



2020 STORY STARTERS ON SUMMER LEARNING

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OVERVIEW

High-quality summer and afterschool programs can change the trajectory of a young person's life. For our nation, the summer months present an opportunity to close educational and opportunity gaps that often begin at birth and to seize the summer months as a time for growth and healthy development for all learners. Typically, the season's education stories tend to revolve narrowly around the summer slide or academic loss and miss the mark on the many other "lost opportunity" summer issues that affect the physical, mental and emotional well-being of young people in America.

Within a presidential election year, issues like immigration, gun control, national defense and the economy can overshadow the critical need for the next president to focus on the perpetual and structural inequities of the nation's public education system and the essential role of out of school time enrichment to student success. **This story starter aims to provide background on the issue of summer learning and afterschool programs, summer policy considerations and emerging research to inform your story development around key education issues within the presidential campaign and beyond.**

The National Summer Learning is a non-partisan, nonprofit organization that tracks and responds to policy, research and practice issues that affect summer opportunities at the federal, state, and local levels, with the goal of ensuring high-quality summer learning opportunities reach as many children and youth as possible, especially those most in need. Its [Guidance for 2020 Presidential Candidates on the Importance of Summer](#) was created to inform candidates as they shape their education agendas.

QUESTIONS TO ASK PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

1. Research shows that finding affordable, high quality summer care is a persistent problem for working families, forcing parents to make decisions that affect their productivity and their children's well-being. According to the Center for American Progress, families can expect to pay 20 percent of their income on summer child care. How would you ensure that families can find affordable and high quality summer programs for their children?
2. Nationally 88 percent of teachers and 73 percent of families say that summer learning programs are important for students' academic success. Research confirms that

voluntary summer programs contribute to students' academic success. However, schools and communities lack sufficient funding to ensure these programs are available to local children, and only 33% of families report that their children are in such a program. How would you invest in expanding access to summer and afterschool programs?

GETTING SCHOOLED ON SUMMER: REPORTS, RESEARCH BRIEFS AND BACKGROUNDERS

- [New Report](#): National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine funded by [The Wallace Foundation](#) and the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#)
Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-Being for Children and Youth

The report lays out nine recommendations to address obstacles that disadvantaged children can face during the summer, including lack of access to quality programs, food insecurity, and exposure to unsafe and dangerous conditions, and to help all children develop positively and stay connected to resources.

- [Book](#): *The Summer Slide: What We Know and Can Do About Summer Learning Loss*
Foreword by Paul Reville, Director, Education Redesign Labs, Harvard University Graduate School of Education

This compendium of the most up-to-date research by leading authorities on summer learning theory, practice and policy establishes the notion that much of student learning occurs outside of school and “is every bit as important as any in-school learning in determining achievement gaps.”

- *Investing in Successful Summer Programs: [A Review of Evidence](#) Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*

RAND establishes that summer programs provide children with the mental, physical and emotional skills they need to succeed in life. The report ranks the quality of summer programs by measuring their outcomes and provides practitioners a roadmap of what constitutes an effective summer program.

- *Calculating the Return on Investment in Summer Learning: [Research Brief](#)*
Summer learning is proven to be a cost-effective strategy for boosting achievement of young students. Communities need to build a menu of summer opportunities that allows policymakers to select summer programs that are within their budget and that achieve targeted outcomes for specific students that they serve.
- *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: 2019 [Summer Nutrition Status Report](#)*
In July 2018, almost 2.9 million children participated on an average day, reaching only one child with a nutritious summer lunch through the Summer Nutrition Programs for

every seven children who participated in free and reduced-price school lunch during the 2017–2018 school year.

STORY IDEAS

The opportunity gap, including access to high quality summer programs or work-based learning experiences combined with food insecurities can shape a less than idyllic summer break for millions of young people in many urban and rural communities. With the right opportunities, trained staff and sufficient community funding, summer can be a time for all children – regardless of ZIP code – to enjoy new experiences, learn in different, hands-on ways and prepare for success in the school year ahead.

Topics to Explore:

- **Food Insecurity During the Summer Time:** Sadly, for many kids, summer equals hunger. Good summer programs provide students with access to nutritious meals, which millions of children in the U.S. need. However, research shows that only [1 in 7 youth](#) eligible for summer meal programs receive them. Improved child nutrition policies will support partnerships to get meals and learning opportunities to where kids are. Bookmobiles and community-based enrichment partnerships with food banks and non-traditional feeding sites like libraries, farmers markets, WIC clinics, hospitals, and neighborhood block parties are emerging in many communities to make sure kids not in formal programs have access to both meals and learning, all summer long. *Where are the food deserts in your community and how well do summer meal programs meet the needs of children and families there?*
- **Follow the Money on Summer:** This past December, Congress reached a budget deal with many wins for summer funding. The House and Senate came to agreement on a \$1.3 trillion budget deal to fund all twelve Departments for FY20, expected to be passed in two parts with increases for summer learning and enrichment programs. What are the budget implications for summer programs in your community?
- **Who and Where are the” Opportunity Youth” During the Summer:** According to the Aspen Institute, nearly 40 percent of our young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are weakly attached or unattached to school and work at some point during that formative stretch of their young lives. What are local collaborations breaking down barriers and expanding summer opportunities to engage these youth in your state and community?
- **What’s the State of Summer in Your Community?** Across the country, states are recognizing the return on investment in stemming summer learning loss and keeping kids safe, healthy, and learning during the summer months. In 2019, the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) tracked 128 state bills in 36 states affecting summer programs and resources, particularly for families in low-income communities and populations most at risk. How does your state measure up during the summertime?

- **What Makes for a Quality Summer Program?** Years of research has shown us that participation in high-quality summer learning programs can improve children’s reading and math skills, engagement in school, motivation, and relationships with adults and peers. Quality matters and is well defined in summer programs. NSLA’s annual awards for summer learning provide [national models for excellence in programs](#) and student outcomes. How can parents identify and select quality summer programs and how do communities shape a continuous cycle of quality improvement in their summer offerings?

NATIONAL EXPERTS AVAILABLE

The National Summer Learning Association is the only national nonprofit exclusively focused on closing the achievement and opportunity gap by increasing access to high-quality summer learning opportunities. NSLA has experts and a network of partners who can identify high-quality local programs to meet the needs of any learner, provide information on summer program practice and policies, offer tips for families and share the national context of summer’s essential role in education.

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