

A *new* VISION FOR SUMMER SCHOOL



NATIONAL
SUMMER
LEARNING
ASSOCIATION



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The National Summer Learning Association’s mission is to connect and equip schools and community organizations to deliver quality summer learning programs to our nation’s youth to help close the achievement gap and support healthy development.

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Introduction

Summer school conjures up many images, few positive. Often remedial in nature, it is typically seen as punishment for poor performance and a less than ideal way to spend the summer for both students and teachers. As a result, it is not surprising that summer programs are often the first to be cut during difficult economic times. Indeed, many districts across the nation are currently scaling back or eliminating their summer programs due to the impact of the economic recession, overlooking the enormous opportunity they can create to support student learning and improve achievement.

By re-envisioning summer school, however, those same districts could utilize existing funds to make summer programs an essential school reform strategy that results in increased student engagement, additional learning time, and ultimately improved student achievement. The National Summer Learning Association, the national leader in the growing field of summer learning, believes the summer months are a largely untapped resource for closing the achievement gap. The Baltimore-based association launched the New Vision for Summer School initiative to help districts transcend the punitive model of the past with comprehensive programming that engages both students and teachers. Such programming provides a cohesive blend of accelerated and engaging instruction, hands-on learning, field trips, and skill-building enrichment activities.

This New Vision for Summer School represents a remarkable departure from the past and is already a reality in several forward-looking school districts across the nation. While it may seem an unlikely source, this kind of summer learning program may just be the change needed to fuel successful school-year reform.

Fortunately, leaders across the nation are beginning to embrace this new vision. President Obama and Education Secretary Duncan, as well as leaders at the state and local levels, have expressed support for summer learning programs, fueling the momentum for change in states and districts. Secretary Duncan has described summer learning loss as “devastating,” and called summer learning “one of the best investments states and districts can make.” (Duncan, 2009). At the local level, innovators such as Pittsburgh Public Schools Superintendent Mark Roosevelt are using federal stimulus funds to create progressive programming that takes advantage of additional time during the summer months to better prepare students for the academic challenges ahead.

However, much more work needs to be done before all underserved children are participating in high-quality summer learning programs. To address this need, the National Summer Learning Association (the Association) decided to tackle the issue of summer school reform and convened a meeting in 2009 to discuss a bold, new vision for summer school with leaders from school districts, community-based organizations, national policy organizations, and philanthropy. The meeting was supported by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and the

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and held in partnership with the Collaborative for Building After-school Systems (CBASS), the Council of Great City Schools, and the National League of Cities. It represented a first step in a new initiative led by the Association to create a vision for summer school that better engages students and teachers, and positions summer programs as an essential component of comprehensive school reform strategies.

This report addresses the following questions associated with the New Vision for Summer School:

- Why do we need a new vision for summer school?
- What impact do high-quality summer programs have on student outcomes?
- Why is now the time to invest in summer school?
- What does the new vision look like and where is it being implemented?
- What are some policy opportunities and recommendations to help implement the new vision?
- How can the National Summer Learning Association and other stakeholders make this vision a reality across the nation?



Why do we need a new
vision for summer school



While many school districts offer summer school, it is often in the form of remedial and punitive options that result in poor attendance, limited engagement, and mediocre results. This limited range of programming stands in stark contrast to the options available for many middle- and upper-income students, who have access to summer camp, academic enrichment programs, vacations, trips to museums and libraries, and other hands-on activities that support learning during the summer. Summer marks a season of huge risks and academic regression for students from high-poverty communities. These well documented setbacks build year after year, resulting in children and youth from low-income families increasingly underperforming their more affluent peers, despite any progress made during the prior school year (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007).

Compelling Research

In this age of research-based strategies and data-driven accountability, summer learning programs are remarkably well-positioned for increased investment, despite the current economic climate.

Since 1906, there have been more than 40 empirical studies that have found incontrovertible evidence of a pattern of “summer learning loss,” particularly for low income youth. One of the most compelling studies on the issue, led by sociologist Karl Alexander of Johns Hopkins University, shows the impact of summer learning loss on the achievement gap. Alexander’s study, which tracked students in Baltimore beginning in 1982, showed that low-income students lost ground in reading each summer, compared to their higher-income peers who made gains in reading skills. By the time the students reached 9th grade, the accumulated learning loss accounted for two-thirds of the reading achievement gap and played a significant role in whether students graduated from high school and went on to college.

The literature is clear and compelling about the fact that summer is a season of huge risks and setbacks for low income youth in the United States. Research tells us that:

- Students typically score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer vacation than they do on the same tests at the beginning of the summer (White, 1906; Entwisle & Alexander 1992; Cooper, 1996).
- Most students lose about two months of grade level equivalency in mathematical computation skills over the summer months. Low-income students also lose more than two months in reading achievement, despite the fact that their middle-class peers make slight gains (Cooper, 1996).
- About two-thirds of the 9th grade achievement gap between lower and higher income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities during the elementary school years. As a result, low-income youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enter college (Alexander et al. 2007).
- Children lose more than academic knowledge over the summer. Most children—particularly children at high risk of obesity—gain weight more rapidly when they are out of school during summer break (von Hippel et al. 2007).
- Parents consistently cite summer as the most difficult time to ensure that their children have productive things to do (Duffett et al. 2004). Two recent polls from the Afterschool Alliance and Public Agenda cite high parental interest and support for summer learning programs, but low enrollment due to a lack of high-quality, affordable programs.

Compelling Outcomes

Recent empirical studies also show that quality summer learning programs can produce significant gains in academic achievement, particularly among low income elementary school students. Based on both experimental and quasi-experimental studies, there is a growing body of literature that illustrates the impact and characteristics of quality summer interventions. High-quality summer learning programs have been proven to stop summer learning loss and help students make gains in academic skills over the summer months. Following is a brief snapshot of several successful summer learning programs, which have improved student outcomes over the summer.

Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL) ----->

RESULTS

BELL Summer is a full day, five-day per week summer learning program for students in grades K-8. In the morning, “scholars” are tutored in core reading, writing and math skills by certified teachers and highly trained teacher’s assistants. In the afternoon, scholars reinforce academic skills and strengthen social skills through art, science and technology, and leadership development courses. On Mentor Fridays, scholars learn about college and career paths, celebrate their cultural heritage, and engage in service.

- > BELL Summer scholars consistently gain at least five months’ of grade equivalent skills in reading and math.
- > An independent, random assignment study by the Urban Institute found that BELL Summer significantly increases scholars’ reading skills. The study also demonstrated that BELL Summer increased parental engagement in academic activities and the number of books read at home by 50 percent, as well as decreased their time spent watching television and playing computer games.
- > BELL has partnered with school districts to replicate and scale its summer model in 8 cities across 6 states with consistent results. For example, BELL and Springfield (MA) Public Schools collaborated to serve 800 high-need students at 11 schools. Prior to enrolling in the program, the students were either at risk of being retained in Grades 5 or 8; or had received grade point averages below a “C”. As a result of this summer learning partnership, scholars gained 9 months’ grade equivalent skills in literacy and math—nearly an entire grade level—and 100 percent of scholars who were at the risk of being retained in grade were promoted to next grade.

Houston Summer Opportunity Sessions ----->

RESULTS

The Houston Summer Opportunity Session (SOS) program was developed by former Houston Mayor Bill White, in conjunction with Expectation Graduation and the Houston Independent School District (HISD). It is a 4-week summer math and science enrichment program with a focus on narrowing the learning gap for students.

- > Students were measured twice to evaluate success. First, they were tested at the start and end of the SOS program. Test results indicate that SOS students scored an average of 14 percent and 13 percent higher in math, and 17 percent and 18 percent higher in science in 2007 and 2008, respectively.
- > Second, in the spring of 2008, scores from standardized tests were collected from students who participated in the 2007 SOS program. The Stanford 10 and Spanish-language Aprenda 3 achievement tests were used. Results indicated that 3rd grade SOS students made 22 percent gains in math and science compared to non-SOS 3rd graders. A 2009 pre- and post-test assessment of standardized scores found that students made gains of 12 percent in Math and 16 percent in science.

Summer Advantage USA -----> RESULTS

Summer Advantage USA is a national, non-profit organization that provides children and school districts with low-cost accelerated summer learning programs focused on academics and enrichment. Summer Advantage USA is a five-week, five day per week summer learning program for students (who they call “scholars”) in grades K-8. In the morning, scholars are tutored in core reading, writing and math skills from a highly trained staff of professional teachers and teacher’s assistants. In the afternoon, scholars focus on strengthening social skills through daily enrichment activities like physical education, art, music, debate, robotics and environmental science. On Fridays, scholars learn from guest speakers and cultural presentations; visit museums and parks; and engage in community service projects. Summer Advantage launched last summer and is already planning to serve 3,500 children this summer. As a seasonal business (summer only), Summer Advantage is built to scale and plans on serving over 100,000 children nationwide.

- > According to the Gates-MacGinitie evaluation tool: Students make approximately 3 months of reading skills gain over the 5-week period. Grade-equivalent scores relate students’ scores to the typical performance of students in specified grades tested in given month of the school year.
- > Students make 6.75 NCE units gain in reading, indicating that on average scholars outpace students nationally. Normal Curve Equivalents (NCE) show a student’s relative position compared to others in the same grade and tested at the same time of year. A gain in NCE units indicates that the student has “grown” more than the norm group. The average student demonstrates no change and generally maintains his/her position for an NCE gain of zero over the summer.
- > An improvement of nine percentage points in comparison to peers nationwide, moving from the 42nd to the 51st national percentile rank. Percentile ranks range from a low of 1 to a high of 99, with 50 representing the middle score and denoting average performance (Summer Advantage, 2010).

Horizons National -----> RESULTS

Horizons National is a network of educational partnerships between public and private schools that provide a tuition-free, six-week summer program for over 2,000 public school K-8 students from low-income families at 19 sites in 10 states. Horizons programs are academic, but also provide a broad array of enrichment activities, including learning to swim. Because students return to the program for an average of five summers, the cumulative gain in skills is transformative academically and socially. Horizons programs serve students of all ability levels, with a primary goal of achieving success within their own public schools.

- > In 2007 a comprehensive evaluation was conducted by Yale University. STAR reading and math achievement tests results were analyzed, and school year attendance rates were studied. The study showed that students performing below grade level during the school year gained an average of 4 months of reading skills during the six-week summer program. Many gained as much as a full year.
- > In summer 2009, STAR reading growth results showed an average additional improvement of almost one month grade equivalency in reading as compared to the previous summer’s growth, for a total of more than four months in below-grade level readers and nearly three months for all students combined.
- > Using their database of over 3 million students, Wireless Generation’s analysis of Horizons K-2 students’ progress on DIBELS measures showed Horizons students were higher than national averages by between 200 and 500 percent in every measure. Horizons students gained in fundamental reading skills over the summer, whereas scores declined for a nationally representative comparison sample.

Extended Learning Opportunities Summer Adventures in Learning (ELO SAIL) ----->

ELO SAIL is a Montgomery County (MD) public school Title I program, designed to provide supplemental academic support to students from low income communities. More than 5,500 students attended the 2007 program in 22 schools that received Title I funds. The primary goal of ELO SAIL is to provide opportunities to acquire and preview concepts and skills in reading and mathematics to alleviate summer academic loss and promote continued learning by students.

RESULTS

- > Findings of the evaluation demonstrated that positive academic results associated with the 2007 ELO SAIL program remained evident in fall two months after the summer program ended.
- > The Grade 1 fall text reading and comprehension levels and the Grade 4 fall mathematics scores were higher for full participants, suggesting that 2007 ELO SAIL was effective in prevention of summer academic loss and even resulted in more academic gain in these grades.
- > Additionally, findings from the disaggregated data suggest that demographically disadvantaged student groups, especially those affected by poverty and limited English language proficiency, had higher Grade 1 fall text reading and comprehension levels and Grade 4 fall mathematics scores as a result of full participation.

Higher Achievement Program ----->

Higher Achievement serves Washington, DC, and Baltimore at-risk youth in grades 5-8, when risky behaviors are known to increase. Higher Achievement's mission is to develop academic skills, behaviors, and attitudes in motivated, yet underserved, middle school children to improve their grades, standardized test scores, attendance, and opportunities. Higher Achievement centers operate in high crime, high-poverty areas and the mentoring program is intentionally designed to improve academic achievement and attachment to school, as well as decrease truancy.

RESULTS

- > 77 percent of mentees achieved or maintained As and Bs in reading (65 percent in math).
- > 61 percent of mentees improved their standardized reading score by at least 3 percent
- > 56 percent of mentees improved attendance by an average of 7 days.
- > 42 percent of mentees reduced tardiness by an average of 9 days.

Bridges to a Brighter Future at Furman University -----> **RESULTS**

Founded in 1997, Bridges to a Brighter Future is a college access and pre-college academic enrichment program for Greenville County, South Carolina ninth-through-twelfth-grade high school students, who have potential but whose family income is below the poverty level and many of whom are living in difficult and seriously challenging circumstances. The mission of Bridges to a Brighter Future is to equip low-income students with the tools and support needed to overcome barriers, graduate from high school and enroll in post-secondary education. Students participate in an intensive three-year program that includes a four-week, summer residential experience on the Furman University campus. Year-round contact and academic support is provided through Bridges Saturday College. Bridges accomplishes its mission by engaging students with life-changing experiences that build academic success, self-confidence, resiliency, leadership, life skills, coping skills, college admissions skills, and character.

- 100 percent high school graduation or diploma equivalency
- 93 percent college enrollment (Over 12 years)

Montana Migrant Education Program -----> **RESULTS**

The children of migrant workers face special challenges. Montana's migrant workers travel far, frequently for low paying, seasonal jobs. They often live below the national poverty level. Migrant children face frequent disruptions that complicate learning and interfere with the consistent program needed to graduate from high school. Seventy percent are limited in English proficiency, and a single classroom typically has students with a wide variety of skills. These factors often lead to frustration and low academic performance, causing many children to drop out of school in their early teens, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty. The Montana Migrant Education Program, in operation since 1967, recognizes that summer learning is vital to youth development, and even more so for the migrant population. Staff members carefully review student's records from previous moves to determine what students know, and build programs to expand on their abilities and provide continuity of education. Parental involvement is viewed as an essential part of the process, and home school community partnerships provide the support necessary to improve student achievement.

- In 2007, 77 percent of students increased scores on reading assessments, and 88 percent increased scores on math assessments.



The time is right for a new vision for summer school...

Despite the current national fiscal crisis, the Association and many other stakeholders believe the next several years present an unprecedented opportunity to improve summer school and utilize summer to make significant progress in closing the achievement gap.

In addition to support from the Obama Administration, policymakers and other key stakeholders across the nation are taking notice of the importance of summer learning programs. Support for improved summer learning, and a new vision for summer school is coming from many quarters, as demonstrated by:

- **A new advocacy of expanded learning time at the federal, state, and local levels.** There is a clear and growing national movement to expand learning time for students through afterschool, summer, before-school, and weekend programs. The U.S. Department of Education has included expanded learning time as a component of all key policies, including the Race to the Top competition and those aimed at turning around low-performing schools. States from Massachusetts to California are finding funding to support expanded learning programs, and communities large and small, urban and rural, are experimenting with strategies to expand time for learning. Notably, summer learning featured prominently in the current gubernatorial race in Texas, where Democratic candidate Bill White cited his support of summer programs in Houston as a key component of his education agenda.
- **New federal funding for innovative reform efforts.** The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) has provided unprecedented opportunities to strengthen the role of summer learning programs. Programs such as Race to the Top, Investing in Innovation, or i3, School Improvement grants, and Title I can all support innovative summer programming, and many states and districts have already invested ARRA funds in summer. Others have included summer learning in their Race to the Top and i3 applications.
- **Growing support for school-community partnerships.** Recognizing that together, schools and community partners can help more students to succeed, school-community partnerships are taking root in a growing number of places. In an era of tight funding, the pooling of resources and knowledge between schools and community partners can help create new opportunities while minimizing stress on budgets.
- **Likelihood of expanded learning support, including summer, in the upcoming ESEA reauthorization.** The Obama Administration's blueprint for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provides an unprecedented set of opportunities to expand and improve the emerging summer learning field through programs such as School Turnarounds, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Title I, and Investing in Innovation.



- > **Recent research and policy recommendations by the National Academy of Education (NAEd).** Recent NAEd research recommends that federal policy-makers “Identify, support, and test promising policies to increase the enrollment and regular attendance of disadvantaged students in summer school programs” as a central piece of an expanded learning policy (National Academy of Education, 2009).
- > **New state policies providing investments in summer learning programs.** Both California and Rhode Island recently created and convened legislative task forces to study the issue and make policy recommendations. Additionally, the Kentucky state Senate recently passed a bill that would create summer “camp” programs for students that address their academic and developmental needs. Finally, the Association has partnered with the Education Commission of the States to create three policy briefs on summer learning finance and policy issues which have been widely disseminated to state policymakers around the nation.
- > **Significant support and interest from philanthropy.** National, regional, and local foundations have long supported summer learning programs, but there is significant new interest from a variety of major funders including The Atlantic Philanthropies, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, The Wallace Foundation, C.S. Mott Foundation, and many others. This critical support helps lay the foundation for future innovation and public investment to take successful programs to scale.
- > **The growing capacity of state and local intermediaries to support summer programs that embody the new vision.** These include nearly 40 statewide afterschool networks and many local networks, such as CBASS, which provide technical assistance, leadership, and other critical supports to summer program providers including the sharing and dissemination of best practices from across the country.
- > **A grassroots summer learning “movement” that has created a network of over 5,000 summer program providers.** A growing network of summer program providers is actively working to improve program quality and advocate for increased public investment. The number of events celebrating National Summer Learning Day has more than doubled over the last two years and in 2008, over 18,000 people contacted their Members of Congress to support increased funding for summer learning.

- **A desire to advance 21st Century skills.** Several recent reports on U.S. global competitiveness cite the need for students to develop skills that foster creativity, innovation, critical thinking, and teamwork (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007). The New Vision for Summer School supports programs that offer hands-on, experiential activities that engage students—essential ingredients for developing 21st Century skills.
- **A cost-effective approach to learning.** Given the extensive research on summer learning loss and the cost of re-teaching lost skills during the fall, summer learning programs are a remarkably efficient use of public funding, even during difficult economic times. They should be considered as an essential investment to ensure that school year progress is maximized and maintained and as an essential strategy in ensuring that students stay in school and contribute to their community and nation.
- **Increasing demand and support from parents.** Summer is traditionally a family time; parents want to spend time with their kids while they are on a break from school. However, parents also place a high priority on ensuring their kids don't fall behind academically while school is out. Two recent polls confirm this by revealing widespread parental support and demand for high-quality summer learning programs. A 2010 report from the Afterschool Alliance found that parents of an estimated 24 million children are interested in enrolling their child in a summer learning program. The same poll also found that 83 percent of parents support public funding for summer learning programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2010). Another poll by Public Agenda of parents in California found that 79 percent of low-income parents would be interested in receiving more information about summer learning programs in their communities (Public Agenda, 2010). Despite the significant interest, both polls showed that a majority of children were not enrolled in summer learning programs, due in part to a lack of affordable programs.

Photo courtesy of Cincinnati Public Schools





What does a new vision
for summer school look like?

While most school districts operate summer programs, many are viewed simply as add-ons to the regular school year, focused only on skills that are needed to meet state requirements, progress to the next grade, or for credit recovery. Further, summer programs are often the first to be cut from budgets in difficult economic times.

The current recession has led many districts—Los Angeles Unified School District is a conspicuous example—to entirely eliminate summer school programs. In fact, a recent study from the American Association of School Administrators shows that more than one third (34 percent) of respondents are considering eliminating summer school for the 2010–11 school year, a rate that roughly doubled, from 8 percent in 2008–09 to 14 percent in 2009–10 (Ellerson, 2010).

By contrast, the New Vision for Summer School positions summer learning programs as an essential component of any comprehensive approach to supporting students. Equally important, programs that embrace the new vision look and feel different than the traditional school year and include learning experiences that both build academic skills and provide a wealth of enrichment activities, such as arts, music, recreation, and hands-on experiential activities that increase student engagement and motivation. Many of these programs can be run by schools in collaboration with community-based partners with expertise in student enrichment. As a result, the New Vision for Summer School allows educators and policymakers to address the tension in education reform that often pits the “whole child” concept against the need to improve

math and reading achievement. Due to the unique nature of summer, both of these priorities can be achieved through a blend of academic instruction and enrichment activities that promote academic gains, creativity, and a love of learning.

Over the past decade, the National Summer Learning Association has worked with thousands of summer programs to help leaders better meet the needs of students, improve program quality and determine characteristics and strategies of successful summer programs. It is through this work that the Association has identified a set of features that reflect best practices in the field and together frame a New Vision of Summer School.

Following are the essential characteristics of new vision summer learning programs, along with examples that illustrate how this vision is currently being implemented in several school districts. While we only highlight districts in this section, it should be noted that nearly all of these programs include robust community partnerships and that many nonprofit organizations around the nation are currently implementing high-quality summer programs that reflect the new vision, including those cited in the impact section of this report.

MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

NEW VISION FOR SUMMER SCHOOL **IN ACTION!**

Summer school has long been a staple in Minneapolis, where nearly 10,000 students return to the classroom during the annual break as part of the state's effort to keep more kids on the path to graduation. This year, though, many more students than before have signed on for the district's expanded summer programming, which will stretch to six hours each week-day for five weeks. A pilot program in the district will extend for eight hours a day over a 6-week period.

Even as districts nationwide are cutting summer programming to deal with budget deficits, Minneapolis Public Schools is making new investments in extended learning opportunities as a way to stem summer learning loss and improve student achievement.

But this isn't the same old summer school. Over the past two years the district has overhauled the traditional remedial model that has defined summer school in the city and across the country for decades. Instead, it has designed a more engaging program reflecting a new vision of summer school that combines high-quality learning and enrichment activities for K-12 students.

Camp MPS, as the district calls its program for elementary and middle school students, features a range of offerings that build essential academic knowledge and skills in morning sessions and provide high-interest recreation and enrichment activities in the afternoon.

"We believe that if we can engage the kids, the learning will follow," says Mary Barrie, who directs alternative and extended learning programs for the 36,000-student district. "We really feel like this is one way to go after the achievement gap. And when you have fun educational activities for kids—things they would never have the chance to do themselves—you can eliminate the opportunity gap."

Elementary school students, for example, get hands-on lessons that integrate science or math with literacy. Then they have a chance to work with local artists and experts who share in classroom discussions and demonstrations. Middle grades students study subjects like water ecology and local history, then head down the river in canoes to learn about the economic impact the waterway has had on the region or test chemical changes in the water over time.

Students in the district can also go to overnight camp, algebra camp, or a program on a local college campus for those interested in science, math and technology, or STEM, subjects.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has called such programs "one of the best investments" schools can make in extending learning time for students. As CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, Duncan launched an innovative summer program for incoming high school freshmen.



District officials in Minneapolis have started to infuse that new vision into summer coursework for struggling high school students as well. The High School Academy offers options to the often staid credit-recovery and test prep classes. Some science classes, for example, will include lab experiments in the local creek, and courses in other subjects feature online activities that differentiate instruction to each student's needs. Another program offers classes on a local college campus that offers dual high school and college credit.

The district spends \$6 million in public and private funds annually on its summer programming, much of it available thanks to the Minnesota's graduation incentive law, which allows schools to use targeted state funding for out-of-school programs for students who meet eligibility requirements.

Community organizations, like Wilderness Inquiry and parks and recreation centers, have become partners in the effort, bringing needed resources and expertise into the schools.

Anecdotal reports from teachers suggest that students who attend the summer program seem to be better prepared for some academic tasks and they display better attitudes toward school.

Program officials are seeking more solid evidence as well, working with researchers at the University of Minnesota to analyze state test data and conduct observational studies to gauge the impact of the program. Once there is data to show that the approach is effective in boosting academic performance and student motivation, Barrie hopes the district will see the benefits of extending the program to a full eight weeks in the summers to come.

"We have to show there's a difference with our state test scores when you have good summer programming," she says, "so we can make an argument for our funding, and perhaps more funding to expand the program even more."

Barrie says she was inspired to rethink the Minneapolis program after attending the Association's national conference and hearing experts make the case for dynamic, comprehensive summer learning offerings to help more students succeed during the school year.

"The conference made me see the urgency to really change summer school," says Barrie. "When you see the research, like the study out of Johns Hopkins University that documents the summer slide, the light bulb goes off."

In addition to learning benefits, the students who participate gain a different kind of appreciation for school and the value of learning, according to Program Facilitator Daren Johnson.

"We see kids who are excited to come to these programs and they don't want to leave," he says. "They don't want summer school to end."

#

Principles of the New Vision for Summer School

- (1) **Increase the duration, intensity, and scope of the traditional summer school model to a comprehensive research-based, 6-week, full-day model that makes summer an essential component of district school reform strategy.**

NEW VISION FOR SUMMER SCHOOL **IN ACTION!**

Detroit Public Schools has invested over \$100 million in comprehensive summer school programming over the last two years. In 2009, the district provided a 6-week, full-day program for more than 40,000 students (up from 28,800 in 2008.) The program was open to Title I eligible students in all grades. Services included academic intervention, high-school transition programs, credit recovery, ACT preparation, tutoring, enrichment activities, parental training sessions, professional development for teachers, principals, counselors, and full staffs of restructured schools, and increased funding for pre-school. The district also provided breakfast, lunch, and a light snack, as well as transportation for students whose program was more than three-quarters of a mile from their homes (Detroit Public Schools, 2009). This year, the program is focused on helping students progress academically as a key component of the new district reform strategy (Detroit Public Schools, 2010).

- (2) **Expand participation to all students in school-wide Title I programs, not just those who are struggling academically, and consider expanded year programs that include all students in participating schools.**

NEW VISION FOR SUMMER SCHOOL **IN ACTION!**

Philadelphia Public Schools is investing \$47 million in their Summer Learning and More (SLAM) this year to increase student achievement and graduation rates. The district is offering five different programs at 117 sites and will employ 3,400 teachers to serve 50,000 students in Pre-K through grade 12. All students in high needs schools are eligible to attend, and there are also classes available for students in non-high needs schools. Enrichment activities led by community partners and certified teachers are offered to every participating student to complement the academic intervention programs (Philadelphia Public Schools, 2010).

(3) Change the focus from narrow remediation and test preparation to a blended approach of both academic learning AND enrichment activities that provides hands-on, engaging programming that fosters critical 21st Century skills, including collaboration, innovation, creativity, communication, and data analysis. (Read about Cincinnati Public Schools on page 23.)

(4) Strengthen and expand partnerships with community-based organizations and public agencies that provide summer activities to align and leverage existing resources, identify and meet gaps in service, improve program quality, and develop shared outcomes for summer success.

NEW VISION FOR SUMMER SCHOOL **IN ACTION!**

Baltimore City Public Schools, with the support of the National Summer Learning Association, launched an intensive partnership-brokering effort that paid dividends last summer as the district made considerable progress. It led to a large-scale public investment in summer learning offered by public schools, recreation centers, and other key partners. Partnership-brokering activities included the creation of a work group with key public stakeholders, and a forum and selection process to help match school principals with community partner organizations. It resulted in an expansion of summer learning opportunities for all Title I schools (from a 4-hour day to a 6-hour day to incorporate enrichment activities and community partners) and greater collaboration and coordination between City Schools, the Department of Recreation and Parks, and the Enoch Pratt Free Library System to provide a consistent, full-day program of integrated educational enrichment and physical activity in 33 schools.

(5) Include strategies to improve student attendance and engagement by providing healthy food, field trips, recreation, electives, attendance policies, and comprehensive supports.

NEW VISION FOR SUMMER SCHOOL **IN ACTION!**

Council Bluffs (Iowa) Community School District is implementing a “Summer Exploration” program this summer to better engage students and teachers. The program includes incentives for good attendance, such as weekly drawings for gift certificates and iPods, and engaging learning opportunities that vary by grade. Incoming 7th graders, for example, will spend their entire day at the Omaha Zoo, where they can explore various locations as real-life researchers, photographers, and writers to get a behind-the-scenes look at how scientists gather data, solve problems, and get important results in extreme environments around the world. Students also have their choice of afternoon electives such as ballroom dancing, robotics, or jewelry making (Council Bluffs Community School District, 2010).

- (6) Provide innovative professional development for educators and ensure summer programs offer teachers a chance to test new models of teaching and gain valuable leadership experience.**

NEW VISION FOR SUMMER SCHOOL IN ACTION!

Detroit Public Schools is offering an innovative twist in their 2010 summer academies. Each summer class will be staffed by two teachers to allow extra instruction and attention for students as well as opportunities for training and professional development for teachers in math and literacy instruction. Additionally, new teachers hired before the start of summer school will be paired with experienced teachers to observe, assist, and help prepare for the new school year (Dawsey, 2010).

- (7) Include innovative approaches to learning for older students, including proficiency-based learning, flexible credit recovery and acceleration, internships, college visits, and other college and career readiness opportunities that provide targeted interventions and workforce development skills to prepare students for future success.**

NEW VISION FOR SUMMER SCHOOL IN ACTION!

Philadelphia Public Schools has partnered with the Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN) and others to offer a variety of activities for middle and high school students over the summer. In 2009, the district and PYN utilized ARRA summer jobs funding to provide a number of programs that focus on critical transitions and new models of work and learning to prepare youth for high school and future career success (Spangler and Shubila, 2009). Additionally, the 2010 SLAM program provides a summer academy for all high school students that includes traditional credit recovery; accelerated credit; career and technical Education courses; and, through collaboration with PYN, coordination of summer work schedules with course schedules to ensure students don't have to choose between work and school (Philadelphia Public Schools, 2010).

- (8) Target key transition periods such as the summers before kindergarten, middle school, high school, and college to ensure students are prepared for success in new environments.**
(Read about Minneapolis Public Schools on page 16.)

- (9) Lastly, summers need to move from the periphery to the center of school reform strategies through sustainable and stable funding from Title I and other sources, long-term planning, robust assessment and evaluation, and improved infrastructure and data collection.**
(Read about Pittsburgh Public Schools on page 38.)



CINCINNATI
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS

NEW VISION FOR SUMMER SCHOOL **IN ACTION!**

For many children in the nation's urban centers, summer vacation doesn't always bring exciting, fun-filled days or memorable experiences. Too often, it's a precarious time with few opportunities for physical activity, cultural enrichment, or creative exploration. But for students in Cincinnati, summer now starts with an extra month of programs designed to infuse more learning, and fun, into a break in the school year that has been linked to a slide in knowledge and skills.

At a time when many school districts across the country are cutting summer programs because of budget shortfalls, Cincinnati is one of a growing number that recognizes the hole in the school calendar as an opportunity to bolster students' skills and provide engaging activities that put them on track toward higher achievement. The district is one of several nationwide creatively tapping federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act dollars to provide an innovative summer program.

The "Fifth Quarter" program, rolled out in the 35,000-student district in summer 2009, offers academic lessons differentiated to individual students' needs, enriched with favorite summertime activities. There are trips to parks and streams, arts lessons, technology-based projects, and fitness activities, many with a green theme that teaches scientific concepts while promoting environmental awareness and appreciation.

"If you look at the research, the gap tends to grow during the summertime, so if we want to stop that, we need to provide those children with academic challenges beyond the regular school year," says Assistant Superintendent Bill Myles. "But this isn't punishment for low performance. We're making sure all children are prepared to compete by providing enriching experiences they might not otherwise have."

Research conducted by Johns Hopkins sociology Professor Karl Alexander and his colleagues shows that low-income youth suffer significantly from a loss of academic skills over the summer. And the losses pile up, contributing to an achievement gap that can make the difference between whether students set out on a path for college or decide to drop out of high school.

Those and other findings convinced Myles and Cincinnati Superintendent Mary Ronan that summer programs could provide the additional learning and enrichment opportunities needed to bridge a persistent achievement gap among targeted groups of students. In 2009, they spent \$1.2 million in federal Title I carryover money and other state and local funds to jumpstart the "Fifth Quarter" program for K-7 students in 13 elementary schools serving large proportions of at-risk students. The district decided to use \$3.6 million in ARRA dollars to pay for and additional three years' worth of programs beginning in summer 2010.

That funding will enable nearly 4,000 students to devote the month of June to planting vegetable seeds, learning martial arts, and creating containers out of recycled newspaper, activities designed to complement their reading and math lessons. Cincinnati officials will track the academic progress of participating students beginning in 2010 and will analyze the data to decide whether and how to continue the program using other funds once the ARRA program expires.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan applauded the Cincinnati program last year in a video interview posted on the department's Web site. The district, he says, is showing leadership in taking advantage of summer time to extend learning opportunities for students. "Time is one of those big things where we can dramatically improve student achievement ...and what we're starting to see now is school districts thinking very differently about summer," Duncan said in praising the Fifth Quarter initiative. "[Cincinnati students] are staying in school a month longer. I promise you there will be some real dividends from that."

The participating schools are tapping partnerships they've built with community organizations that provide after school and weekend services throughout the year to address a range of social, health, and academic needs. Those groups—such as the YMCA, Cincy After School and Families FORWARD—helped design some of the activities.

"The kids that I saw loved it," says Janet Walsh, a spokeswoman for the district who saw the summer program in action last year. "They didn't see it as having to go to school in the summer. They saw it as fun."

#

Windows of opportunity for making the new vision a reality

Despite the extremely difficult budget situation most states and districts are facing, there are several key policy opportunities that advocates of the New Vision for Summer School can take advantage of to jumpstart and build out this important agenda, beginning in the summer of 2010. Following is an overview of current policy opportunities that can include a New Vision for Summer School.

Low-Performing schools and school turn-arounds

Due primarily to recent federal policy, there is a renewed focus on “turning around” the nation’s lowest performing schools. This is due in part to the Obama Administration’s focus on the issue, as well as other national, state, and local efforts focused on high school reform and closing the achievement gap. One of the key strategies many schools are considering to improve performance is the use of expanded learning time.

Within the framework of expanded learning time, summer learning programs are uniquely positioned to play a critical role in education reform and turning around low-performing schools for several reasons:

- > Extensive research confirms the concept of summer slide and the role that unequal summer learning opportunities play in the widening of the achievement gap.
- > Compelling data and evaluations from summer learning programs show students making gains of 2 to 5 months in math and reading achievement, as opposed to losses of up to 2 months without such programs.
- > Most districts already operate summer school programs that are ripe for expansion and innovation to better serve and engage students, particularly in low-performing schools.
- > Growing capacity of non-profit organizations to partner with schools to provide high-quality seamless programming focused on student engagement and closing the achievement gap.
- > Significant support from the Administration, including Secretary Duncan, who has called summer learning programs “one of the best investments states and districts can make” (Duncan, 2009).



While the potential for summer programs to make a significant contribution in low-performing schools is enormous, most districts will require significant support to develop and implement high-quality programs and move beyond the limited, often punitive summer schools of the past. As a result, districts and other stakeholders will be considering a variety of different approaches to execute summer programming. However, there is a dearth of information on the subject, particularly as it relates to implementation issues such as planning, staffing, transportation, curriculum, and evaluation. This provides an opportunity for the National Summer Learning Association, summer learning providers, and other key stakeholders to provide technical assistance and partnerships to improve capacity and quality.

ESEA Reauthorization

As the primary driver of federal education policy, the upcoming reauthorization of ESEA provides an excellent opportunity to target the summer months as a strategy to help close the achievement gap and support healthy growth and development. While a variety of funding streams can fund summer programs (e.g., Title I, 21st CCLC), there are no requirements that states and districts invest any federal funds in summer learning and there are currently no funded federal education programs that exclusively focus on the summer months.

In addition to the issue of school turnarounds, which are sure to be included in the next ESEA, the reauthorization provides several opportunities to strengthen and expand the role of summer programs. While Congress will ultimately write the final language for ESEA, the Obama Administration's recent blueprint

provides a look at several priorities that are likely to be included in the final bill. Following is a brief overview of key opportunities and initiatives in the ESEA blueprint that can include summer learning.

> **Title I, College and Career Ready Students.** As the largest federal education program, Title I should be a key source of support for summer learning programs. Unfortunately, it has only been used in limited amounts and often to support a narrow and remedial vision of programming. Fortunately, several districts are beginning to use Title I funds for innovative, comprehensive summer programs and we believe the blueprint's focus on expanded learning time as a strategy to improve achievement will help meet the goal of ensuring students are prepared for college and career success.

> **21st Century Community Learning Centers.** 21st CCLC is one of the primary funding sources for summer programs across the nation. The blueprint revises the existing program to award grants to models that 1) comprehensively redesign and expand the school day or year, 2) provide full-service community schools, or 3) provide services before school, after school, or during the summer. The Association believes that summer learning plays a critical role in all three of these approaches and that summer will continue to be supported substantially if Congress approves the Administration proposal. Again, it is critical that any summer program, even those in an expanded year setting, look and feel different than the traditional school day.

> **Investing in Innovation (i3).** The blueprint builds on the existing i3 program funded through ARRA to provide competitive grants to develop or expand innovative programs and practices that improve student outcomes. The Association is aware of multiple applications focused on summer learning for the current i3 grant competition and believes the extension of the grant would provide additional opportunities to develop and expand innovative summer programs.

> **Race to the Top.** The blueprint would also continue the Race to the Top program funded by ARRA to provide competitive grants to states and districts to implement comprehensive reforms. Summer programs have been included in many first round state RTTT applications and we anticipate future opportunities to include summer as a component of state and district applications.

> **Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students.** The blueprint creates a new program designed to improve learning environments through strategies focused on school safety and the promotion of mental and physical health. Priority will be given to programs that propose partnerships between schools and nonprofit organizations, which provide opportunities for summer providers and schools focused on these issues.

> **Promise Neighborhoods.** These new competitive grants will support a continuum of community services, family supports, and comprehensive education reforms to improve outcomes for students from birth to college in high-need communities. Community-based summer program providers are well-positioned to participate in this program.



> **Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund.** This proposal would provide grants to states and districts that implement ambitious reforms to support teachers, principals, and school leadership teams. The summer months represent an ideal time to provide innovative professional development, test out new teaching strategies, build relationships with students, and further engage educators and students.

> **Increased flexibility.** Overall, the blueprint focuses on increased flexibility for states and districts to blend federal funds. This provides an opportunity to provide comprehensive summer programming for students. For example, a district could utilize Title I or School Turn-around Grants to provide academic instruction in the morning and 21st CCLC or Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students funding to provide afternoon enrichment.

ESEA Policy Recommendations

Following are the National Summer Learning Association's policy recommendations to Congress to ensure ESEA can support the New Vision for Summer School.

- (1) Require states and districts to collect data and report on the amount of federal funds used from Title I, 21st CCLC, and IDEA to support summer learning programs, as well as the number of children served.
- (2) Create a dedicated program and funding stream that would focus exclusively on the summer months as a strategy to close the achievement gap, either through the authorized STEP UP Act, or a new program based on our New Vision for Summer School.
- (3) Include language and/or set-asides in Title I and throughout ESEA programs that explicitly feature summer learning programs as an allowable and recommended use of funds to help states and districts close the achievement gap.
- (4) Identify summer as a preferred delivery time for Supplemental Education Services (SES). Current SES language discourages the provision of services during the summer despite research on summer learning loss and significant private and public capacity to provide high-quality interventions during the summer.
- (5) Consider revising SES to allow Title I funds currently used for SES to support summer learning or expanded learning programs that include an academic assistance component.
- (6) Encourage states to use a portion of the state set-aside for Title I (both Part A and SIG) to fund technical assistance and capacity building efforts for summer learning at the state and district level.
- (7) Ensure that summer learning programs are an essential component of all expanded learning approaches under the revised 21st Century Community Learning Centers, including expanded year programs, based on the Association's New Vision for Summer School. Provide incentives for strong school-community partnerships.
- (8) Encourage alignment and coordination of federal, state, and local funding streams that can be used to support comprehensive summer learning programs, including Title I, Workforce Investment Act/ Summer Jobs, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, AmeriCorps, and state and local funding for summer school, parks and recreation, libraries, and juvenile justice.
- (9) Support research to understand the costs and benefits of various approaches to summer school. Despite extensive research on the summer slide and impact of summer on the achievement gap, additional study is needed to determine which types of programs yield the best results and are most cost-effective through a mixture of randomized, longitudinal trials and mixed methods research studies.
- (10) Provide a robust role for local, state, and national intermediary organizations to provide technical assistance, build capacity, facilitate school-community partnerships, monitor program quality, and disseminate best practices to help guide the emerging field of summer learning.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

While much of the over \$100 billion in education funds included in ARRA have been expended or committed, they are still playing a critical role in education reform and can provide a significant source of support for summer learning programs. Key funding streams that states and districts can use for summer programs include Title I, Title I school improvement grants, the competitive Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation funds, Summer Jobs for older youth, IDEA, and AmeriCorps. Despite the late date, the federal government, state agencies and school districts each can play a key role in supporting the use of ARRA funds to create and expand summer programs that fulfill the new vision.

At the **FEDERAL** level policymakers can encourage the use of ARRA funds for summer learning by:

- Providing guidance that explicitly encourages states and districts to utilize Title I and Title I school improvement grants to expand or start-up summer learning programs.
- Providing examples of innovative summer programs that have successfully used ARRA and/or regular Title I funds to support programming as models for others to adopt and highlighting the existing flexibility to implement community partnerships.
- Providing examples of how states and districts are utilizing multiple funding streams for summer programming, including education, Summer Jobs, AmeriCorps, and CCDBG.
- Collecting data on the use of ARRA funds for summer learning to determine funding levels and impact on student achievement and other outcomes, which in turn can inform further policymaking.

- Ensuring that both Race to the Top and the i3 competitive funds go to states and districts that include summer learning programs as an improvement strategy.

STATE policymakers can direct ARRA funds to expand and/or enhance summer learning by:

- Encouraging and/or requiring districts and schools receiving Title I School Improvement Grants to include summer learning programs as a component of their school improvement plans.
- Encouraging districts and schools to utilize Title I, Part A funds to support summer learning programs, focusing on those that include academic enrichment and community partnerships.
- Requiring summer learning programs as a component of state and district plans to turn around low-performing schools and as part of Race to the Top applications.
- Leveraging existing state sources for summer programs, such as juvenile justice, summer jobs programs, and summer food programs that come through multiple state agencies to create comprehensive and cost-effective summer programs.
- Using a portion of the state set-aside for Title I (both Part A and SIG) to fund technical assistance and capacity building efforts at the state and district level.
- Using ARRA funds to invest in one-time costs that build sustainable infrastructure for summer programs such as professional development, data collection, materials, and policy development. This could include creating a legislative task force on summer learning to study existing funding streams, supply and demand, and other key issues to inform the use of ARRA and other funds for summer learning programs.

DISTRICTS, too, can take advantage of ARRA funds to expand or enhance summer programming. While these funds may only be available in the short-run, there are many ways to make investments in summer programs that will provide benefits for years to come. Opportunities include:

- > **Stocking up.** Invest in materials, professional development for teachers and other leaders, new curriculum, technology, and other goods that are one-time expenses with longer-term benefits.
- > **Building an infrastructure for summer school.** Use funding to pay staff time to develop policies and approaches (memoranda of understanding and partnership agreements), systems for outreach, training for staff, training for trainers, development and implementation for evaluations and systems for planning. Another key piece of infrastructure is data. ARRA funds can be used to purchase or develop data collection and management systems that support administration, quality improvement, and student participation and achievement.
- > **Providing staff and other support for partnerships development.** When it comes to improving and expanding summer programming all roads seem to lead back to partnership. Providing time for partners to get to know each other and focus on efficiencies is an excellent use of ARRA funding. Making sure that all grant application from states, districts, and nonprofits encourage or mandate partnerships is another way to build additional partnerships.
- > **Scaling up or creating new summer programs.** ARRA funds provide an opportunity to scale up or replicate a successful model. The two year window will give program managers time to secure resources to keep the program going.

- > **Supporting research to better understand how programs could meet the needs of children, families, and communities.** ARRA funding can be used to gather information from families and students about their needs and desires for summer programming. It could also be used to gather information on the supply of and demand for summer programs that can guide future investments. This information can then be used to fill in gaps or modify existing programming to better meet family preferences and use resources wisely.

- > **Conducting a large scale rigorous evaluation that can be used to demonstrate the value and contribution of summer programs.** Most evaluations of summer programming fall short of the academic rigor needed to convince policy makers that investments in summer programming are sound. An evaluation cannot always be randomized due to ethical challenges of denying a child access to a program. ARRA funding could be used to conduct a high quality study of this nature.

- > **Creating summer jobs and connecting this to programming to support older youth in preparation for the work force or higher education.**

- > **Making sure school construction creates spaces conducive to summer school.** Many buildings lack air conditioning or ventilation systems appropriate for summer months. ARRA funds that are supporting school facilities improvements help lay the groundwork for summer programs by ensuring that suitable space is available.

Taken together these suggestions promote the use of ARRA funding to make summer a regular part of education, so that when the stimulus funds recede, summer programming has advanced on a variety of fronts, and can be sustained through other funding streams, programs, and partners.

High School Reform and “Transitions”

The National Summer Learning Association believes the summer months represent a key and under-utilized strategy to improve youth transition to high school, make strong connections to the workforce, and better engage both students and teachers through innovative programming. While this section focuses on the transition to high school, summer programs also have the potential to play critical roles in the transition to kindergarten and college.

A good opportunity to implement the New Vision for Summer School occurs at key transition periods for older students since transitions between middle school and high school, and high school to higher education and careers, coincide with summer break. These transitions present an additional challenge for struggling students and youth living in poverty. Researchers estimate that an average of 10 percent of 9th graders nationally are not promoted to the 10th grade. Some school districts, however, report significantly higher proportions, with Chicago reporting as high as 40 percent (Allensworth and Easton, 2005). While a number of factors contribute to students falling off track during the middle to high school transition, studies indicate many students do so because they lack the knowledge and skills needed to handle the academic demands of high school and beyond (Neild and Balfanz, 2006a; Balfanz, Herzog, and MacIver, 2007; Neild and Balfanz, 2006b; Roderick and Camburn, 1996; cited in Neild, 2009).

Summer learning programs are an integral part of the solution to address such challenges. High-quality summer learning programs focus on accelerating learning, supporting transitions, narrowing the achievement gap, and preparing youth for high school, college and career success — particularly low-income youth and struggling students. These programs are intentional about building skills, knowledge, attitudes and behav-

iors that promote academic achievement, healthy development and college and career readiness. Regular attendance in high-quality summer programs is associated with a range of positive academic and social developmental outcomes, including improved skills in literacy (Chaplin and Capizzano 2006) and math (Roderick et. al, 2003), successful transition to the next grade (Cooper et. al, 2006), increased attachment to the labor market and increased likelihood of future employment (Sum, 2006), and improved self esteem and leadership skills (Bialeschki et. al, 2007).

Despite considerable research demonstrating the potential of high-quality summer programs to stem these issues, very few communities currently have offerings that are consistent with the research-based principles and characteristics of effective out-of-school time programs. For high school youth living in poverty, there is a critical shortage in the supply of quality summer learning opportunities. Typically, due to constraints including cost, geographic location, and scheduling issues, poor families may have access only to local summer school remediation programs sponsored by school districts and designed to address grade-level retention, or to local parks and recreation programs, which typically have no focus on learning. Unfortunately, these programs are also often lower in quality and thus present a stark contrast to the many opportunities for enriching summer learning experiences enjoyed by youth from middle-class and affluent families.

We firmly believe that the summer months are an ideal time to foster innovative approaches to hands-on, real-word learning and accelerate school-year gains. The flexibility afforded by the summer presents an opportunity for districts to promote and integrate student-centered approaches that can support teaching and learning during the regular school year, and promote increased high school graduation and college enrollment.



STEM education

Another area ripe for stronger connections to summer is Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education. Since research confirms that all students tend to lose math skills over the summer, such programming is essential to send students back to school ready to learn in the fall. Additionally, the summer represents an ideal time for students to engage in hands-on science activities, as well as summer jobs that promote STEM career pathways and an interest in

STEM education. NASA has recognized the connections between these issues with their new Summer of Innovation pilot, a \$50 million program designed to increase student learning and career pathways around STEM issues while stopping summer learning loss. Additionally, the Noyce Foundation is working with afterschool and summer programs around the nation to strengthen the role of STEM in out of school time. Districts and nonprofit organizations should take advantage of policy opportunities and resources to embed STEM education in summer school programming.



Next steps for implementing

A *new* VISION FOR SUMMER SCHOOL



As we embark on the summer of 2010, momentum for the new vision continues to grow. Both President Obama and Secretary Duncan continue to talk about summer learning, and NASA has made an unprecedented commitment to summer STEM programming. State and local leaders are investing in innovative summer school programs across the nation. National and regional foundations have made summer learning a funding priority. Education Week recently published a commentary from the Association entitled “Summer School as the Key to Reform?” which has further stimulated dialogue and interest (Fairchild and Smink, 2010).

Despite this important momentum, the Association is keenly aware of the current fiscal challenges faced by states, districts, and non-profit organizations. As a result, most of our policy recommendations focus on cost-neutral or cost-effective solutions that take advantage of existing funding and support. To mobilize

support for our ambitious agenda, the Association launched a national campaign to increase public investment in summer programs, and we’re thrilled to be more than halfway to our goal of \$50 million less than a year into the three-year campaign. But much work remains to be done before the New Vision for Summer School becomes a widespread reality.

The overarching goal is to change the culture around summer learning by moving it from an afterthought to a central place within education reform strategies. Research and experience indicate that summer programming is very much a locally organized activity, with each locality taking into account its unique circumstances, including the local political appetite for the issue. With approximately 15,000 school districts and 95,000 schools nationwide, it is critical that advocates for the new vision begin to think more systemically about summer programs if the vision is to be realized.

To support this work, new tools and better information will be needed, including:

- **New research** to identify best practices for implementation and better ways to scale up quality programs and to demonstrate the long-term value of summer programs;
- **More funding** to provide services to lower-income children who are lagging behind in school in part due to differences in their summer experiences; and
- **More political will** to challenge the status quo perception that remedial summer programs are sufficient and that a 10-week summer vacation serves our children well.
- **More credibility** within the education community so that summer school is viewed as a necessary component of a high quality education rather than a time for those who are not successful to make up lost ground.

Additionally, the history of the summer learning movement points to successes that are built on the backs of individual change agents—mayors, district employees, and non-profits leaders—who are able to nurture critical partnerships and find ways to make summer services essential to the community. If history is to



be our guide, advocates of the new vision will need to develop multiple pathways to build systems for summer learning that speak to the different “change agents.” And strategies for spreading the New Vision for Summer School will require the support of many different individuals and organizations.

The National Summer Learning Association is well poised to support states, districts, and communities as they work to implement the New Vision for Summer Learning. As the national leader in summer learning, the Association has over 15 years of experience working with school districts and nonprofit organizations. Our initial work around NVSS over the past year has provided us with the following observations that will inform our strategy moving forward:

- Districts have varying degrees of capacity for and interest in summer programs. The quality and variety of programming is very uneven, ranging from innovative, comprehensive programs to those that are strictly remedial.
- Districts often do not have a good sense of the type of help they need to improve quality and are seeking assistance, particularly around evaluation.

The Association intends to focus on the following areas of work related to capacity building and program improvement as part of the NVSS initiative:

- Evaluation tools, including longitudinal tracking of assessments, grades, attendance, participation, and behavior.
 - Negotiation of staffing issues, including work with teachers unions, use of “highly qualified” teachers (if using Title I), use of non-certified teachers/instructors and volunteers, wages for both teachers and non-teachers, and recommended student-teacher ratios.
 - Use of funding streams, such as Title I and Title I school improvement funds, to provide innovative programming.
 - Alignment of federal, state, and local funding streams that can support summer programs, particularly to mitigate current budget cuts.
 - Development of incentives to improve attendance and retention.
- Use of proficiency-based learning and credit flexibility for students during the summer.
 - Examples of effective programs for high school students, focused on workforce development and college readiness.
 - Ways to serve non-Title I schools and students.
 - Approaches to include adult education services for parents of summer school students.
 - Development of a template for summer learning that can be replicated throughout a district.
 - Facilitation of site visits to observe successful summer programs.
 - Planning assistance, including timelines for key decisions.
 - Determining whether districts should ramp up existing programs or create new ones.
 - How to “re-brand” summer school and improve outreach, marketing, and communication with parents and students.

The Association is excited to lead this initiative and looks forward to the day when all 13 million children living in poverty have access to opportunities that embody the principles of a New Vision for Summer School.

PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

NEW VISION FOR SUMMER SCHOOL **IN ACTION!**

Summer for Pittsburgh's middle school students will be filled with outdoor recreation and trips to the zoo, sessions producing stories for a youth radio corps, and rehearsals for a local theater production. Combined with a dynamic academic program, **Pittsburgh Public Schools' Summer Dreamers Academy will offer high-interest activities for the district's 5,500 rising 6th, 7th, and 8th graders in an effort to prepare them for high school and set them on a path toward long-term academic success.**

At a time when many districts are responding to state budget shortfalls by cutting summer programs for students, Pittsburgh instead decided to tap millions in federal stimulus dollars to revamp and expand offerings designed to head off summer learning loss and foster a more positive attitude toward achievement and college preparation. They're not even calling it school.

The Academy's academic focus is packaged in a summer camp atmosphere that allows students to experience a range of activities that might nurture broader interests beyond school. The program replaces the traditional, skills-focused summer school that emphasized remediation for low-achieving students and was often considered punitive. The new summer program is being designed and marketed not as something students have to do, but that they want to do.

"The learning loss that takes place over summer for kids who don't have access to quality programs is to blame for a substantial proportion of the disparity in achievement," says Deputy Superintendent Linda Lane who became convinced of the value of the academy approach after attending the National Summer Learning Association's annual conference, where she became steeped in the research on summer learning loss and learned about the new vision for summer learning. "Stretching out the time kids are learning and practicing is very important."

The district is dedicating more than \$10 million in federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act dollars over two years to the summer program as a way to build literacy skills and prepare middle school students for high school, college, and beyond. While the federal funds are helping to jump-start the program, the district is also raising private funding to support the program.

"Once we decided on this approach one of the first things we did was call the National Summer Learning Association to help us find the research and resources, and articulate the reasoning for the program," says Eddie Willson, the Academy's activity project manager. "And then they put us in touch with other successful programs that we could model ourselves after."



U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called such an approach an innovative use of federal stimulus funds money to buy more time for learning. “Not only can states and districts use recovery money to do this, we are asking them to think seriously about doing this,” Duncan said in a 2009 video interview posted on the department’s Web site.

Organizers in Pittsburgh have heeded that advice by extending academic offerings through the summer months. But they are not shortchanging the fun and leisure that tend to motivate youth and are essential to their overall well being. “We really want to get kids excited about and invested in their own futures academically but also in a hobby or an interest that can continue throughout the school year and their lives,” says Willson of the Academy.

Far from the stereotype of summer school as a bastion for boredom for low-performing students, participants in the Summer Dreamers Academy can choose the books they like and then explore their readings further through science- and arts-related activities and multimedia projects. In the afternoon, they will participate in some of the 27 activities—such as kayaking, martial arts, music and dance, and technology—provided by community organizations.

Guest speakers, camp skits and team-building activities will be part of the program at the city’s high school and middle school campuses. The camp, transportation, and meals are free to all students who attend, and officials are expecting at least 2,400 eligible students to join in the voluntary program.

The district is pushing some of the concepts into summer programs for younger students as well. The K-4 program is getting away from the staid classroom setting and will incorporate art and music activities and field trips in a full-day program. “We want to get across the idea that learning does not have to mean sitting with a worksheet,” says Lane. “You can have fun and learn at the same time.”

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