

How can boards provide leadership and funding for summer programs?

SUMMER LEARNING SERIES

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Since summer is typically treated as time away from school, summer learning hasn't historically been regarded as one of education's more pressing problems. Thus, when school districts and county offices of education are faced with painful funding shortfalls and the possibility of cutting programs to save money, summer programs may be on the chopping block. In fact, in a recent survey by the California School Boards Association, over 90 percent of the districts that reported they do not offer summer programs stated that it was due to the lack of funds.

"We recognize that district leaders have extremely hard decisions to make in our under-resourced environment, and summer has been the victim of that prioritization in a big way," said Jennifer Peck, executive director of the California-based nonprofit organization Partnership for Children and Youth (PCY), which oversees the statewide Summer Matters campaign. "I think in large part that's been due to a pretty broad lack of awareness about the very real and dramatic consequences of a lack of summer learning opportunities, particularly for our most disadvantaged students."

However, there is a growing recognition that a lack of summer programs hurts the basic educational mission of schools. Experts say summer learning loss—when students lose knowledge between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next—is a major factor in children's academic careers, especially for children from low-income backgrounds. In addition, many children unable to participate in



summer learning programs have less access to physical fitness programs and healthy nutrition. (See Issue 1 of this series for a discussion of the evidence supporting the link between the availability of summer programs and student achievement and wellness.)

In response to concerns about summer learning loss, a statewide coalition of educators, policymakers, advocates, school district leaders and foundations joined together in the Summer Matters campaign with a singular mission: to promote and create access to summer learning opportunities for all children.

The Summer Matters campaign has been engaged in developing and advocating for legislation to make public funding more flexible and easier to use for summer programming, piloting innovative summer programs throughout the state, implementing a communications strategy to garner greater public support and building a network of trainers to strengthen program quality.



Getting started

Successful summer programs cannot happen without enlightened interest, effective leadership and active support from school boards and superintendents. Not only does the school board set the vision and goals for the district, it adopts the district budget, as well as written policies that provide direction and structure, and it monitors program effectiveness.

Through all these areas of responsibility, the school board can set an expectation that summer programs are part of a district's overall educational effort, not just a seasonal offshoot. To achieve this, planning should happen year-round and be treated equally with traditional school year programs.

"Strong summer programs absolutely should be brought to the table to help extend a school district's resources—and in communities where that is happening, we see stronger results for kids," said Gary Huggins, chief executive officer of the National Summer Learning Association.

"A great role for a school board is to support a superintendent who is trying to create a high-quality summer learning experience for his or her students," added Huggins. "And if your district administration isn't there yet, you can help by asking what the district is doing about summer learning and by helping, where appropriate, to make connections with partners in the community to help create more summer learning opportunities.

"Even school districts that can't afford to run a summer learning program can serve their students by equipping teachers and parents with information on summer learning loss and pointing students toward available, affordable resources in the community."

In its 2011 report "Making Summer Count," researchers at the Rand Corp. offered six recommendations to school boards for building better summer learning programs:

1. Move summer programs from the periphery to the core of school reform strategies through better planning, infrastructure, data collection and accountability.
2. Strengthen and expand partnerships with community-based organizations and public agencies to align and exploit existing resources, identify gaps and improve programs.
3. Provide budget and logistic information to participating school sites and potential program partners by March to allow sufficient time for planning and recruitment.
4. Be creative with funding. Use multiple sources.
5. Create a summer learning task force consisting of local stakeholders to identify areas of collaboration and planning.
6. Change the summer focus from remediation and test preparation to a blended approach of academic and enrichment activities.



Show me the money

In this era of diminished resources, funding for summer programs requires planning, persistence and creativity. There is no singular go-to source for funding. Typically, most successful programs “braid” together multiple, diverse revenue sources.

In the recent CSBA survey, more than half of the responding districts reported relying upon multiple funding sources for their summer programs. Sixty percent used general funds; 36 percent used special education funds; 32 percent used Title I grants; 23 percent used migrant education funds; 21 percent used After School Education and Safety (ASES) and 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) supplemental funds; and 23 percent turned to other sources, such as private grants, School Improvement Grants or regional occupational program funding.

A PCY guide, *Funding to Support Summer Programs*, provides a list of funding sources that can support summer programs and examples from California districts that successfully use these funds.

21st CCLC funds are federal grants used to establish or increase expanded learning activities for K-12 students. They focus on three primary areas: improved academic achievement; enrichment services that complement academic programs; and family literacy. While the majority of 21st CCLC funds are for after-school programs, a small portion of the funding—called “supplemental”—can be used for summer learning programs.



21st CCLC grants are available through a competitive proposal process managed by the California Department of Education (CDE). Eligible applicants include districts and county offices of education, cities, counties, community-based organizations, public and private agencies or a consortium of two or more entities collaborating with a local district or county office.

Applicants must be serving students from schools that are eligible for Title I schoolwide programs, which in most cases means at least 40 percent of the school's population is enrolled in the free and reduced-price lunch program. (CDE sometimes reduces the 40 percent requirement when considering other mitigating factors.)

Some districts also have "supplemental" **ASES funds** from the state for after-school programs. While there are no new dollars for summer through ASES, many districts were allowed to "grandfather" existing supplemental ASES funds when Proposition 49 was implemented in 2006. A first step in exploring these funds is to check with the district's after-school or student services department.

Recent legislation (SB 429, 2011) created greater flexibility in the way grantees use 21st CCLC or ASES supplemental funding. Specifically, the law allows grantees to run a longer program, serving a broader variety of students at alternate sites from the funded school sites.

Hourly intervention funds come from CDE and provide support to instructional programs like remedial reading and summer school, particularly for students at risk of not succeeding in school. However, this program is one for which categorical program flexibility was granted under SBX3 4 (2009), ABX4 2 (2009) and SB 70 (2011). Through the 2014-15 fiscal year (unless extended), districts may temporarily suspend program requirements and use the funds for "any educational purpose."

Therefore, the extent to which these funds are available for summer programs is dependent upon whether or not the board accepted this flexibility and explicitly identified how the funds will be used.

Title I funds exist to assist schools with high concentrations of economically disadvantaged students. These funds can be used to promote student achievement, staff development and parent and community involvement. In recent years, funding restrictions have been loosened to allow greater use in summer learning programs. Decisions about the use of Title I funds are made at both the school site and district level.

Like 21st CCLC funds, at least 40 percent of the students in eligible schools or districts must qualify for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program. Almost all districts in California receive some degree of Title I funding.

Districts that receive **Title I, Part C, migrant education funding** are required to conduct summer school programs for eligible migrant students.

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) are offered through local government entities to support community services, including summer learning programs, to low- and moderate-income residents. Eligibility criteria vary by locality, and most CDBG funds are awarded to nonprofit and public organizations that support low- or moderate-income individuals. The overarching mission of CDBG funds is to promote viable, successful, thriving communities. In many communities, support for summer programs is seen as part of that effort.



City or county funds vary widely, both in how they are dispensed and in amount. These are local taxpayer funds and typically represent local sensibilities. Often this money is used to run parks and recreation department programs that provide recreation, enrichment, and sometimes career and job preparedness activities. School districts interested in broadening a summer school program to include recreation and enrichment can partner with their community's recreation department.

Some cities (e.g., Oakland, San Francisco) designate funds for summer youth programming, then contract with local schools or nonprofits to operate the programs.

Foundations have frequently played an important role in sparking innovation, like summer learning programs. Numerous foundation and private organizations, large and small, support or advocate educational goals, which may include summer learning.

Eligibility criteria and degree of financial support range widely. Most foundations have specific funding guidelines, which may include geographic, population or programmatic considerations. The length of support may be months, years or ongoing.

Fees for summer programs are increasingly common, often implemented to cover gaps between other funding and total program costs. They can be one-time up-front fees, weekly or daily. They can include sliding scales to help low-income families.

Summer programs can charge fees if their funding sources do not prohibit them, and if participating families are willing to pay. Under state law, entities that receive 21st CCLC and ASES supplemental grants for summer programs can charge fees, but no student can be turned away because he or she can't pay.

The PCY offered two specific examples of districts that have created and expanded strong summer learning programs over the past five years:

- In the Sacramento City Unified School District, the district uses a combination of after-school supplemental funds, Title I and targeted public grant funds whose goals overlap with summer learning program aspirations (e.g. Tobacco Use and Prevention Education, Safe and Supportive Schools, Career Tech Preparation). The district has also attracted private funding.

Over the past four years, Sacramento City Unified has expanded its program dramatically, from serving only high school students in 2009 to serving elementary through high school students. The district superintendent is an enthusiastic proponent of the program, specifically because students are so engaged by the program's focus on service learning and because the program serves as a training ground for teachers and community staff.

- At the Oakland Unified School District, educators have grown their summer school program despite significant economic challenges by providing strong data about summer learning loss to school principals who have chosen to contribute a portion of their site-level Title I money to summer school.

The district matches this school-site investment with district Title I funds. In 2012, Oakland Unified had 55 school sites serving over 6,500 students. With this commitment, the district has been able to attract private funding from the Packard Foundation, the Bechtel Foundation, the Noyce Foundation and the Walmart Foundation, and has built other public/private partnerships that have extended summer school into the afternoon with engaging science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programming.



Resources for summer wellness programs

To support summer wellness, districts may obtain summer meal reimbursement funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) when approved by CDE to serve as a program sponsor under the Seamless Summer Feeding Option or Summer Food Service Program. Both programs are designed to provide meals to children in low-income communities during summer vacation. However, Seamless Summer Feeding Option funding is available only to districts that also participate in the National School Lunch Program.

In addition to financial resources, districts should be thinking about untapped opportunities that can extend the district's limited funding.

Patrice Chamberlain, director of the California Summer Meal Coalition, said, "We have underestimated the value of the human resources available to our school districts. We have an incredibly capable and dedicated work force of child nutrition directors in California who are already experienced in operating USDA child nutrition programs that can pull together a pretty amazing summer nutrition 'safety net' with enough support."

Chamberlain said superintendents and school board members can be instrumental in supporting child nutrition directors' summer efforts by doing three things:



- Bringing child nutrition directors to the planning table early and finding out what kind of support they need to start or expand a summer meal program.
- Facilitating community partnerships. Whether summer school is happening or not, there are many ways districts can support summer meal programs in the community (either as a vendor or sponsor) ... and many ways the community can support school district summer meal programs (e.g., promotion, activities, prizes, books).
- Engaging teachers, principals, and parents/caregivers to ensure that families know about summer meal programs. Lack of awareness is an issue that results in underutilization, which then makes it a less financially viable proposition.

To provide physical activity programs during summer, districts might consider sharing program costs, facilities maintenance and operations with another governmental agency or community-based organization. Entering into a joint use agreement for access to gymnasiums, pools, playgrounds, school yards, playing fields, tracks or multipurpose rooms can be a more economical way to expand the availability of physical activity opportunities and other programs.





An optimistic approach

Despite the ongoing fiscal challenges of public education, districts and county offices have shown that, with creativity, effective partnerships, and enough motivation, summer programs can become an important component of school and community services for children and youth. Certainly, the proven benefits of summer programs make it imperative that boards give serious consideration to developing strategies to curtail summer learning loss and health decline. As the PCY's Peck says, "We believe that as more local education leaders and policy makers across the board learn about the consequences of summer learning loss, they will respond with action."

