



# smarter summers. brighter futures.

A SUMMER PLAYBOOK FOR PTA AND SCHOOL LEADERS





 Establish clear and realistic goals to support your school's vision of a dynamic and supportive summer.



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# THE SUMMER PLAYBOOK

01

When you were a child, what was your favorite memory of the last day of school—Counting down the minutes until the final school bell rang? Racing through the doors and into the sunshine? Thinking about the roller coasters at the amusement park?

Summertime indeed means sun and fun, but learning should hardly take a vacation. Many students, especially those from underserved communities, lose up to two to three months of grade-level equivalency in math, reading, and other academic skills over the summer months. This phenomenon is known as the summer slide.

During the school year, our children receive vital resources, including age-appropriate learning materials, supportive teachers, healthy meals, and structured physical activity. Young people need all these resources to explore, grow, develop, and learn, even when the bell rings for the last time at the end of the school year.<sup>1</sup>

The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA), Learning Heroes (LH), and National PTA (PTA) envision a world where every child thrives during the summer. That is why these three national organizations have partnered, for the first time, around this critical issue for students. Through NSLA's knowledge base and resources, National PTA's reach and influence, and LH's research and communications, we can help make this vision a reality.

With this Playbook, PTAs, along with teachers and principals, will have a robust and research-based toolkit to keep youth safe, healthy, and engaged in learning during the critical summer months.

## WHY SUMMERS MATTER

While summer may seem like a welcome break for students,<sup>2</sup> research shows it is the critical time when many students risk:

- Falling two to three months behind in reading and math
- Gaining weight without access to nutritious meals
- Participating in unsafe behavior without support from teachers and caring mentors

Over time, this “summer slide”—learning loss experienced during summer—makes it harder for a child to thrive in school, graduate from high school, attend college, and attain financial stability.<sup>3</sup> Research shows strong evidence of children being better prepared for the school year after regularly attending a high-quality, five-week summer learning program.<sup>4</sup>

SUMMER PROGRAMS WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD ON FOUNDATIONAL ACADEMIC SKILLS, EXPLORE ENRICHING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES, AND BOND WITH PEERS AND CARING MENTORS OR TEACHERS EFFECTIVELY SERVE THE WHOLE CHILD.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

ACROSS THE COUNTRY, PARENT AND SCHOOL LEADERS CAN HARNESS THE POWER OF SUMMER TO PREPARE YOUNG PEOPLE FOR SUCCESS IN THE UPCOMING SCHOOL YEAR AND SUPPORT THEIR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT.



The community  
is a rich and  
exciting learning  
landscape for  
children in  
the summer.

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# SEIZE THE SUMMER

03 Across the nation, two-thirds of students – or approximately 8 million – perform below grade level.<sup>5</sup> Three out of five parents are anxious about their child’s readiness for college and, as a result, their future happiness. In a survey conducted by Learning Heroes, nine out of ten parents thought their child was at or above grade level in reading and math, when National Assessment of Educational Progress data tell us that only about a third of students perform at that level.<sup>7</sup>

Even when parents are aware of the long-term consequences of the summer slide, many do not feel equipped with the resources to keep their children learning at home.

Parents often associate “summer learning” with punitive and high-pressure summer school – stressful experiences from which they would rather protect their children. Parents are motivated to keep their children learning in the summer when they better understand the positive impact such enrichment has on school year success.<sup>8</sup> They are eager to discover high-quality summer learning programs that are educational, supportive, and fun.



By 2020, 65 percent of U.S. jobs will require a postsecondary degree.



## THREE STRATEGIES FOR SUMMER SUCCESS

PTAs and schools are key to linking parents to vital summer learning opportunities that can help children have fun and meaningful learning experiences that prepare them for the next grade.

The Playbook empowers and equips PTAs and educators to make summers matter in their communities with three key strategies:

**STRATEGY #1: COMMITMENT:**  
ESTABLISH A SCHOOL-WIDE COMMITMENT TO SUMMER FUN AND LEARNING

**STRATEGY #2: COLLABORATION:**  
SHARE SCHOOL, DISTRICT, AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

**STRATEGY #3: CONNECTION:**  
STAY IN TOUCH WITH FAMILIES AND CELEBRATE SUMMER LEARNING FUN ALL SEASON



## SUMMER STRATEGY 01: COMMITMENT



Parent and school leaders can use community conversations and a plan of action to demonstrate a real commitment to ensuring every child thrives during the summer.

### FOR SCHOOL LEADERS - CREATE THE VISION

Use these helpful tips to establish clear and realistic goals to support your school's vision of a dynamic and supportive summer. Ask PTA members and teachers to consider what collective impact they want to have on families during the summer.

#### SAMPLE VISION STATEMENTS:

- > Every child will have summer opportunities to strengthen skills, explore new subjects, stay healthy, and form meaningful connections to peers, adults, and the community.
- > Every parent will gain an understanding of the importance of summer, plus knowledge of effective resources and activities accessible to families in the summer.

#### SAMPLE OF SMART (SPECIFIC, MEASURABLE, ACHIEVABLE, RELEVANT, AND TIMELY) GOALS:

- > Establish a school-wide daily challenge for every student to read 20 minutes, engage in two new activities, perform 20 minutes of physical activity, and practice one math problem.
- > Ensure 90 percent of the student body has a library card and 100 percent of students eligible for the Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FARMs) program are connected to summer meal programs or other community resources for support.
- > Commit to making the school resources accessible during the summer (e.g. school library or media center open three days a week) or enroll students in a digital learning subscription that's available over the summer.

- > Work with families to connect them to summer program scholarship or discount opportunities.
- > Support families in setting daily screen time goals and reminders to all families to check parental controls.
- > Partner with 5-7 local businesses and ask each to provide up to 10 summer jobs or internships.

### INVITE THE PLAYERS

Host a fun summer visioning session for key "players" (parents, teachers, PTA leaders, and community leaders) to help realize the shared vision and commit to established goals.

### EQUIP PARENTS

To help parents support summer learning fun and progress, Learning Heroes launched Summer Stride, a research-based, English/Spanish resource, that gives parents interactive tools and information they need to set their child up for success in the next grade!



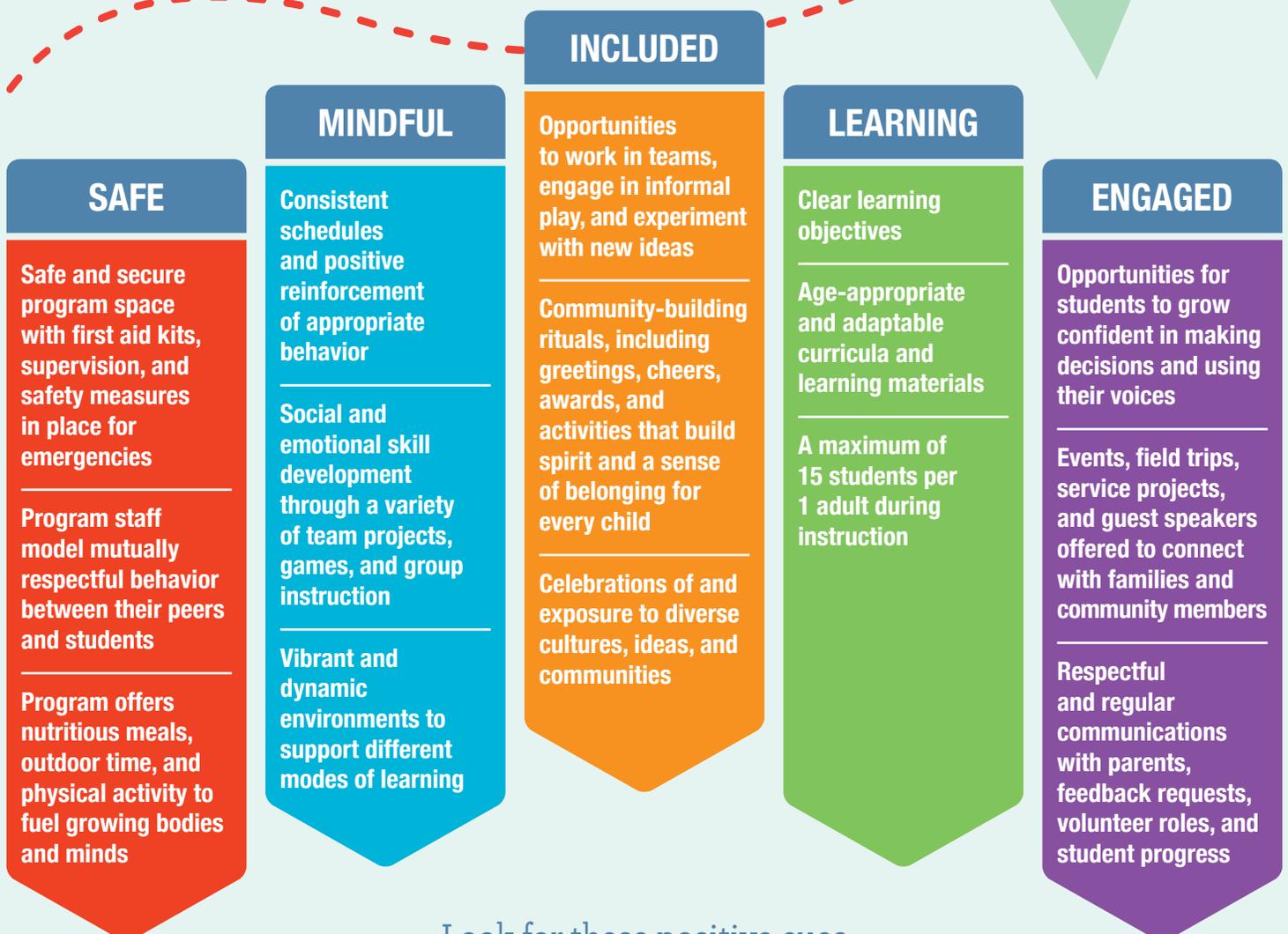


# EVERY CHILD DESERVES AN AMAZING SUMMER.

The National Summer Learning Association offers these recommendations for identifying a high-quality summer program for your child.



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Look for these positive cues when deciding on a summer program experience for your child.

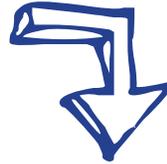


### FOR PARENTS: FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

Through regular communications and school events, parent and school leaders can keep school year goals front and center in the summer. Here are a few conversation starters and goal-setting tools for parents to engage in the conversation and keep it going.



#### PARENTS START THE CONVERSATION WITH TEACHERS

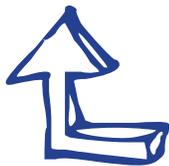


- What subject does my child excel in/enjoy the most?
- What subject area challenges/frustrates my child the most?
- What specific skills does my child need to work on for the next school year?
- Will the school library be open during the summer?
- What public library programs might be a good fit for my child?
- Does the school/district offer summer learning programs for my child?
- What special education services will be available for my child during the summer?
- When/where will meals be served during the summer?



#### PARENTS KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING WITH CHILDREN DURING SUMMER

- What topic or issue do you want to learn more about this summer?
- What new fact surprised you today?
- What was your favorite activity today and why?
- How did you get moving today and how do you feel?
- How would you explain to a friend what you learned today?
- What steps can you take to improve in a subject area that challenges you?
- Why is this specific skill important for you to learn?



#### PARENTS SHARE SUMMER SUCCESS STORIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA. TAG THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND POST TO THE SCHOOL/PTA PAGES.



- *Sample post:* At the start of summer, my child struggled with [insert subject] and grew stronger in [insert one to three specific skills] because of the #KeepKidsLearning campaign.
- *Sample post:* Access to [insert tool/activity/resource] transformed my child's summer experience. Now [he/she] is ready to kickstart the school year thanks to #KeepKidsLearning, @[insert community-based organization], and @[insert other key individual].

## TRACK FOR SUCCESS

This suggested tool helps families set goals, track progress, and celebrate commitment.



# SUMMER CHALLENGE

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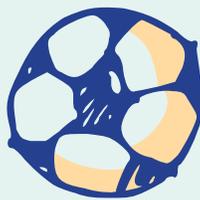
## > Take the 20-2-1 Summer Challenge <

Complete each of the activities listed below in a single day. Then, using your favorite calendar, check off each day that you completed all three activities. At the end of the summer count how many days you checked off.

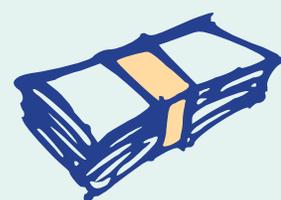
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**Read something of interest for at least 20 minutes every day.**



**Pick two choice activities (e.g. write in a journal, make art, play outside).**



**Do one math activity every day (e.g. practice multiplication, visit [KhanAcademy.org](https://www.khanacademy.org)).**



national summer  
learning association

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## SUMMER STRATEGY 02: COLLABORATION

Collaboration is key in building a supportive school community even during the summertime. Parent and school leaders can inspire families to discover learning wherever it happens and help families create or connect with no/low-cost community events and resources. Perhaps your local zoo will bring a program to your school during the summer or you might host a books and bubbles night or a night of music under the stars with a local music store. *The sky's the limit.*

### FOR SCHOOL LEADERS - SHARE FUN AND LOW-COST/FREE OPTIONS FOR FAMILIES TO LEARN TOGETHER

- > Discount nights or summer programs at the local aquarium, zoo, children's or history museum
- > Sports, parks, hiking trails, and block parties
- > Library programs and bookstore reading groups
- > College/university tours
- > Cultural-exploration family dinners
- > Outdoor concerts and performances

### FOR PARENT LEADERS - TAP INTO SCHOOL RESOURCES

- > Promote school-based summer offerings to families through newsletters, email, meetings, special events, and personalized calls.
- > Ask the principal what online tools/subscriptions are available to students during the summer.
- > Ask the principal/librarian for access to the school library during the summer. Create a sign-up list for parent volunteers to lead reading circles and donate books to help.
- > Ask teachers for reading lists, math games, and next-year learning objectives. Incorporate teacher recommendations into PTA communications, host summer planning nights for parents, and distribute a grade-level summer checklist to parents.



#### No Kid Hungry Summer Meals Texting Program

Across the nation, the Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FARMs) program provides students from lower-income families nutritious meals during the school year. When school is out, an estimated 4 million children—1 in 6 kids—face hunger in the summer months because many families do not know how to access this vital resource during the summer. In partnership with the USDA, the national organization No Kid Hungry launched a free, summer meals texting service. Now, all families can text "FOOD" to 877-877 to find the community site for children to access free and healthy breakfasts and lunches throughout the summer.



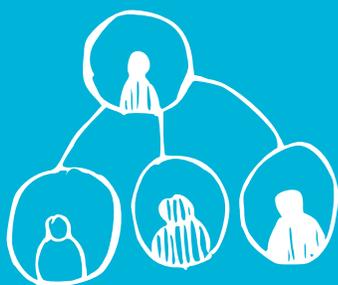
## SPOTLIGHT ON OLDER YOUTH - THE SUMMER MELT: SUPPORTING GRADUATING SENIORS



When we think about the “summer slide,” often our thoughts focus on younger students, but among graduating seniors is the phenomenon known as the “summer melt.” According to a July 2018 article published by the ACT Center for Equity in Learning, 44 percent of high school graduates who have applied and been accepted to college do not attend their classes in the fall. The effect is greater at community colleges and among low-income, minority, and first-generation students.



Some factors that can contribute to the summer melt range from incomplete paperwork, lack of access to financial aid resources and insufficient preparation for the transition to college life through mentorships and college tours. Here are some ways parents can support their graduating seniors in navigating the road to higher education while setting them up for success from the first day of the semester to graduation:



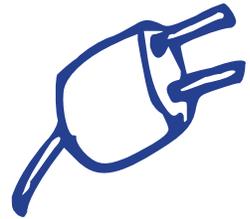
- Explore college websites for resources about academics, student life, campus tours, financial aid, and other points of interest that may be helpful in planning for the first semester of school;
- Talk with your child’s school counselor during the summer about the planning process for your child’s transition to college including available summer bridge programs that may give them a head start for the fall;
- Arrange a meeting with your child’s teacher to discuss his or her strengths and areas of improvement they may need to focus on during the summer to prepare for the next stage of their academic journey; and
- Register your child for college orientation upon acceptance to the school of their choice. Orientations usually occur during the summer and are a great way to navigate the planning process and get a peek into college life and expectations. Save the date and plan to attend.

Visit ACT’s website at <https://equityinlearning.act.org> and review the Parent Toolkit at <https://www.parenttoolkit.com> for more helpful tips to prevent the summer melt.

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## SUMMER STRATEGY 03: CONNECTION

Ensuring children have access to summer learning opportunities requires diverse stakeholders coming together to pool resources and move their networks to action. PTAs play a key role in the educational success of children and the promotion of family engagement. Summer is a great time to uphold that commitment and to stay connected with families, advocate for more summer programming or funding, and celebrate the importance of summer through National Summer Learning Week.





seize the summer...

## COMMUNICATIONS SUGGESTIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Creating a communications schedule offers a great way to stay connected with families over the summer. Here are some ideas that you might consider, and tools like [Hootsuite](#) or [Sprout Social](#) allow you to pre-schedule posts so you too can still enjoy your vacation time:



- > Post on Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram two times per week
- > Use [#KeepKidsLearning](#) and [#belearninghero](#)
- > Text parents with summer tips or community activities

Include posts about summer goal-setting, resource links, and shout-outs in communications:

- > Text Sample: Remember to get your library card. Check out a book to keep your your child on track for the 20-2-1 challenge.
- > Text Sample: From Meatball Monday to Stir-Fry Sunday, any day is a good day to create something yummy. Post a summer photo of something delicious and nutritious you've enjoyed.
- > E-Newsletter Content:
  - Encourage families to sign up/check out free community events, summer programs, and meal sites and embed links.
  - Share swim and sun safety reminders.
  - Ask families to post summer success stories/memories on social media.
  - Encourage families to maintain their summer goals—stay active, learning, and engaged.
  - Include save the dates for community events.
  - Include back-to-school tips and key information to get families ready for a great school year ahead.



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## Swimming Safety

Before diving into an active and healthy summer, parents should assess their child's swimming ability. After all, fun in the pool can only begin if children learn how to swim AND how to be safe in the water. Despite the increased risk of drowning, eight out of ten children with no/low swimming ability plan to swim at least once in the summer and three out of ten plan to swim 10 or more times. Research shows that young people can increase their self-confidence and skills in the water by taking swimming lessons, practicing regularly, being exposed to swimming role models, swimming with parents, and learning safety rules.

- > 65 percent of African-American children would like more swimming opportunities.
- > Children living in lower-income communities are 63 percent less likely to have a good swimming ability.
- > Seeing a talented swimmer who looks like them increases children's interest in swimming according to 76 percent of parents.
- > Children who swim with their family are 2.7 times more likely to be good swimmers.

Learning water-safety rules nearly quadruples a child's ability and self-confidence to swim.

Parents can help their children make a splash this summer by taking advantage of low/no-cost swimming lessons offered by community organizations, including the Red Cross, YMCA, and local parks department.

# Social Media Summer Calendar Sample

TIMELINE	THEME/TOPIC	SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POST
WEEK 1	ACADEMICS/ READING	Pave the path to graduation: Help ensure your child is reading at grade level by the third grade. Read 20 minutes per day with your child. #KeepKidsLearning @TagFamilyAndFriends @TagSchoolLeaders @TagParentLeaders
WEEK 2	SUMMER STRIDE	Summer is a great time to support grade level skills to set your child up for success in the new school year. For free & bilingual #summerlearning tools go to... bealearninghero.org via @BeALearningHero @NationalPTA & @summerlearning!
WEEK 3	HEALTH/ PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	Children risk gaining weight during lazy summer days. Don't forget to go outdoors, keep moving, and stay nourished in the summer. #StayActive @TagALocalSportsCamp @nokidhungry
WEEK 4	ACADEMICS/ COLLEGE	Is college on the horizon for your child? This summer, master the timeline for college admissions. @Khanacademy #KeepKidsLearning @TagACollegePrepCourse @UniContigo
WEEK 5	CAREER	By 2020, 65 percent of U.S. jobs will require a postsecondary degree. Most jobs will require strong skills in communications and collaboration. Encourage your child to build a professional portfolio at LRNG.org. #KeepKidsLearning @TagYourLocalRepresentative
WEEK 6	WELL-BEING/ COMMUNITY BONDS	Share a success story on what your child accomplished this summer. #KeepKidsLearning @TagASchoolLeaderAndTeacher

## FOR PARENTS - GETTING READY FOR BACK-TO-SCHOOL

Want a gut check on how ready your child is for the new school year?

It only takes a few minutes with the **Readiness Check** from Learning Heroes! Have your child answer 3-5 questions as a quick math and reading review from last year. It isn't a test—your child can relax and solve the problems—like a game! At the end, you'll get fun, free activities to help your child at home.

>The Readiness Check is a free and fun resource for parents to get their child ready to start the new year fresh and on the road to success.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

>Keep math skills sharp with the Quantile Summer Math Challenge. Visit Lexile "Find a Book" to submit your Summer Reading Pledge and use the Summer Reading Log to track a child's reading throughout the summer break.

>Get ready to stop the summer slide –while helping kids in need – with the Scholastic Read-a-Palooza Summer Reading Challenge!

>Khan Academy is a great way for children to get help with what they're learning in school and brush up on skills during the summer.

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Gomez-Pinilla, Fernando, and Charles Hillman. "The Influence of Exercise on Cognitive Abilities." *Comprehensive Physiology* 3.1 (2013): 403–428. PMC. Web. 21 Apr. 2018.

<sup>2</sup>"Summer Learning Recruitment Guide," The Wallace Foundation, web.

<sup>3</sup>"Summer by the Numbers," National Summer Learning Association, May 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, Catherine, et al, "Learning from Summer: Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Urban Youth," RAND Corporation and The Wallace Foundation, 2016.

<sup>5</sup>"The Nation's Report Card," National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Carnevale, Anthony, et al, "Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020," Georgetown University Public Policy Institute Center on Education and the Workforce, 2014.

<sup>7</sup>"Parents 2018: Going Beyond Good Grades," Learning Heroes, December 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Rosenberg, Jeff, "Summer Learning Recruitment Guide."

<sup>9</sup>"USA Swimming Foundation Announces 5-10 Percent Increase in Swimming Ability Among U.S. Children," USA Swimming Foundation, July 2017.



#### **ABOUT THE NATIONAL SUMMER LEARNING ASSOCIATION**

The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) 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, offers expertise and support for programs and communities, and advocates for summer learning as a solution for equity and excellence in education. NSLA's work is driven by the belief that all children and youth deserve high-quality summer learning experiences that will help them succeed in college, career, and life.

#### **ABOUT LEARNING HEROES**

Learning Heroes informs and equips parents with information, resources, and opportunities to help support their child's academic and developmental success. Based on our extensive parent research, we create easy-to-understand materials and tools delivered through multiple channels and trusted messengers. For more information, visit [www.bealearninghero.org](http://www.bealearninghero.org).

#### **ABOUT THE NATIONAL PTA**

The National PTA's mission is to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children. To achieve this mission, PTA values collaboration, commitment, diversity, respect, and accountability.

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