

STATE SPOTLIGHT

OREGON

Creating Equity-Driven, Joyful
Summer Learning Programs



OVERVIEW

In 2021, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) launched a network of nine states to promote system-based strategies to transform and improve summer learning. The collaboration focused on assisting state education agencies and partners in using data for more impactful summer programs, advancing summer program quality, promoting exemplars of summer learning practices and identifying and disseminating model policies and regulatory conditions.

The participating states were Alabama, Arizona, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Tennessee, Utah and Virginia. This effort was coordinated with the U.S. Department of Education's Summer Learning and Enrichment Collaborative and was funded by The Wallace Foundation and MetaMetrics.

Building on a Strong Foundation

Oregon had a strong foundation for summer learning before joining the summer learning network: In addition to the 21st Century Community Learning Centers and migrant education federal grants, Oregon legislators passed the Student Success Act in 2019. This was an investment of \$2.45 billion in Oregon education appropriated every two years. This historic investment included \$8 million for summer learning programs, or \$4 million per summer. As the COVID-19 pandemic upended normal school operations in 2020 and 2021, the state legislature added \$260 million for summer learning in 2021 and \$150 million for summer 2022. Because key partnerships in summer learning were already in place, the Oregon Department of Education hit the ground running when it joined the summer learning network.



During the Summer Learning Network

Goal	<p>The Oregon Department of Education’s (ODE) overarching goal is to actualize high-quality, equity-driven summer learning programs aligned to the agency’s strategic plan to address unfinished learning. This goal includes two key strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deepen state partnerships through a network of community-based organizations, culturally-specific service providers, enrolled Tribal members, state agencies, school district partners, philanthropists, community leaders and education advocates to focus on summer learning. 2. Develop a conceptual framework that includes practical tools and evidence-based resources to support the creation, implementation and continuous improvement of high-quality summer programs.
Approach	<p>With a substantial investment from the state legislature and federal funds designated for summer learning, the team knew many schools and districts would be offering a summer program for the first time and would need guidance and support to develop equitable educational practices for summer learning. The team also knew that districts would need the help of community partners to realize these goals.</p> <p>A summer learning collaborative was established in spring 2021 to collectively create a space for sustained collaboration, system alignment and access to summer learning opportunities.</p> <p>The ODE team embraced an asset-based approach to addressing students’ summer learning needs and interests by creating guidance that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating joyful, engaging and connection-centered summer learning programs based on the strengths and interests of young people, including the active co-creation of programs with families and community partners. • Focusing on building deep interpersonal relationships where students are well-known, cared-for and connected. • Fostering identity-affirming learning environments that sustain cultural knowledge. • Integrating relevant, hands-on learning experiences. <p>For summer 2022, the team worked across the agency to create a survey to gather feedback about how students perceived summer programming. This effort helped ODE deepen understanding of students’ perceptions of program quality. For this initial launch of the survey, ODE received approximately 2,000 responses from students across Oregon.</p>
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learn from other states about the processes and systems employed to develop strong summer learning programs. 2. Explore strategies for the effective use of federal relief and state funds to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. 3. Tap into the expertise of CCSSO and NSLA, along with other research. 4. Bring agency members together to learn from each other and build a collective understanding of the power of summer learning.
Partnerships	<p>Oregon summer collaborative partners include the steering team members listed here and general members consisting of community-based organizations, culturally-specific service providers, enrolled Tribal members, state agencies, school district partners, philanthropists, community and education leaders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oregon Afterschool & Summer for Kids Network (OregonASK) • Foundations for a Better Oregon • Oregon Community Foundation • 21st Century Community Learning Centers • Student Success Act Summer Programs

Products

With support from ODE leadership, the team created a [Summer Learning Best Practice Guide](#) and [Companion Toolkit](#). These resources are designed to help districts as they develop a variety of meaningful summer programming. Additional resources on summer learning can be found on the [summer learning page](#) of the department's website.

ODE, in partnership with the Oregon Summer Collaborative, created a common vision for summer learning: The collaborative envisions a racially just, child-centered education system where the whole community supports every child with equitable access to safe, inclusive and welcoming learning environments, in and out of school year-round.

Lessons Learned and Looking Ahead

The Oregon team achieved its goal of creating a **paradigm shift in the agency about the potential of summer learning and what constitutes a high-quality program. More importantly, students had the opportunity to see what school could look like through hands-on, culturally-affirming summer experiences. Oregon went from serving approximately 15,000 students through a few federal and state grants to well over 100,000 students in the summers of 2021 and 2022. The team learned many lessons along the way:**

Internal coherence and shared strategic vision are key

Strategic collaboration with teams and offices within the department was key for summer learning to be known, supported and championed across the agency. ODE's cross-team collaboration infused the collective equity stance of the agency in the design of the summer learning state framework and guidance documents. These efforts ensured a meaningful connection to school-day initiatives in the summer learning space.

Work with, not just for, schools and districts

The team worked closely with schools, districts and partners to create resources that would truly be helpful to them. Strong feedback loops helped ODE learn from districts and provided opportunities for districts to learn from each other. These feedback loops not only ensured the team was meeting school and district needs, but were also a way to create tools and resources that could take some weight off schools and districts so they could focus on immediate student needs during the pandemic.

Well-rounded summer programs can address unfinished learning

The guidance and technical assistance provided by ODE aimed to expand district leaders' thinking about the potential of summer learning. Districts shifted from traditional remedial summer school programs to well-rounded, hands-on programs that incorporated academic skill-building while also reflecting the interests, choices and voices of the students. For example, programs incorporated surfing into lessons about geometry by having students calculate the trajectory of a wave or had small group reading sessions coupled with field trips that expanded and deepened the content they were learning.

Celebrate wins along the way

The team highlighted and celebrated the work of Oregon summer programs that exemplified high-quality programming and provided varied opportunities to collaborate, learn and share practices. This helped tell the story of summer learning, validated the hard work of staff and set the stage for continuous quality improvement by creating a culture of reflection that recognizes both strengths and opportunities for growth.

Looking ahead, ODE is preparing for the reality that federal and state pandemic relief funds will eventually run dry. It has held several sessions for districts on how they can braid funds from multiple sources to support their programs. ODE continues to look into ways to make the programs sustainable for the long term.

Ultimately, ODE aims to gather evidence of the effectiveness of its work, create a cohesive system of continuous quality improvement across state and federal grants and continue to build and deepen partnerships at the state and local levels. Across the state, the team has seen a mindset shift about the value of summer learning. Team members want to continue to expand that mindset to foster joyful, academically rigorous, connection-filled experiences for students. ■