



# PREVIEW



**national summer  
learning association**

## Summer Learning

**A Bridge to Student Success  
and America's Recovery**

**A COVID-19 PLAYBOOK**



Photo courtesy of the Miracle Makers:  
East End Community Services, 2017



# Summer Learning

## A Bridge to Student Success and America's Recovery

A COVID-19 PLAYBOOK



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# Message from the CEO

## Dear Education and Community Partner:

The COVID-19 health crisis has upended our lives in ways we could never imagine and has exposed, grown, and exacerbated the digital divide, food and financial instability, childcare issues, opportunity gaps and learning losses millions of underserved students and their families actually face every summer. While we cannot predict the length of this pandemic, we know demand for human support services is dramatically increasing and resources to pay for them declining.

To successfully navigate this time, education and community leaders must be hyper-creative, collaborative, and empathetic in how we tackle issues of equity and utilize summer as a critical bridge to a successful school year, particularly for students from low income families, English language learners, students with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness or foster care, and students engaged in the juvenile justice system. In doing so, we must address unfinished learning, coordinate tailored and engaging learning experiences in school and out of school, online and in-person. We must maintain social and emotional connections that help build resiliency and success for every student.

For more than 25 years, the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) has led the movement to ensure every young person in America, regardless of their background, zip code or income, can access and participate in life-changing experiences every summer. It's my belief that social entrepreneurs in education are often drawn to summer and out of school (OST) time programs because of the opportunity to develop creative solutions to communal problems and awaken young people's passions, grow their resiliency and foster learning in ways not always offered during the school year.

During this pandemic, NSLA has convened a National Summer and Continuous Learning Taskforce with two dozen national experts and partner groups focused on meeting the varied needs of families, students and communities. In this playbook, we have collected their insights and resources and combined them with NSLA tools to help local leaders and families plan for the school year and summer ahead. Now more than ever, summer is essential to the healthy development, well-being and continuous learning of every student and critical to helping America navigate this crisis and end up even stronger on the other side. We thank you for your leadership and commitment to students. We look forward to supporting you every step of the way.

Summer matters,

Aaron Philip Dworkin  
National Summer Learning Association  
Chief Executive Officer

# Introduction

## PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

According to the RAND Corporation and Wallace Foundation report, [Investing in Successful Summer Programs](#), summertime can be used to support an array of goals for children and youth, including academic enrichment, physical and mental health, social-emotional well-being, and the development of interests.

The only way we're truly going to make critical summer learning and enrichment opportunities more readily available through this pandemic and beyond is through ingenuity and partnerships. It will take all of us—state and local leaders, parents, educators, and community partners—working together to ensure America's students come out of this crisis stronger.

The purpose of this playbook is to provide a long-term, comprehensive, and sustainable framework for planning, collaborating, and executing evidence-based practices and partnerships for high-quality summer and out-of-school time (OST) experiences.





# NSLA Believes Summer is a Time For:

**INNOVATION:** An opportunity for school districts, community partners, municipal leaders, and OST providers to improve school-year teaching and learning by testing new curricula, technology, and instructional strategies (particularly in virtual environments) before scaling.

**INSPIRATION:** Learning happens anywhere, anytime, and offers a chance to individualize learning and to explore project-based experiences that help students acquire deeper knowledge of themselves and the world around them.

**INTEGRATION:** An opportunity to break down systemic barriers and community silos to create a safety net that equitably supports the whole student.

**IMPACT:** Recent research offers conclusive evidence that summer is an opportunity to close academic and opportunity gaps while promoting healthy development and well-being for students to thrive.



# Policies and Funding That Advance Summer Learning

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A [survey](#) conducted in early June 2020 by the National League of Cities (NLC) of more than 1,100 cities, towns, and villages from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico found that two-thirds of cities reported that they were making cuts to summer-specific programming, including summer youth employment programs, summer camps, municipal pools, and festivals and events.

This points to the urgent need for parents, educators, advocates, business leaders, and policymakers to each take a stand to protect and expand summer learning opportunities in communities across the country.

Specifically, policymakers must implement legislation that improves the accessibility and availability of summer programs. Effective policies must address the unmet demand that families have for quality summer experiences and childcare, and improve access to critical summer nutrition programs as food insecurity needs rise.



**District-level summer program leaders may be able to promote summer learning program sustainability, scale, and quality by setting a board policy on summer programming; authorizing a central body to carry out decision-making; measuring and communicating the impact of summer programming to justify spending and support; cultivating relationships with district, city, state, and federal decision-makers; and advocating for clear funding messages from state agency staff.**

**RAND Corporation/Wallace Foundation Research Brief:**  
[Navigating Federal, State, and Local Program Support Opportunities](#)





Educators across the country agree that summers matter and “offer opportunities for social and academic growth, but can also put disadvantaged children at risk for worse outcomes,” according to the first cross-sector report, *Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-Being for Children and Youth*, released by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NAS).

The NAS Committee on Summertime Experiences and Child and Adolescent Education, Health, and Safety identified 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 community resources.

### Key Recommendations Include:

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** Local governments (e.g., county, city) should establish a quality management system (QMS) to identify and provide positive developmental summertime experiences for children and youth, experiences that advance academic learning, improve health and well-being, and promote safety and social and emotional development.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** Foundations and other philanthropic organizations should augment their funding, technology, and in-kind supports to intermediaries that are creating systems, platforms, and communication vehicles for—and promoting promising and effective practices focused on—summertime experiences for children.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** Governors and mayors should convene local public and private employers to leverage and support employer policies, practices, and programs to expand the capacity of, and access to, quality summertime experiences for children and youth, particularly those in underserved communities.



[READ FULL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS HERE](#)