

A ROADMAP TO KICK-START RECOVERY IN 2021

Six Principles for Summer Learning and Beyond

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Executive Summary

When public schools closed their doors in the spring of 2020, an estimated 3 million students went missing from formal schooling of any sort. Last summer, the stakes were high as districts attempted to reconnect with these disengaged students and their families to ensure they could access critical services like food and rental assistance. Unfortunately, the [logistics and politics](#) overwhelmed administrators and a [dearth of learning and enrichment options](#) was offered in summer 2020.

During the beginning of the 2020–21 school year, a mixture of public confusion and mistrust of guidelines coming from state and federal authorities led to a [churn of reopening and reclosing schools](#). However, the tides changed within the [first 100 days of the Biden Administration](#) when the U.S. Department of Education [created a clear pathway](#) for reopening schools and re-engaging students. By April 2021, the majority of K–8 schools had reopened for in-person learning and \$81 billion of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds had been distributed to states for spring and summer planning. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s release of [ARP spending plans](#), many states are [using the funds for summer programs](#).

Compared to summer 2020, districts are now well positioned to implement robust summer learning and enrichment programs this year. The COVID relief funding’s historic investments in local education agencies provide districts with an opportunity to re-engage students and pay them back for missed learning and social engagement during the summer and fall of 2021. Summer programs must re-establish transparency and trust with stakeholders after such a tumultuous year. It is promising that the vast majority of large and urban districts plan to offer summer learning and enrichment options, despite the inequitable schooling offered during the year—especially for students of color, students with disabilities, and English language learners. Overall, districts are well positioned to balance research-based practices with the unique circumstances of this summer as they work toward long-term recovery—and, frankly, students cannot have a repeat of summer 2020.

Summer Learning Principles

We propose the following six principles for summer learning that synthesize research on the topic with field-based practices related to COVID-19 recovery and planning:

- 1. Tie summer plans to long-term recovery goals:** Districts must consider their long-term learning acceleration goals and make sure this summer’s programs further those goals. By keeping the long game in mind, and building cohesion between summer and school-year programs, districts can promote consistency and put in place supports that will enable a quicker recovery.
- 2. Make the most of limited summer learning time:** Districts must balance easing students back into rigorous multi-hour academic days with prioritizing opportunities for joy, play, and other social and emotional skill development areas. To achieve this balance, districts should consider incorporating alternatives to direct in-person instruction, including remote learning combined with strategic in-person tutoring, expanded opportunities for summer enrichment activities, and ways to center student-student relationships.

- 3. Center attendance strategies in relationships and responsiveness:** To rebuild relationships and anticipate engagement barriers, districts must communicate early and often, and design programming around student and family needs. This includes a robust family communication and engagement plan and creative approaches to get around attendance barriers, such as providing students with payments for attending summer programs and home visits.
- 4. Leverage community expertise to expand learning and enrichment options:** Districts should partner with community organizations and share capacity and resources to provide additional learning and enrichment options for families this summer. Districts can also form partnerships with local government agencies, nonprofits, and labor partners to establish common goals and share resources for rapid recovery throughout this summer.
- 5. Create new pathways to recruit, train, and pay high-quality educators:** District leaders must consider innovative ways to ensure skillful, diverse, and specialized staffing. This includes finding new ways to develop new, more diverse candidate pools, working with nonprofits and state agencies to create new teacher pathways and restructure licensing programs, and increase pay for summer programming to compensate teachers for their extra service during such a challenging year.
- 6. Ensure that students and families have support networks for critical social services:** Summer programming should include intentional approaches to rebuilding students' connection and access to social services that have been limited during the last school year. They should use the summer to initiate a distributed approach to partnering for reconnection, re-engagement, and social services (such as screening, triage, and ongoing support) that will be in high demand in the fall.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic created mass disruptions for our nation's schools. Students missed out on [critical learning](#) and socialization with their peers. The 2021 summer and fall provide districts with an opportunity to re-engage students and pay them back for missed learning and social engagement. Extensive research has shown that summer learning and enrichment programs, when implemented well, [improve academic achievement](#) as well as social, emotional, and mental health, as referenced in the [Department of Education's Elementary and Secondary School Relief fund \(ESSER\) guidance](#).

Many teachers, families, and students experienced school being done to them and not with them during the 2020–21 school year. Summer programs are an opportunity for districts to re-establish trust with stakeholders, collect community ideas and needs, be transparent about emerging plans, and meaningfully incorporate any shared feedback into program implementation.

This year, school districts are approaching summer with more than a year of experience with remote and hybrid learning, as well as a strong commitment to providing some form of summer programming. As of this May, nearly all of the nation's largest and urban districts—97 of the 100 that CRPE follows—[lay out a plan for 2021 summer learning and enrichment](#). This is up from the [32 percent of large and urban districts we reviewed last summer](#) that had a plan.

As a result of the new federal COVID relief funding, districts have more money than ever for summer programs. But they have had limited time and capacity to plan, communicate, and implement those programs, including determining how to combine the federal dollars with other state and local funding for learning recovery.

Meanwhile, over the next couple of months at the state level, education agencies must quickly finalize, communicate, and begin implementing their post-summer plans for the use of the bulk of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds. The U.S. Department of Education requires districts to [seek broad public input](#) on spending plans for [ARP funds](#), including set asides for learning loss, interventions, and summer enrichment programs. Summer learning programs provide a unique opportunity to [incorporate multiple perspectives](#) by creating cross-functional steering committees to make rapid decisions (e.g., site administrators, teachers, students, and families).

At the local level, district leaders face several unprecedented challenges as they begin summer offerings and continue to plan for the fall. In many communities, there are fewer sources of standardized data because of remote learning; when [educators are flying blind](#) they are more likely to fall back on reductive strategies that can track students based on broad and misleading indicators (e.g., attendance or grades). Our work has shown that many districts are [rethinking how to use their assessment data](#) to ensure they are prepared for summer and fall planning, including shifting toward instructional policies and practices that support [accelerating, not remediating, learning](#).

Districts typically [summarize, share, and use student engagement and academic data](#) to help identify and prepare for students in summer programming. If end-of-year data are not available this summer, then it is critical that districts are specific and transparent about how students are identified for additional academic or social, emotional, and mental wellness support in summer. Most importantly, educators should be cautious when recommending students based on existing tiers of support (especially lower tier status), course failures, or previously used promotions standards, as these metrics may not be valid in the unique COVID context and may lead to subjective recommendations and tracking historically underserved students.

Summer programs also face the high stakes of re-engaging students before fall 2021. We know that [absenteeism has been underreported](#) this year due to remote learning and other COVID-related factors. [According to researchers](#), families and students enrolled in summer programming achieve the greatest success when program administrators are explicit early on regarding attendance policies and use innovative approaches to incentivizing enrollment and attendance.

Districts notably increased their readiness and depth of offerings from last summer to this one, and their expanded summer learning and enrichment has the potential to help students re-engage academically and socio-emotionally. Districts would be wise to keep in mind the need to balance research-based best practices with the unique circumstances of this summer—and a unique need for occasional flexibility—as they work toward long-term recovery. We present six guiding principles that aim to strike this balance.

Summer Learning Principles

Districts across the U.S. are using this summer to recover and re-engage students in preparation for the fall. This year, more districts have announced explicit plans for summer learning and enrichment programs than last year, and many of them are thinking thoughtfully and strategically. We propose the following set of principles, which some districts are already applying, as local and state educators consider the development, refinement, and support of their summer programs. The principles are also foundational to future planning for the fall and beyond.

1 | Tie summer plans to long-term recovery goals

Ideally, a full-time district administrator starts summer planning in the winter. This summer, the onramp has been much shorter because of the uncertainty about summer offerings and the changing status of vaccinations and COVID case rates. As such, this year's summer planning requires more ongoing strategizing and more hands on deck.

In addition, districts must consider their long-term learning acceleration goals and make sure this summer's programs further those goals. For example, districts can combine summer and fall goals into one coherent plan, or consider multiyear summer programming with cohesive instructional offerings throughout the school year.

We know that [initial academic gains taper off](#) when students attend only one summer of programming at a moderate level. However, when students attend at least two summers of programming at a high level, they outperform their peers in both math and reading measures. By keeping the long game in mind, and building cohesion between summer and school-year programs, districts can promote consistency and put supports in place that will enable a quicker recovery.

2 | Make the most of limited summer learning time

Summer programs must maximize instructional time to reap the academic benefits students are owed from missed learning this year. Recent studies suggest that summer programs should offer [at least five weeks of learning](#) for at least three hours per day and, ideally, [run over multiple summers](#) to ensure students' academic gains persist over time. In addition, we know that academic instruction during summer programming should [focus on the most essential skills](#) and content areas that will be required to start grade-level learning in the following year.

However, districts must balance easing students back into rigorous multi-hour academic days with prioritizing opportunities for joy, play, and other social and emotional skill development areas.

To achieve this balance, districts should consider incorporating alternatives to direct in-person instruction, including remote learning combined with strategic in-person tutoring, expanded opportunities for summer enrichment activities, and ways to center student-student relationships. Ideally, districts will apply [what they've learned from families and teachers](#)

participating in pandemic learning pods—who say they value the new level of individualized support and emotional growth. Summer program design must incorporate both individualized instruction in core academic subjects that students must continue with [grade-level learning](#) and vehicles to rebuild students’ authentic connections with peers.

3 | Center attendance strategies in relationships and responsiveness

Attendance and engagement will make or break student successes related to summer learning. Summer is many students’ first re-entry point to in-person learning. To rebuild relationships and anticipate engagement barriers, districts must communicate early and often and design programming around student and family needs.

Their [communication and engagement plan for families](#) (particularly those whose children could most benefit from participating in summer learning) should encompass phone calls, text messages, emails, and home visits. It is also important that district and school leaders consider ways to remove barriers that parents and students may face in attending or engaging in summer programs (e.g., provide transportation and meals). Parents are likely interested in programs that align with their work schedules, like full-day programs that will accommodate drop-off and pick-up times at the start and end of the work day. Older students might not attend summer programs because they need to help [care for younger siblings](#). In this case, a coordinated child care center or community care center may be a useful partnership. In addition, districts can use federal COVID-relief dollars to [provide students with payments for attending summer programs](#), as many need to earn money to support their families and may face a crucial choice between work and summer learning.

[Home visits](#), a common strategy reintroduced during remote learning, are an effective way to reconnect with disengaged students and families. Districts will want to consider whether spring home visits are feasible in order to improve the attendance of high priority students, and possibly use home visits over the summer to re-engage students for the fall.

4 | Leverage community expertise to expand learning and enrichment options

Districts should partner with community organizations (e.g., YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs) and share capacity and resources to provide additional learning and enrichment options for families this summer. We know that instructors with expertise in a skill or topic who provide enrichment are [more likely to engage students](#). In addition, local partnerships with culturally specific community organizations can create identity affirming opportunities for students to help re-engage them in the school environment. Districts can also [form partnerships with other local governments](#) (e.g., cities and/or counties) or [nonprofit organizations](#) that will establish common goals and shared resources for rapid recovery throughout this summer.

To facilitate successful, expedited summer plans, districts can empower community stakeholders to take ownership of pandemic spending, planning, and long-term recovery discussions. Districts can cut costs if they partner with community organizations that have their own funding sources for personnel, facilities, and curriculum. In addition, districts can save money by working with labor partners to hire staff based on projected daily attendance for summer programs, a much smaller cost than hiring for general student enrollment. This will reduce costs and ensure the appropriate teacher-student ratio for the highest-impact teaching strategies during limited summer hours.

5 | Create new pathways to recruit, train, and pay high-quality educators

Given the exhausting conditions for teachers this year, many in the education community are predicting that it will be challenging to recruit high-quality, motivated teachers for summer programs. With that in mind, district leaders must consider innovative ways to ensure appropriate staffing. One option is to consider recruiting staff from community-based organizations and learning pods who may be more likely to match students' backgrounds, language, and life experiences. Many of these individuals supported students during remote learning and have extensive, firsthand knowledge of their needs and home situations. Districts should look for ways to develop this pool into fully credentialed educators; summer learning provides an opportunity to give these adults meaningful classroom practice.

In order to facilitate this, district human resource leaders should strive to establish thinner bargaining contracts that leave more decisions about working conditions up to individual schools. This will allow schools to experiment with a variety of approaches that will help them recruit and hire more quality educators for summer—and beyond—including educators coming through nontraditional pathways. Recruiting educators may also require additional pay this summer, in which case districts should use federal funding options to provide higher summer salaries or summer bonuses.

Districts can also work with nonprofits, community organizations, and states to create new teacher pathways for those who have served students throughout the pandemic in these alternative education programs. It is important that district leaders establish these pathways in partnership with existing community organizations or high-quality tutoring corps programs that may have a clear trajectory from short-term service toward long-term teacher certification opportunities. Districts should also work with state offices to restructure licensing options for staff who gained experience teaching students outside of the typical school setting throughout the pandemic.

More broadly, leadership should ensure summer staff have a track record of success in the targeted grade levels or programs for which they are assigned. For example, districts must be sure to hire enough teachers who are skillful and specialize in special education services or English language learning. It is also important that districts plan ahead for quality, intentional professional development before programming begins. For some educators, like community partners, this may be an enticement to teach in summer programs.

6 | Ensure that students and families have support networks for critical social services

Summer programming should include intentional approaches to rebuilding students' connection and access to social services that were limited during the last school year. This is no easy task since services like free meals, mental health, and enrichment activities are typically harder to access in summer months.

We know that students and families benefit from a [network of support](#), including community organizations that help with food and rental assistance, family engagement, peer-to-peer relationships, and connections to mentors and health professionals. [Research suggests](#) that each connection in a student's web has the potential to provide a unique support, enabling them to access the broadest possible range of services and advocacy.

As such, districts must not return to business-as-usual systems for social, emotional, and mental health. It will not be enough. There is likely a backlog based on the immensity of student and family needs that have accumulated since the beginning of the pandemic and there is no way traditional models will be sufficient. Instead, districts should use the summer to initiate a distributed approach to partnering for reconnection, re-engagement, and social services (such as screening, triage, and ongoing support) that will be in high demand in the fall.

Summer Learning District Models

The principles outlined here may require districts to revamp existing summer programs—a difficult task at the end of a tiring year. But several districts are showing what is possible and providing models for others to consider.

GUILFORD COUNTY SCHOOLS (NC)

Academic acceleration through the lens of summer camp

Guilford County Schools' summer program balances academic acceleration with engaging content. Classes focus on accelerating academic content but are designed more like summer camp to provide students with a full day of rotating activities that include academic support, social-emotional support, recess, and enrichment activities.

For example, Guilford offers a “fifth quarter” to help secondary students, including seniors, recover end-of-year failing grades in core subjects. [Secondary summer programming](#) provides extended time customized to students' needs using a blend of direct instruction, small groups, and independent practice. If seniors complete coursework by the end of June they can graduate with their peers.

At the same time, the district offers a range of options for students who are ahead of their class, want to try something new, or hope to get a jump on the 2021–22 school year. Courses are staffed by certified teachers, in-class tutors, and teachers completing specialized licenses. Some examples:

- STEAM programming, like “First LEGO League Explore” camps that focus on engineering fundamentals, design, coding, and lego-based robotics. Coding courses with Code.org and Google will teach engineering and coding in a “lively and fun” competition setting.
- Arts enrichment programming, including learning a new instrument, drumline, community theater, poetry, and music production.
- Career and Technical Education programming, where students engage with business/industry and college leaders in fields like artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, biomedics, and manufacturing and engineering.
- Elementary camps themed around topics like astronaut training, paleontologist training, celebration of nations, and bug camp.
- AP and International Baccalaureate “prep” camps.

This blend of work and fun seems to be successful. Enrollment has increased, with over 15,000 students signed up (compared to just 1,200 who attended in 2019). Over 1,600 teachers are staffing these efforts across two, three-week sessions.

District Demographics

Number of students: 72,950

% Qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch: 65

% Special education: 14

% English language learners: 9

% Black: 41

% Hispanic: 16

% Asian/Pacific Islander: 7

% American Indian/Alaska Native: 0

% Hawaiian National/Pacific Islander: 0

% White: 31

<https://www.gcsnc.com/Page/74593>

INDIANAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS (IN)

Multi-layered strategy via extensive partnerships, free programming for all students, exclusive options for targeted student populations, and staff hiring incentives

Indianapolis Summer of Learning, a partnership between Indianapolis Public Schools, The Mind Trust, and the United Way of Central Indiana, is offering summer learning labs through cross-sector partnerships to 7,500 1st-9th grade students. The district is leveraging dozens of community-based partnerships to offer community-led enrichment options. Labs will be offered at both schools and community learning sites so that families have multiple choices and access points.

This partnership is offering teachers a \$10,000 stipend to staff a five-week summer school program. This works out to about \$66/hour, considerably higher than usual summer pay. Its Summer Learning Lab program, a partnership with The Mind Trust and the United Way of Central Indiana, is also offering part-time enrichment teachers \$5,000 stipends and instructional aids up to \$6,000 stipends. The district's Indianapolis Teaching Fellows programming will also be used to supplement staffing plans.

Other incentives are in place to attract staff as well. Some teachers can work virtually, with students attending their classes in community site learning hubs staffed by instructional aides. Other teachers can choose to come back in-person. Class size is restricted to 20 students/class. Teachers in the Summer of Learning program will receive twice-weekly professional development.

Indianapolis Public Schools is also layering on additional targeted summer programs for high priority student groups. It is doing this by inviting an additional 4,000 students in grades 3-12 to academic recovery-focused summer school classes, requiring all 9th grade students attend a summer bridge program, and offering an entrepreneurship program in partnership with a local university for all high school students.

District Demographics

Number of students: 28,000

% Qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch: 80

% Special education: 22

% English language learners: 19

% Black: 44

% Hispanic: 29

% Asian/Pacific Islander: 1

% American Indian/Alaska Native: 0

% Hawaiian National/Pacific Islander: 0

% White: 21

<https://myips.org/blog/district/ips-offering-summer-school-programs-for-students-in-grades-k-12/>

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (FL)

Scaling summer school 10x through partnerships; redefining summer “learning” beyond just core curriculum

Miami-Dade County Public Schools has prioritized learning acceleration for the past school year, with its 2020 summer program focused on academic recovery for targeted age groups and its 2020–21 education plan requiring extended learning time for students needing more academic intervention.

While the district’s [summer program](#) continues to provide extended learning opportunities to address student academic needs, this year it has increased the breadth and scope of programs through a partnership with [The Children’s Trust](#), a local foundation. This community partnership has increased seats by a factor of ten, allowing the district to target 65,000 students (a quarter of its student population) and provide them with a panoply of more than 300 summer courses that balance academics, enrichment, and community-based programming.

Eighteen unique district-based programs will operate across more than 100 schools. While [some](#) continue long-standing district academic initiatives like summer reading, STEAM camps, and credit recovery programs, there are some new offerings. Those include a teen summer camp anchored on four interdisciplinary, project-based classes (“Finding Your Voice to Shape the World Around You,” “Going Global,” “STEM Up!” and “Time to Explore”), an expo where students pitch entrepreneurial ideas, and a six-day virtual creative writing camp featuring master classes and workshops with best-selling authors, poets, and fiction writers. The district also offers a summer internship program for up to 2,000 students to explore career-related interests.

School sites will also host community-led summer camps by providers like the YMCA and Florida International University After School All stars. All open school sites will be staffed by counselors and mental health services will be provided throughout the summer to any student in need, either in person or virtually.

Amid these options, the district will continue to anchor summer programs in student learning. It will be tracking the learning data of all those who participate in its summer camps—and those who don’t—using sources like iReady diagnostic results in reading and math, academic grades, and attendance.

District Demographics

Number of students: 350,434

% Qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch: 69

% Special education: 11

% English language learners: 18

% Black: 20

% Hispanic: 71

% Asian/Pacific Islander: 1

% American Indian/Alaska Native: 0

% Hawaiian National/Pacific Islander: 0

% White: 7

<https://summer305.dadeschools.net/#!/fullWidth/4245>

PINELLAS COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS / SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PALM BEACH COUNTY (FL)

Maintaining integrity to long-term strategic plans and ESSER funding

Pinellas County Public Schools in Florida leads two summer programs that inform its 2020–21 strategic plan: the Summer Career Acceleration Program supports the district’s career and college readiness goals, and Summer Bridge supports its student achievement goals. The career acceleration program targets students who plan to work upon graduation, offering an eight-week paid internship and financial literacy course. Summer Bridge provides interventions to K–12 students below proficiency in core academic subjects and provides specific support to students preparing for the algebra end-of-course exam, in alignment with district priorities. Pinellas County plans to invest another \$4.5 million of ESSER stimulus funds to expand this summer’s Summer Bridge program to more students, and to train teachers. By clearly aligning these summer programs to broader strategic priorities, funding priorities, and teacher professional development, Pinellas County is more likely to see greater cohesion and student success in their implementation.

PINELLAS COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

District Demographics

- Number of students: 100,948
- % Qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch: 40
- % Special education: 14
- % English language learners: 6
- % Black: 19
- % Hispanic: 18
- % Asian/Pacific Islander: 4
- % American Indian/Alaska Native: 0
- % Hawaiian National/Pacific Islander: 0
- % White: 54

<https://www.pcsb.org/Page/4032>

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PALM BEACH COUNTY

District Demographics

- Number of students: 192,533
- % Qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch: 59
- % Special education: 16
- % English language learners: 13
- % Black: 28
- % Hispanic: 35
- % Asian/Pacific Islander: 3
- % American Indian/Alaska Native: 1
- % Hawaiian National/Pacific Islander: 0
- % White: 30

<https://www.palmbeachschools.org/summerlearning>

This winter, the School District of Palm Beach County, also in Florida, rolled out a multiyear Student Academic Support Plan to take advantage of its “unique opportunity to rethink available student academic supports (short and long term) to increase student achievement.” Core strategies of the support plan include increasing cross-department collaboration to leverage resources and codifying the district’s approach to addressing instructional gaps. The first phase over the winter focused on tutoring and intervention. That led into summer programming focused on expanded learning opportunities for math, literacy, students with special needs, English language learners, graduation, and promotion. The district increased its summer school budget from \$6 million to \$11 million to fund three summer strategies (regular programming, summer reading camp, and tutoring) to meet these priorities. The second phase will build off this work and launch in fall 2021. The district collects student progress, attendance, and program usage data to measure success across each phase.

TULSA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (OK)

Summer day camps at all students' home schools

Tulsa Public Schools' summer learning and enrichment program—*Ready. Set. Summer!*—provides a month of programming in July open to every student in the district at their home school.

While each school will create its own month of unique programming, all sites will rely on a network of community partners, focus on building student-adult relationships, and provide hands-on learning and developmentally-appropriate enrichment. Partners include Bike Club Tulsa, City Year, Gaining Ground, Global Gardens, 100 Black Men of Tulsa, Reading Partners, Tulsa Debate League, Tulsa Dream Center, YMCA of Greater Tulsa, and Youth at Heart.

K-8 summer school programs will focus on relationship-building, academic acceleration, experiential learning, and arts and recreation enrichment. High school programs include credit recovery and arts and recreation enrichment, but also will allow students to engage in internships and service learning projects while receiving wraparound services focused on wellness, mentorship, and career exploration.

The district is also partnering with [The Opportunity Project](#) to launch [Tulsa City of Learning](#), which provides families access to additional summer options beyond the district's month-long summer program. From June through August, the City of Learning serves as an online hub to connect families to high-quality summer providers for little to no cost.

[Enrollment has already doubled](#) this summer to 10,000 from 2019, when 5,000 students were in attendance.

The district is applying federal stimulus funds to offer teachers stipends for working summer school. It also links *Ready. Set. Summer!* to a districtwide, post-pandemic [expanded learning initiative](#) that provides extended hours, after-school care, tutoring, and counseling services to students from the spring through fall.

District Demographics

Number of students: 36,512

% Qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch: 82

% Special education: 17

% English language learners: 21

% Black: 24

% Hispanic: 35

% Asian/Pacific Islander: 2

% American Indian/Alaska Native: 5

% Hawaiian National/Pacific Islander: 1

% White: 24

<https://www.tulsaschools.org/about/teams/academics/summer-learning>

TUSCALOOSA CITY SCHOOLS (AL)

Proactive planning, family engagement, and problem-solving to build a summer program that students will attend

Tuscaloosa City Schools' *My Summer Learning* program, which functions as an extended school year with similar hours and academic focus, has been a core part of the district's larger mission to close opportunity gaps since 2017. Students' reading and math gains are tracked annually against the districts' long-term academic goals. This spring, Tuscaloosa City Schools surveyed families to plan for family interests and needs in advance of the summer start date and established program partnerships aligned to their expressed needs.

Tuscaloosa City Schools recognized that it could not assume families would attend its summer school. District officials called families of students who were academically behind to personally describe the value of its 2021 Ultimate Summer Program. They queried hesitant families on what barriers existed and how to get around them. Proactively engaging participating families helped them generate simple solutions to possible attendance obstacles, such as adjusting transportation stops.

Surveying the families in advance helped them build programming based on families' preferences. Because families preferred full-day programs to accommodate work schedules, the district used the spring to recruit day camps and community-based partners to ensure multiple full-day options. It also ensured options for children at all grade levels (to accommodate families with siblings) and provided advance notice of the summer schedule so parents could incorporate it into their summer plans.

The district's summer guide provides options in eight categories of community programming (arts, recreation, career, STEM, enrichment, faith based, literacy, and education) with dozens of public, private, and university partners layered on top of its school-based summer school programs.

District Demographics

Number of students: 10,910

% Qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch: 65

% Special education: 13

% English language learners: N/A

% Black: 68

% Hispanic: 4

% Asian/Pacific Islander: 2

% American Indian/Alaska Native: 1

% Hawaiian National/Pacific Islander: 0

% White: 24

<https://www.tuscaloosacityschools.com/Page/2294>

Conclusion

The pandemic has created novel and disparate learning conditions for students, fatigued educators, and stress-tested district systems. We know that students will return to school buildings this fall with learning losses and social-emotional and mental health needs that extend beyond traditional years. We also know some students have flourished and are entering at new levels of readiness to expand learning. The infusion of federal stimulus funds gives districts an opportunity to rethink what summer learning can and should look like, to connect it to long-term planning and goals, and to re-engage and rebuild relationships with students and families. Summer school should look and feel different—our students, families, and communities need new and different supports and partnerships. As schools prepare for a fuller return to in-person schooling this fall, this summer signals to us what districts prioritize, how nimbly they can evolve, and how they might approach the next several years of recovery and reinvention.

About the Center on Reinventing Public Education

CRPE is a nonpartisan research and policy analysis center at the University of Washington Bothell. We develop, test, and support bold, evidence-based, systemwide solutions to address the most urgent problems in K-12 public education across the country. Our mission is to reinvent the education delivery model, in partnership with education leaders, to prepare all American students to solve tomorrow's challenges. Since 1993 CRPE's research, analysis, and insights have informed public debates and innovative policies that enable schools to thrive. Our work is supported by multiple foundations, contracts, and the U.S. Department of Education.