86%).

FROM: Summer Matters: How Summer Learning Strengthens Student Success. Research Summary.

Access to a full curriculum

State law requires that all students have access to a curriculum that includes the arts, civic education, health and nutrition, and STEM. In Mount Diablo Unified School District summer programs for elementary students have included science and technology activities like creating electrical circuits and building

boats that float. At Whittier City Elementary School District the summer experience includes art and science activities based on themes from a book that the students all read. Students in both Los Angeles and Sacramento have identified community issues and created service projects to address them.

Professional development opportunities support the implementation of state standards

As local districts start using the California School Dashboard to report on implementation of California's academic standards, the state expects them to develop local indicators related to professional learning and the improvement of instruction.

Districts throughout California are capitalizing on summer programs to support and document adult learning. In Mountain View Elementary District, in El Monte, credentialed teachers use summer afternoons to develop new lesson plans, which they pilot with students the following morning and then debrief. Sacramento City Unified took a similar approach with math instruction. Meanwhile, summer programs run by the Fresno County Office of Education and LA's BEST provide strong training grounds for after-school staff as they learn how to align expanded learning experiences with their district's instructional efforts across the curriculum.

Effective District Practices for Summer Learning

School districts interested in summer learning programs need not reinvent the wheel. A wealth of resources and expertise from ten years of the Summer Matters campaign are readily available. Some key lessons learned include:

Create summer learning programs, not summer school

To create programs that students want to attend, academics and enrichment can and should be integrated into program offerings, as they are in the summer activities that middle class families pay for. Directors of successful programs organize participants into cabins, not classes; talk about camp counselors, not teachers; and emphasize child-friendly themes, not curriculum units. They abandon the desks in regular classrooms and focus on group projects that give kids time and space to express their creativity. They organize field trips and activities that get everyone moving. At the

high school level they design experiences like internships and community service projects that get students engaged.

Successful summer programs still offer remediation, credit recovery and skill development, but these objectives are often more effectively accomplished when programs focus on intrinsic engagement and motivation.



TOOLS THAT SUPPORT SUMMER LEARNING

Video: Summer Learning – an inspiring alternative to summer school.
Watch this 3-minute video to see summer learning in action.

Being Intentional About Both Fun and Learning

Districts that are serious about engaging youth in summer programs think about both fun and learning through every step of program development and delivery. This includes specific actions such as:

- Naming and marketing the program in creative ways.
- Gathering input from youth about what they want to learn and do.
- Hiring staff with energy, enthusiasm, and the desire to learn. (After school staff are a great place to start.)
- Using project-based and experiential learning that requires students to engage in collaboration, critical thinking, and communication.
- Incorporating STEM, art, theater, recreation, and specific learning objectives for every activity.

For more examples see the Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs

Buy-in and vision start at the top.

Creating and sustaining a summer learning program requires that district leaders assume responsibility for students beyond the 180 days of the school year and the confines of the school site. That shift in thinking acknowledges that the learning occurring in the expanded time and space of summer is crucial for student success, and thus for the success of the school district.

The school board and senior administrators must

articulate a vision for summer learning and make it part of the district culture. Their leadership can ensure that resources—time, funding, and facilities—are allocated to planning for high quality summer learning programs. The district goals identified in the LCAP provide an excellent place to start because they raise questions like these:

- Which goals related to high need students and to achievement gaps could be addressed—at least in part—by offering a high quality summer learning program?
- What summer programs are currently offered? Are these investments strategic or not?
- What existing infrastructure, either in the district or the community, could be used to support a more strategic summer learning program?

Summer becomes an integral part of a school district's culture and operation when staff at the district office, the school site, and within the teaching force understand and embrace summer learning as an essential educational strategy.



TOOLS THAT SUPPORT SUMMER LEARNING LCFF

Leveraging Summer for Student Success Partnership for Children and Youth, 2014.

A guide about how to use summer learning as a strategy for implementing LCFF.

Engage community partners

Partnerships with expanded learning providers and other community organizations help ensure that summer feels different from the school year even as it supports district goals. Creating continuity in staffing has significant benefits. Students see familiar faces during the school year. Districts see their after school staff gain skills through training and coaching made possible during the longer summer hours.

Many programs depend heavily on partners like parks and recreation departments, libraries, regional and state parks, community-based organizations, and local businesses. All of these organizations can help provide the resources and activities essential to a program's success. They also give students experiences and assets—such as a library card—that last far beyond the summer program hours.

Often, in rural communities, the small and geographically dispersed student population makes it difficult to put together a cost-effective summer



program. In many areas of the state—including Glenn, Tehama, Butte, and Fresno counties—the local County Office of Education (COE) serves as the program provider. In such cases, the COE often holds expanded learning grants that form the base funding for summer programs across districts in a county. Districts match these expanded learning dollars with their LCFF investments to cover the full cost of the program. These COE-run programs can take advantage of scaling opportunities - for example county-wide bus contracts across several county-run programs that offer enough hours to attract bus drivers. They can also bring county and state entities - like universities, parks and libraries - to the table for more efficient, larger scale partnerships.



TOOLS THAT SUPPORT SUMMER LEARNING

Summer Learning Planning Timeline

This planning document provides a simple list of tasks and recommended timeframes.



TOOLS THAT SUPPORT SUMMER LEARNING

Planning Your Program: 3 Designs for Summer Learning Programs

Use these documents to explore different program designs - district/community partnership, district operated, and contract to community-based provider - and a sample budget for each.

Provide ample time and staffing to make summer planning a year-round activity

Late spring is not the time to begin talking about and planning for summer. Weaving summer planning into the overall strategy of the district is essential. Early planning - no later than January - supports early hiring of staff and early recruiting of students. It gives local leaders time to think creatively about program design, explore and negotiate partnerships, and secure resources. It gives instructional staff time to plan programs, and to participate in professional learning.

Successful districts clearly identify a staff person to lead the summer learning effort. They also allocate resources to allow this person to plan throughout the year. In some districts—including Oakland—a Summer Program Coordinator plans year-round and adds capacity by hiring consultants and interns in the spring and summer months. Other districts—particularly when they are just starting out—use a Teacher On Special Assignment (TOSA) until they are clear about the long-term role and time required. Still other districts subcontract all or most of the planning work to their community-based after school partner. In these cases, the district still needs to assign a district employee as liaison to the after school provider, but the time commitment is less.

Budget planning helps bring it all together

Supporting summer programs can be challenging because they typically begin before the district's annual budget is finalized. A commitment to provide funds every year, as an integral part of the district's mission and operation, is therefore crucial to program stability and success.

Key budget variables include how many hours, days, and weeks a program runs and the number of students it serves. Staffing is the key driver in a program budget, and choices about staffing strategies (e.g., mixing credentialed and after school staff) will have a large impact on the cost per student per hour.



TOOLS THAT SUPPORT SUMMER LEARNING

The Cost of Summer

An inside look at the operating budgets of high-quality summer learning programs in California.

Summer Learning Makes Sense

For educators committed to closing the achievement gap and for students seeking to embrace their own potential as learners, the hours and days of summer are too precious to waste.

Throughout California, school district leaders are using their newfound flexibility under LCFF to put summer to work in ways that serve equity goals. Their summer learning programs take many shapes and involve creative partnerships customized to meet local needs and circumstances.

The most promising programs offer powerful and enriching experiences to young people who need those experiences most. They blend learning and laughing, academics and engagement, purposefulness and plain old fun. They require planning, resources, and creativity. And they work.

Thanks to a decade of experience with these programs, a wealth of resources exists to support this work. Those listed in this brief are a good place to start for all California school district leaders who want to make summer a time when learning flourishes.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT SUMMER PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

In addition to the planning tools described above, districts should explore:

Expert Technical Support

The California Department of Education funds staff at 16 County Offices of Education around the state tasked with supporting after school and summer program quality.

Guidance for District Leaders

The California School Boards Association has guides to help superintendents and board members take stock of current summer investments, investigate options, and create a strong vision for the district's summer programs and practices.

The Summer Matters Network

At www.summermatters.net you'll find a wide variety of planning tools, resources, and research about summer learning. Subscribe to the e-newsletter for regular updates.

PACE Continuous Improvement Publications

PACE. *2020 Vision: Rethinking Budget Priorities Under the LCFF*. 2014

Tom Luschei. *Educating California's Disadvantaged Children: Lessons from Colombia*. 2017

Heather Hough, Jason Willis, Alicia Grunow, Kelsey Krausen, Sylvia Kwon, Laura Steen Mulfinger, Sandra Park. *Continuous Improvement in Practice*. 2017

Katie Brackenridge, Jessica Gunderson, Mary Perry. *Expanding Learning: A Powerful Strategy for Equity*. 2017

Mark Murphy. *Promising Practices in School District Budgeting Under LCFF*. 2017

Elizabeth Friedmann. *Building Intersegmental Partnerships*. 2017

Jorge Aguilar, Michelle Nayfack, Susan Bush-Mecenas. *Exploring Improvement Science in Education: Promoting College Access in Fresno Unified School District*. 2017

Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Daisy Gonzales. *Accountability for Alternative Schools in California*. 2017



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Stanford Graduate School of Education
520 Galvez Mall, CERAS 401
Stanford, CA 94305-3001
Phone: 650 724 2832
Fax: 650 723 9931