BUILDING COMMUNITY SYSTEMS FOR SUMMER LEARNING:
SNAPSHOT OF STATE AND LOCAL EFFORTS
THE GOOD NEWS IS, community leaders and Statewide Afterschool Networks from across the country are working to expand summer opportunities by replicating successful, evidence-based practices through cross-sector collective impact approaches. Such practices include:

- Creating a community-wide summer steering committee
- Assessing gaps in services and developing an action plan
- Focusing resources on research-based interventions
- Leveraging funding and capacity community-wide for marketing, data management and quality assurance
- Finding creative and sustainable ways to fund summer opportunities long term

Creating a community system for summer opens the door to collaboration, reduced duplication of efforts, efficient management of the community’s resources, shared standards of quality, and greater return on the investments in summer opportunities. The resulting portfolio of summer opportunities reaches into every corner of the community and helps all students stay safe, healthy, and engaged throughout the critical summer months.
The six elements of coordinated community efforts described here are taken from the National Summer Learning Association domains for community system building and reflect many common elements found in similar collective impact or system-building efforts. Policy recommendations reflect key priorities for advancing summer and other out-of-school time (OST) opportunities within communities through systemic policy changes that result from systems-building efforts.

1 | A Shared Vision

A shared vision for summer learning leads to a multi-year, community-wide summer learning action plan with defined goals and strategies, aligned with broader educational and community priorities. The plan includes targets and goals that set the direction, and common objectives and measurements of youth outcomes. Ideally there is a process for assessing and updating the summer learning action plan each year.

Some communities build a summer learning plan from existing initiatives and infrastructure. In Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Georgia, and New Jersey, collaboration between districts and OST providers around Common Core State Standards has provided a shared sense of vision and purpose. Summer learning goals and objectives are closely connected to these standards of learning, and professional development between school-based and OST providers is shared so that all elements of the systems are working toward common learning objectives in a similar way.

Another approach is to connect to and leverage national education, youth, and community development initiatives. In Arkansas, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and the Arkansas Out of School Network’s (AOSSN) partnership has helped to shape shared priorities across out of school initiatives. Because of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading’s explicit focus on summer as a strategy for achieving third grade reading proficiency rates, AOSSN has made summer a more explicit priority. AOSSN’s coordinator, Laveta Wells-Hale, describes the impact of the partnership on her work,“We were inspired by the Grade-Level Reading Campaign to do more than raise public awareness about the importance of summer learning.” While a shared focus on early literacy brought summer to the forefront for AOSSN, they have continued to expand their summer priorities to also include a focus on health and STEM education, building on natural intersections.

In some communities, existing local priorities offer a natural starting point for summer-systems and plans. In Savannah, Georgia, educational commitments to youth development and engagement also connect explicitly to prevention of juvenile crime. The Mayor’s Taskforce for After School Initiative brings together a number of partners to ensure availability and quality of programming. Summer learning and afterschool opportunities are designed to impact not only academic performance, but also work to prevent delinquency and reduce crime and to develop citizenship and good health habits.

In Grand Rapids, Michigan the Believe2Become (B2B) initiative developed out of a vision from local stakeholders to close the educational achievement gap by 2025, and saw out-of-school time, and particularly summer, as a key factor in the equation. While coordination has helped to dramatically improve outcomes in the community, they also strongly believe that innovation and individual strengths from different organizations, rather than rigid adherence to a single model, contributes to a much stronger whole. In this model, ongoing communication among partners becomes critical for successful coordination.

2 | Engaged Leadership

Summer learning work at the community level must be led by a stakeholder group that represents key sectors including city and/or county agencies, schools, funders, program providers, intermediary or coordinating body, and other community members (including parents and youth). There is shared accountability for the development and implementation of the summer learning action plan. Recognized leaders within the community, such as mayors and superintendents, act as summer learning champions and more visible leaders of the shared effort. Intermediaries are a natural hub for sharing of information, data, and resources.

In Kansas City, the Special Assistant for the Office of Civic and Community Engagement is a position in the mayor’s office that has a role in coordinating and convening a number of OST agencies on a quarterly basis. In Baltimore, a number of organizations—including the Family League of Baltimore, the Safe and Sound Campaign, and the AfterSchool Institute—worked together to coordinate efforts across the system. The results were several mechanisms to increase access to and quality of summer opportunities in Baltimore, including the development of a steering committee, a process for sharing information, and consolidated roles. Programs are then carried out by a variety of organizations and city agencies, coordinated by these leadership bodies.

3 | Continuous Quality Improvement

A process for quality improvement of both the summer learning system and summer learning opportunities includes standards and tools for quality assessment and program improvement, professional development and training, and opportunities to share resources and best practices.

The Oakland Summer Learning Network (OSLN) was created in 2011 as a collaborative effort of several private schools, community-based organizations, and local agencies, such as the public library system and Oakland Fund for Children and Youth, a program of the city’s Human Services Department, working to expand the number of summer learning opportunities for middle-school youth. The program currently serves 5,700 Oakland students annually. The OSLN has made an intentional focus to develop an action plan towards the creation of a coordinated summer learning system across Oakland. A part of this action plan involves all funded summer learning programs participating in a continuous summer learning quality improvement process using the Summer Learning Program Quality Assessment (SLPQA) developed in partnership by the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality and the National Summer Learning Association. The OSLN also facilitates a professional learning community to support summer programs in their continuous improvement...
The system includes coordinated management of summer learning data, considering scope, scale, access, quality, and outcomes. The result is better data-driven decision-making across the system and new opportunities to prove return on investment.

In order to answer key questions around program effectiveness and impact across the city and over multiple years in Grand Rapids, a data-sharing work group was formed between the local district, the Believe2Become (B2B) initiatives, and a community research institute to facilitate the safe transfer of records, including test scores, attendance and demographic data and to include a process for parents to provide consent. The parties worked through multiple challenges and forged a Master Data Sharing Agreement (MDSA) that facilitates real-time data analysis for program staff and broader evaluation of the initiative. Results throughout the year were then shared with the B2B summer learning initiative. Learn how they broke through the barriers at http://cridata.org/B2BMDSA/.

In summer 2010, Dallas’ Big Thought partnered with Dallas Independent School District (DISD) on a new model of summer learning that combined their 21st Century initiative with DISD’s summer school to create a full-day program that blended DISD academics with Big Thought’s wide range of enrichment activities and partners. Today, the program is a part of the Dallas City of Learning initiative, bringing together the Dallas Independent School District and the myriad resources and offerings of the City, with Big Thought as the lead agency and managing partner. Through the partnership with Dallas City of Learning, 200 local arts, cultural, educational, youth development and social service organizations offer free programs to Dallas youth and their families. Robust shared data agreements with all of the Dallas partners, allowing Big Thought to improve and measure student academic and social-emotional outcomes, and student engagement in each major activity. They are also able to use crucial formative data across systems to strategically allocate resources throughout the city – including program services, transportation, and nutritional support, ensuring a reduction in summer learning loss and an equipped workforce pipeline.

Under the leadership of Dallas Afterschool and Beyond, the Achieve, Connect, Thrive (ACT) framework unites stakeholders from across Dallas around the skills young people need to succeed—called ‘power skills’ for student success. Derived from the best of the youth development field, and afterschool program providers themselves, the skills in the framework are those that research from a number of fields, including education and developmental psychology, suggests are important for success in school, college, and 21st Century careers. Four power skills—critical thinking, perseverance, self-regulation, relationships with peers—serve as the foundation of year-round trainings and peer learning between district teachers and community educators. In 2013, 79 summer programs in Boston participated in the ACT framework, using common measurement tools to assess program quality and student skill development from multiple perspectives. Analysis shows a significant increase in skills among more than 5,600 participating Boston children in 2015. To learn more about the ACT Framework, visit http://bostonbeyond.org/initiatives/act-framework/.
In this element of the system, outreach to youth and families about availability of opportunities, supports recruitment and enrollment of youth into programs, and helps programs and agencies across the system make referrals to families seeking particular resources. Additionally, community-wide strategies to disseminate results on summer learning impact for a majority of programs across the community help build awareness of the successes and need for continued investment in the system.

A centralized Super Summer website and the regional call center, 211 Maryland, acted as community hubs for information on all summer learning academies, food programs, reading programs, and other programs such as camps, recreation programs and sports leagues. Partners launched a comprehensive communications campaign including press conferences, public service announcements, recruitment events, direct mailings and neighborhood canvassing that reached more than 40,000 residents throughout the city. Each participating partner received training on centralized messaging so that they could provide information to families on all Super Summer offerings.

Each year the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) organizes a popular Citywide AfterZone end-of-year celebration with 400 middle school youth in attendance. At this event, PASA staff are able to promote the summer program and speak directly with parents, families and students. The organization also hosts a series of school-based recruitment fairs over the course of the spring and visits students in their classrooms to present to smaller groups. Other recruitment and promotional techniques employed have included bilingual, automated phone calls to families featuring Providence’s mayor on behalf of middle school principals; staff interviews on Spanish language radio; and direct student outreach from principals, teachers and counselors at the schools.

Since the program is a joint venture with Providence Public Schools and involves hiring teachers, guidance counselors and social workers from each middle school, they all take an active interest in recruiting their students and promoting the program in their schools.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**FIRST,** we look to states and communities to incentivize partnerships and improve partner alignment. Partnerships between summer providers serving similar groups of students ensure complete access to a broader range of services and less duplication of efforts. These partners may include summer meals sites and sponsors, schools, community-based and faith-based organizations, libraries, museums, parks and recreation centers, youth employment sponsors, and other agencies, service providers, and organizations that touch the lives of youth during the summer. Private, public, or quasi-public intermediaries are natural leaders of systems that can hold responsibility for coordinating these partnerships, holding partners accountable, and facilitating coordination of shared resources like facilities, transportation, and data. The result: a community-wide network of programs for anywhere, anytime learning throughout the summer months.

**SECOND,** policymakers can promote sustainability and flexibility of resources. Many existing funding streams are able to support summer learning either as they currently stand or with more explicit expansion into the summer months. Smart use of existing pools of funding and greater collaboration between youth-serving sectors can greatly increase impact during the summer. Communities are looking beyond the education sector for youth-oriented investments in health, juvenile justice, and enrichment programs that can all take place in the summer space. Promoting summer as an allowable and direct student outreach from principals, teachers and counselors at the schools.

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**THIRD,** states and communities must invest in structural supports and systems that drive quality and sustainability over the long term. Structures such as quality standards, common evaluation tools, centralized data systems, shared professional development, and single administrative processes for certifying providers make clear the requirements for participation in the summer system by providers and hold everyone across the system to the same level of quality. Coordination of summer services with each other and with school-year programs that serve the same students, lead to greater efficiency and better outcomes for youth.

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**The Sacramento “Summer at City Hall” program brings together resources from the school district, regional transportation systems, the summer meals program, community field trip sites, and the city council to give 100 students a rich and memorable internship experience. While serving in meaningful departmental support jobs, these interns are immersed in the inner workings of city leadership and present end-of-summer projects to the city council synthesizing what they have learned and their ideas to make their city even better.**

**In Utah, the Office of Child Care Department of Workforce Services offers a grant, funded by Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars, for expanding summer programs that serve children of working families. These programs typically also draw dollars from education streams and the private sector.**

**In Rhode Island, statewide coordination and support of summer and afterschool programs is led by a partnership between the United Way and the Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance (RIASPA). Together with the organizations they serve, RIASPA developed statewide quality standards and an assessment tool to maintain and measure program quality. Part of the United Way’s support goes to professional development on quality for its grantees.**
A systems approach to summer and out-of-school time opportunities creates many advantages.

Foremost, the system promotes equity by coordinating service areas, targeting groups of students most in need of particular kinds of resources and interventions, and reducing barriers to program access. The summer plan helps direct programs and resources to particular areas of need, and ensuring that changes are strategic not ad hoc. This approach also maximizes and grows available resources, whereby facilities and other shared resources are used efficiently, and multiple streams of funding are pooled together for similar categories of youth. An established system is able to withstand leadership changes over time, while also providing adaptability, through a forum for identifying and continually re-evaluating local context and priorities. Finally, a system approach to summer builds capacity and coordination of professional development and program quality, key drivers of program success.

RECURRING THEMES ACROSS DOMAINS:

- Build relationships and coordinate resource investments across organizations, agencies, and initiatives that already have relationships with children beyond the school day and year (for example, libraries, housing authorities, etc.)
- Develop meaningful relationships and coordinate closely with schools; from teachers to superintendent. This engagement with schools often flows from demonstrable results by OST programs, which in turn have a real impact on school-based outcomes.
- Plan how to involve families from the outset. System coordination of family engagement will result in better strategies for marketing, enrollment, retention and will reduce overall barriers to participation.
- Think broadly about including the right stakeholders. Certain stakeholders may already have relationships, a history of working across initiatives, or have developed systems for collecting data from grantees in a way that positions them well to encourage collaboration across community initiatives. Strategic direction may come from a funding collaborative, mayoral office, or other intermediary or leading organization.

The process for building an effective community system around summer learning requires three steps:

- Community Assessment
- Community Coordination and Strategic Planning
- Capacity Building

Examples of how this work has been carried out in several communities and an overview of NSLA services to support summer learning community system building can be found at www.summerlearning.org.
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