

Every Child. Every Summer.

Guidance for 2020 Presidential
Candidates on the Importance of
Summer Programs for Children and
Working Families



“Environments, exposures, activities, and interactions during summertime can promote positive cognitive, social, emotional, and skills development, while promoting safety, and physical and mental health, for children and youth. However, summertime experiences are not evenly and equitably distributed, and many children and youth lack access to quality experiences due to the challenges of availability, accessibility, and affordability.”¹

Summertime Presents Unique Challenges for Youth and Working Families

Summer is the time of greatest inequity for children in America. All gaps – achievement and opportunity – grow in the summertime. During the school year, children have access to critical resources through public schools, including access to learning, caring and supportive adults, supervision, regular nutritious meals, physical activity, enrichment programs, and health care.

When the services “faucet” turns off during the summer months, children from low-income families largely go without these critical services for three months. Summer is not idyllic for many low-income children and youth because of the lack of access to basic needs such as meals and meaningful, engaging learning experiences.

Lack of Summer Programs Affects Children

- A seminal meta-analysis of summer learning found that all students lost mathematics and reading knowledge over the summer, and that losses were larger for low-income students, particularly in reading.²
- In July 2018, almost 2.9 million children participated in the Summer Nutrition Programs on an average day, reaching only one child with a nutritious summer lunch for every seven children who participated in free and reduced-price school lunch during the 2017–2018 school year.³

- Gaps in opportunity lead to achievement gaps, and long-term shortfalls. For example, 77.6 percent of low-income students graduated high school on time in 2014, compared to 90 percent of non-low-income students (a 12.4 percentage point difference)⁴

Lack of Summer Programs Affects Working Families

Research shows that finding summer care is a persistent and expensive problem for working families, forcing parents to make difficult decisions and trade-offs.

- More than 70 percent of families agree that summer activities are important, but only a third (33%) enroll their child in a summer program.⁵
- Parents reported facing barriers to finding adequate and affordable youth programs to cover their working hours during the summer months.⁶ This forces parents to adjust work schedules and make other sacrifices that affect their productivity, earning power, and contributions to the economy.

Parents with means readily invest in structured summer programming for their own children. Since the 1970s, spending on enrichment has grown steadily among the top quartile income bracket and remained flat for the bottom quartile.

- Today that average gap in spending is a \$7500 a year difference, deepening the opportunity gap.⁷
- With the average weekly cost of a summer program ranging from \$100 to over \$600, meaning even middle-class families have difficulty paying for high-quality programs and care during the long break from school.⁸

Summer Learning Makes a Difference

Nationally, 88 percent of teachers say summer learning programs are important to students' success and 85 percent of families support public investment in summer programs.⁹ Studies show that high-quality summer programs—depending on their design—benefit children and youth in academics, career preparation, and social and emotional skills.

- A groundbreaking study published by the [RAND Corporation](#) shows that high-quality summer programs can make a difference in stemming learning loss and closing the country's achievement gap. Elementary school students with high attendance in voluntary and free summer learning programs boosted their math and reading skills.
- According to a new report from the [Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development](#), summer programs offer an opportunity to develop social emotional skills, which research shows are a "booster rocket" to learning and also a factor in educational equity.¹⁰
- Research on summer youth employment programs in Chicago and New York demonstrate that summer jobs provide youth not only a wage, but a chance to learn social and soft skills that are valuable in both school and the workforce. Engaging students through mentorship, training and paid work is shown to have positive impacts on their behavior, skills and academic performance, as well as reducing youth involvement in violent crime.¹¹

Summer Learning Has a High Return on Investment

When it comes to supporting summer opportunities, a little federal funding goes a long way. For every public dollar invested in summer, programs raise two more. Even school-based summer programs rely on a mix of public and private funding, and cannot serve all their children in need. Key investments such as literacy for younger students and employment for older youth payback dividends in long term academic and economic success.

The federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21stCCLC) program is the only dedicated for summer and afterschool programming. While this is a small slice of the summer funding pie, it is critical to help get new programs off the ground, and to give programs the running room to improve quality and expand services while raising new local and philanthropic dollars.

In a study of the New Mexico K-3 Plus program, which extended literacy instruction for the highest need students by 30 additional days, researchers found that when comparing cost and academic gains, the summer program had a larger "per day" effect on

reading achievement, and thus a greater return on the investment.¹²

States are Making Investments in Summer, Federal Funding and Policies Should Align

States are making creative use of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) funding to support summertime initiatives, such as:

- Leveraging the new Title IV, Part A "Student Success and Academic Enrichment" (SSAE) grant program, which has many allowable uses that are a good fit for the summer;
- Creating bridge programs that help students and families successfully make critical transitions between grade levels; and
- Targeting students most in need of extra support in key areas like literacy use summertime for targeted teacher professional development.

In recent years, states are reforming school funding models to include funding to extend learning into the summer months; passing legislation to boost access to summer meals programs and fostering partnerships that help programs reach more kids in the summer. At the same time, research shows that state policies addressing summer learning do not yet fully incorporate best practices for quality that we know lead to outcomes.¹³

Now is the time for federal education policies to align to the summer learning investment and commitment happening at the state level, and to lead the way in promoting best practices.

Steps for Including Summer Learning in Education Plans for America's Children

With strong national leadership and vision, communities across the country can reimagine summers for children and youth to be fruitful opportunities to learn, grow and thrive. By featuring education as a key campaign issue and exploring the possibilities of summer learning as a candidate, you encourage educators, child advocates, and policymakers to create policies and programs that emphasize the importance of high-quality summer programs for children and working families.

Targeted federal support can go a long way toward helping states and local communities leverage existing resources to maintain similar opportunities for the most vulnerable students during the summer months. Federal funding is critical for summer programs. These dollars serve to launch new programs and allow existing programs to serve more students and improve quality.

Many summer programs raise two private dollars for every public dollar invested. It's more than academics. With the right opportunities and high-quality, well-funded programs, summer can be a time for children of all backgrounds to have new experiences, and learn in fun and different ways, at their own pace, and according to their own interests.

The following are steps that policy leaders, especially at the federal level, can do in their education plans for the nation to ensure that summertime provides a real chance for all children to improve their health, academics, social emotional learning, and career skills:

- **Focus on quality.** Policymakers and communities should invest in systems for continuous quality management and improvement for summer education opportunities, including coordinated data systems to assess needs, gaps, progress indicators, and outcomes.
- **Remove barriers.** Federal and state government agencies should review existing policies and regulations for opportunities to allow learning and nutrition programs and services for vulnerable children and youth to continue into the summer months, and reduce barriers to access for existing programs such as the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).

- **Expand the scope of services, and target youth most in need.** Government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and private sector entities that fund, deliver, or otherwise support summertime experiences for children and youth should focus on underserved children and youth of all ages who lack access to summer activities and services; and include comprehensive developmental (academic, social, emotional, physical) programs in their summer portfolio.
- **Foster more partnerships** across government agencies, between public and community-based organizations, and private summer programs. We can create greater cost and resource efficiencies when programs, engaging similar groups of youth and families, coordinate services.

The Future

Summer does not need to be “the time of greatest inequity for children in America.” Right now, we have an opening. By prioritizing summer learning, communities across the country can close opportunity gaps for all children, strengthen local economies through youth workforce development, and ultimately, create healthier, happier futures for America’s children.

Every child. Every summer.



national summer learning association

The National Summer Learning Association is the only national nonprofit exclusively focused on closing the achievement gap by increasing access to high-quality summer learning opportunities. NSLA recognizes and disseminates what works in summer learning, develops and delivers capacity-building offerings and convenes and empowers key actors to embrace summer learning as a solution for equity and excellence in education.

For more information, visit www.summerlearning.org

Endnotes

- ¹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2019. Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-Being for Children and Youth. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25546>
- ² Cooper, H., Nye, B., Charlton, K., Lindsay, J., & Greathouse, S. (1996). The effects of summer vacation on achievement test scores: A narrative and meta-analytic review. Review of Educational Research, 66, 227-268. <https://www.summerlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/MoreThanAHunchKidsLoseLearningSkillsOverThe-SummerMonths-1.pdf>
- ³ FRAC <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/frac-summer-nutrition-report-2019.pdf>
- ⁴ <https://gradnation.americaspromise.org/2018-building-grad-nation-report>
- ⁵ Afterschool Alliance. (2014). America After 3PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand. Washington, D.C.
- ⁶ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2019/06/11/470845/parents-cant-find-summer-child-care-work-suffers/>
- ⁷ Duncan, G. and Murnane, R. eds. Whither Opportunity? (2011)
- ⁸ Afterschool Alliance. (2014). America After 3PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand. Washington, D.C.
- ⁹ Afterschool Alliance. (2014). America After 3PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand. Washington, D.C.
- ¹⁰ <http://nationathope.org/report-from-the-nation/>
- ¹¹ <https://www.summerlearning.org/knowledge-center/summer-youth-employment-programs-offer-just-summer-job/>
- ¹² <https://www.summerlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CalculatingtheReturnonInvestmentinSummerLearning-1.pdf>
- ¹³ <https://www.summerlearning.org/knowledge-center/summer-school-reading-proficiency/>