

Case Studies: What Powerful Summer Programs in California Look Like

California school districts provide varied examples of summer learning programs, each one customized to meet local needs and circumstances. That said, these programs also have several characteristics in common. For one, they look very different from traditional, academics-only summer schools. They combine learning with activities that motivate and engage young people, providing summer enrichment experiences that feel more like summer camps, similar to those available to children from higher-income families who can pay for them. Simultaneously, they are aligned with school district learning goals in intentional and strategic ways.

The school districts and county offices of education that operate these summer learning programs find that they are a cost-effective strategy for meeting district goals, in part because they marshal resources from the larger community and from a range of funding sources.

A focus on growth and engagement

At the **Mountain View Elementary School District** in El Monte, Superintendent Lillian Maldonado-French underscores the difference for students who attend a summer learning program instead of a traditional summer school aimed at remediation.

“When I think about traditional summer school I always think of it as a deficit model. It’s mandatory, the kids have to be there. They don’t have a lot of fun. Summer learning is really a growth model. Rather than just remediating or plugging holes and deficits, we take what the student already has and we build on that. We find that the students learn even more. They’re so excited and engaged and happy to be here. It’s wonderful.”

Officials in the **Kerman Unified School District** saw the difference firsthand when they changed the summer program they offered for middle grade students. After taking a credit recovery approach in 2014, and seeing very poor attendance, this Fresno County school district wanted its summer investment to yield better results. District leaders turned to their after-school program provider and the local county office of education, asking them to replicate a summer learning program already in place nearby. In 2015, the district’s 100-student pilot program was filled to capacity.

After that pilot year, Kerman Superintendent Robert Frausto said: “Kids lose information over the summer and here I have a program that helps them retain knowledge. I think traditional summer school is not working, particularly for middle school. You get kids in a summer program when they want to be there. They’re learning but they’re also having fun. I heard nothing but really positive comments from students and parents.”

Some districts retain a focus on helping struggling students catch up by creating hybrid summer learning experiences. **Oakland Unified School District**, for example, blended remediation goals with STEAM enrichment activities and field trips. Elementary students needing extra help spent the morning with a classroom teacher doing more traditional academic work. In the afternoon they attended a summer camp that involved them in fun, exciting summer experiences and gave them a broader understanding of the world around them.

A program design that addresses specific learning goals

Sacramento City Unified School District found that many students were not successfully transitioning into middle school or high school. The district created its Summer of Service program in part to explicitly address those transition issues. The program also provided civic education to the 7th and 8th graders in this 47,000-student school district. The program was managed at multiple sites each summer by community-based organizations, with a staff that included both district teachers and employees from after-school programs. At every site, students learned basic elements of service learning and then applied them in a service project they selected and designed. The activities and focus of the programs varied, reflecting the approaches taken by the program providers, the needs of the students and families, and the priorities of the school principals.

Fresno County Office of Education plays a pivotal role in the planning and management of summer learning programs for many local school districts. Reading, leadership, nutrition, and science have been central learning goals in the programs, largely depending on district priorities. At **Central Unified School District**, for example, 6th to 8th grade students spent time each day reading and discussing the book *The Hunger Games*. Throughout the rest of the day, many activities built on the themes and imagery from the book. The students also participated in electives such as robotics, engineering, cooking, gardening, theater, dance and art, as well as physical activities such as tennis, soccer, and swimming.

Mountain View School District has a long-standing and collaborative partnership with THINK Together that helps make an integrated approach to summer learning work. Teachers focus on the academic component of the program while THINK Together staff provide a wrap-around program that includes physical fitness and enrichment activities, plus other group activities that create a spirit of freedom and fun for students. As one of the state's largest providers of expanded learning programs, THINK Together contributes multiple resources, such as a curriculum from NASA that was used in 2015 to provide STEM activities in Mountain View. Field trips, including an overnight camping experience, also set the program apart from school as usual. Out of the 7,500 students in this elementary district, almost a third participated in the summer learning program in 2015.

In rural **Yolo County**, the county office of education, Woodland High School, the local community college, the

non-profit Center for Land-based Learning, and several workforce development initiatives joined forces to create a summer program for local high school students. The focus was career exploration and preparation. It gave students a hands-on experience that helped them see how energy, water management, and the local agricultural economy fit together. The program combined classroom and field work, for which the students earned college credits.

Azusa Unified School District, in partnership with a local university, provides enriched learning opportunities to its GATE students. Housed on the university campus, the program runs four hours per day for about three weeks. The district also offers a STEM-focused summer program on a regular school site based on a packaged curriculum that is aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards. One goal of the program in 2016 was to give the credentialed teachers who staffed the program an opportunity to evaluate the curriculum for districtwide use.

For more examples of powerful summer programs throughout California and additional resources, visit www.csba.org/summerlearning.

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<p>Mountain View Elementary School District</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Located in El Monte in the San Gabriel Valley area of Los Angeles County. » A K-8 district with 7,052 students served in 12 schools. » Student demographics: 58.5% English learners, 91.3% eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and largest ethnic group is Hispanic/Latino (94%). » Per-pupil revenues (based on ADA of 6,893): \$12,867. 	<p>Kerman Unified School District</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Located in Kerman in Fresno County. » A K-12 district with 5,134 students served in 7 schools. » Student demographics: 37.2% English learners, 82.4% eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and largest ethnic group is Hispanic/Latino (84.2%). » Per-pupil revenues (based on ADA of 4,882): \$11,907.
<p>Oakland Unified School District</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Located in Oakland in Alameda County. » A K-12 district with 49,760 students served in 126 schools. » Student demographics: 31.4% English learners, 73.4% eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and largest ethnic groups are Hispanic/Latino (44.9%), Black/African American (25%), and Asian (12.8%). » Per-pupil revenues (based on ADA of 35,436): \$14,708. 	<p>Sacramento City Unified School District</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Located in Sacramento in Sacramento County. » A K-12 district with 46,815 students served in 82 schools. » Student demographics: 20% English learners, 68.2% eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and largest ethnic groups are Hispanic/Latino (39.5%), White (17.4%), Asian (16.6%), and Black/African American (16.1%). » Per-pupil revenues (based on ADA of 38,655): \$13,053.
<p>Central Unified School District</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Located in Fresno in Fresno County. » A K-12 district with 15,772 students served in 22 schools. » Student demographics: 11.9% English learners, 64.5% eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and largest ethnic groups are Hispanic/Latino (58.1%), White (16%), and Asian (13.2%). » Per-pupil revenues (based on ADA of 14,917): \$10,973. 	<p>Azusa Unified School District</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Located in Azusa in Los Angeles County. » A K-12 district with 8,782 students served in 18 schools. » Student demographics: 27.2% English learners, 79.3% eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and largest ethnic group is Hispanic/Latino (92.2%). » Per-pupil revenues (based on ADA of 8,561): \$13,227.
<p>Fresno County Office of Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Countywide enrollment: 202,221 students served in 32 school districts and the county office of education. » Student demographics: 20.6% English learners, 72.9% eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and largest ethnic groups are Hispanic/Latino (64.6%) and White (17.5%). 	<p>Yolo County Office of Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Countywide enrollment: 29,841 students served in 5 school districts and the county office of education. » Student demographics: 21.3% English learners, 51.7% eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and largest ethnic groups are Hispanic/Latino (47.1%) and White (34.5%).

Enrollment and demographic data based on 2016–17 school year, and financial data based on 2015–16 school year. Reported by the Education Data Partnership at www.ed-data.org.

