

# Education Access, Opportunity, and Enrichment Policy Brief

Marlena Mareno and Ryan Vyskocil

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# **Summer Learning Programs**

Summer learning programs are essential to curb summer learning loss, that being the loss of knowledge over the summer months between school years. Studies have found that summer learning loss is one of the main contributing factors to the achievement gap that exists between different demographics, and it is therefore essential that the state aids in providing affordable summer learning opportunities to at risk students.

# Scope of the Problem

Due to an outdated school calendar, students are being deprived of valuable learning time during the summer months. There is an overall loss of education amongst all students, however, low-income students are worse off. These students experience an average loss of two months of education in both math and reading skills, where middle-class students experience a loss in only math skills (ReadyNation). This amounts to two-thirds of the achievement gap, lack of college and career readiness, and decreasing international test score rankings (ReadyNation).

This loss not only hurts the students and their futures, but it also hurts the state who funds these students' education. New York funds a child's education for 10 months, spending an average of \$19,550 per student, per year depending on the location within the state. However, because of the two month education loss, the state ultimately losses \$3,910 per student, quickly adding up to a \$21 billion loss nationwide (ReadyNation).

Because schools are continuously trying to catch up to appropriate standards, programs in the arts and physical education are often cut altogether. A lack of physical education during the summer results in half of a child's annual weight gain, leading to obesity. The trend continues as current employers pay \$73 billion a year on medical expenses and "lower productivity" from the increasing obesity rate (ReadyNation).

Similarly, New York spends an average of \$70

million on remedial educational (ReadyNation). Teachers across the country agree that they spend the first two months of the academic year reviewing material that was

previously

taught. This not only wastes a copious amount of money, but it continues the loss of valuable time for students. Because of this, students miss opportunities for "innovation in instructional approaches and curriculum development" (TEL&AP "The Promise").

Similarly, teachers are restricted from utilizing new learning models (TEL&AP "The Promise"). The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) has been an active member in attempting to provide relief to the growing issue by compiling nonprofits together to build summer learning systems in 10 cities nationally (TEL&AP, "The Promise"). Their efforts are continually growing, but it is essential that New York State invests more time and resources towards improving the condition of summer learning throughout the state(TEL&AP, "The Promise").

# **Current Policy**

There is currently no dedicated funding stream for summer educational programs for students. However, one state funded program that looks to engage students in a beneficial summer employment opportunity is the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). This program currently receives \$30 million in allocations, which has increased from \$15.5 million in state allocations in the 2009-2010 fiscal year (AfterSchool 2016). The program targets low-income youth ages 14-25, and strives to provide up to six weeks of employment at entry level jobs in order to provide youth the opportunity to gain



valuable professional experience. This experience also enables these students and young adults to explore the job market and pursue individual passions and interests. Some of the entry level jobs that are offered to participants include,

but are not limited to, the following: government agencies, hospitals, nonprofits, small businesses, and law firms. This program is very extensive in New York City, but is also present in the City of Albany. In Albany, the program is targeted at students ages 12-18, and is called LIGHT (Learning, Initiative and

Gaining headway Together). While these programs offer low-income students with fantastic opportunities, one of the problems with such

programs is that funding is limited and students must, therefore, be selected from a large pool of applicants. As an example of this issue, there were over 110,000 student

applicants for



the SYEP in 2015, but only 55,000 of these students were chosen to participate in the program. This exemplifies the issue that there is a portion of students who would like to take part in, but are not selected to engage in this summer employment experience. Also although this program offers great learning experiences and employment opportunities, there is little content that would be utilized in the classroom for the following year, whereas a more sufficient program would allow students to apply what they learned directly to their academics the following year.

As previously stated, there is very little policy surrounding summer educational programs for students in the state of New York. This is mainly because most summer programs are privately funded, and, therefore, require a fee from participants. According to the Afterschool Alliance's America After 3pm report, reporting families spend and average \$549 per week (or \$250 in parts of the Capital Region) on summer learning programs for each child (America 2014). It must be noted that the number of affluent families who send their children to very expensive summer learning programs may have skewed this number, but regardless, this statistic makes it clear that quality summer learning

programs are largely inaccessible for lower income families who are the most vulnerable to losing the most knowledge during the summer months.

An example of more affordable educational summer camps that are provided through the state are the Department of Environmental Conservation Camps. These camps cost \$350 a week per camper, and offer students the opportunity to learn more about the environment, sportsmanship, and life skills while also taking part in many fun activities throughout the day (Department of Environmental Conservation 2016). Even this price of \$350 per week adds up to \$2,100, if a student takes part in a six week program, and this price is simply not possible for lower income families who must worry about paying for necessities week to week. Private resources that are very helpful for families in the

Capital Region are websites such as Kids Out and About and the Kids' Wellbeing Indicator Clearinghouse (KWIC), which provide a calendar of and information about different summer educational programs that are provided throughout the Capital Region (Kidsoutandabout 2016). Resources such as these are very helpful for lower income

parents because they map out different subsidized or free day and week programs that students can take part in for little to no cost. While this is not necessarily state or federal policy, it is a helpful resource to lower income families, especially in the Capital Region.

Included on the next page are outlined models that could play a role in fixing the current system and helping those who need it the most. Some of these models have been utilized elsewhere and have proven to be successful. It is imperative that programs such as these are created and implemented

in order to ensure that every student is receiving the education he or she deserves, as well as, a fair chance to be successful in the future. By



following these models, the learning gap could be further narrowed, providing an equal chance for all students.

# Model Programs and Funding Streams

#### Minnesota Funding Streams

Minnesota's Graduate Incentives Program provides funding for local districts to provide extending learning programs for eligible students (those deemed "at-risk"). Minneapolis school district took advantage of this funding stream and established summer programs with a budget of approximately \$6 million, serving more than 9,000 students (NSLA 2013).

# Model Programs and Funding Streams

#### **Rhode Island Funding Streams**

In 2012, Rhode Island approved \$250,000 in new funding, "for innovative summer learning partnerships as part of the Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative" (NSLA 2013). Although this funding stream is not substantial, it provides the framework for other states to directly allocate funds to support state wide summer learning programs.

## Summer Advantage USA

Another successful program which has aided in literacy achievement is Summer Advantage USA. This program is "one of only two scientifically validated summer learning programs in the nation" (TEL&AP, "Using"). This five week program utilizes "rigorous morning academics" coupled with "engaging afternoon enrichment activities" to provide participating students with "over two months of growth in reading skills, as well as two months in math skills" (TEL&AP, "Using"). By hiring high skilled professionals to teach in small-group settings, this program is able to provide students with these opportunities (TEL&AP,

# GO Project-New York City

One model program that is funded through private and grant support is the GO Project, which is housed in the lower east side of New York City. The three focuses of the program are early and continuous intervention, responsive and individualized instruction, and holistic and integrated programing (GO Project 2009). As a result of the program, the average GO Student gains two months of math and reading instruction, rather than "sliding" for two months (2009). Additionally, 98% of students are being promoted on time to the

# California Funding Streams

In 2010, California passed Senate Bill 798 into law, requiring that when state appropriations of 21st CCLC federal funding exceed a certain level, 15% of excess funding must be allocated to support summer learning programs (NSLA 2013). Additionally, a portion of After School Education and Safety and 21st CCLC funding, totaling about \$36 million, is available to summer learning programs through "supplemental grants" (2013).

# **Policy Recommendations**

#### Informational Database:

One policy recommendation is providing funding for a statewide website/browser that parents are able to use to select quality summer educational opportunities for their children during the upcoming summer. Privately funded websites, such as Kids Out and About, exist locally and provide this information, but many of these websites are unregulated and do not reach all parts of the state. A state funded database for summer camp and summer education opportunities helps make information available to a larger demographic, while also providing program details. The Rhode Island Department of Education offers this information on their website, and although New York is much larger, this a feasible educational policy alternative.

# Allocate funding for Summer Learning:

Currently there is no dedicated funding stream that provides annual funding for summer educational services to at-risk students, or students overall. Looking at California, Minnesota, and Rhode Island as models, it is essential that New York State allocate either direct funding or grant opportunities that will ease the cost burden of summer learning programs on impoverished populations throughout New York State.

# **Key Organizations**

- The New York State Network for Youth and Success: This collaborative organization works to strengthen the capacity and commitment of communities, programs, and professionals to increase access to high-quality programs and services beyond the traditional classroom. The recent merger between the New York State Afterschool Network and AfterSchool Works! NY, now known as The Network for Youth Success, has brought the professional development efforts in line with the advocacy and policy work to better address the needs of the expanded learning field in New York State.
- National Summer Learning Association: This
  non-profit, national organization aims to
  provide high-quality summer learning options
  to students in order to prepare them for college,
  the workforce and life tasks in general. The
  organization aims to close the achievement gap
  and provide all students, especially those of
  low-income, with opportunities for success
  inside and out of the classroom.
- Boys and Girls Club: As the second leading provider of after school and summer programs in the State of New York (behind public schools), the Boys and Girls Club provides programs that instill a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging, and influence among students (Boys 2016).
- YMCA: The YMCA is an organization that focuses on all individuals, including children, promoting healthy living and wellness for all. With their variety of programs, the YMCA strives to "enable kids to reach their full potential," as well as, "preparing teens for college" (YMCA 2016).

# Glossary of Terms

**KWIC:** Kids Well-being Indicators Clearinghouse was developed by the New York State Council on Children and Families. Its purpose is to promote "children's health, education, and well-being indicators as a tool for policy development, planning, and accountability" (KWIC 2016).

**21st CCLC:** 21st Century Community Learning Centers is a federally program that aims to provide students with quality extra curricular learning opportunities.

**Summer "Sliding":** The term is used to describe the disadvantage that lower-income students have during the summer months when they are most susceptible to falling behind in their academics.

At-Risk Students: Youth that are less likely to successfully transition into an economically self-sufficient adulthood.

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# Community Policy Institute

The Community Policy Institute builds capacity surrounding policy within the Capital Region. We provide researched-based policy information to our community partners who use the information to modify best practices and advocate for policies that will further the development and effectiveness of direct community engagement.

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