

Getting Support for **Summer Learning**

How Federal, State, City,
and District Policies Affect
Summer Learning Programs



Catherine H. Augustine and Lindsey E. Thompson

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PREFACE

Summer programs offered by school districts can provide academic support and enrichment opportunities to students from low-income families who often lose ground over the summer to their peers from higher-income families. In 2011, The Wallace Foundation launched the National Summer Learning Project (NSLP) to expand summer program opportunities for low-income students in urban districts.

Through the NSLP, The Wallace Foundation provided support to the participating public school districts and their community partners in Boston, Massachusetts; Dallas, Texas; Duval County, Florida; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Rochester, New York. The RAND Corporation research team assessed the effectiveness of these districts' voluntary, district-led summer learning programs and found near-term academic benefits in mathematics for all students and benefits in reading and social-emotional domains for students with strong program attendance (i.e., high attenders). These academic benefits also persisted through their school year.

As the NSLP wound down in 2017, these districts and their partners turned their attention and efforts toward sustaining progress in increasing the scale and improving the quality of these programs. In this report, we consider how the policy environment constrains or supports districts' attempts to scale and sustain quality summer programs, and we aim to help summer program leaders in school districts across the country navigate policy contexts at the district, city, state, and federal levels. Because most of our research was conducted in urban settings, this report is likely most useful for summer program leaders in urban school districts, whose contexts will be similar to those studied.

This report is the sixth in a series. The previous five are as follows:

1. Catherine H. Augustine et al., *Getting to Work on Summer Learning: Recommended Practices for Success*, 1st ed., RR-366-WF, 2013
2. Jennifer Sloan McCombs et al., *Ready for Fall? Near-Term Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Students' Learning Opportunities and Outcomes*, RR-815-WF, 2014

3. Catherine H. Augustine et al., *Learning from Summer: Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Urban Youth*, RR-1557-WF, 2016
4. Catherine H. Augustine and Lindsey E. Thompson, *Making Summer Last: Integrating Summer Programming into Core District Priorities and Operations*, RR-2038-WF, 2017
5. Heather L. Schwartz et al., *Getting to Work on Summer Learning: Recommended Practices for Success*, 2nd ed., RR-366-1-WF, 2018.

The first report, the first edition of *Getting to Work on Summer Learning*, offers lessons learned from detailed formative evaluations of the NSLP district programs in summer 2011. These evaluations, shared with districts in fall 2011, were designed to help summer leaders improve the programs they offered in 2012. RAND researchers completed another set of evaluations of the summer 2012 programs so that the districts could further strengthen their programs by summer 2013, when we launched a randomized controlled trial to assess program effects on student performance. The second report, *Ready for Fall?*, describes how students in this study performed on mathematics, reading, and social-emotional assessments in fall 2013, after one summer of programming. The third report, *Learning from Summer*, provides an examination of student outcomes at four different times: fall 2013, at the end of the 2013–2014 school year, in fall 2014 after the second summer of programming, and at the end of the 2014–2015 school year. The fourth report, *Making Summer Last*, describes how summer program leaders were integrating their programs into their districts’ core priorities and operations as a sustainability strategy. The fifth report, the second edition of *Getting to Work on Summer Learning*, updates the first report using lessons learned from our evaluation of the NSLP district programs in summers 2011–2014 and in our outcomes study.

This research was undertaken by RAND Education and Labor, a division of the RAND Corporation that conducts research on early childhood through postsecondary education programs, workforce development, and programs and policies affecting workers, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy and decision-making. The overarching study and this report were sponsored by The Wallace Foundation, which seeks to support and share



effective ideas and practices to foster improvements in learning and enrichment for disadvantaged children and the vitality of the arts for everyone. Its objectives are to improve the quality of schools, primarily by developing and placing effective principals in high-need schools, promoting social and emotional learning in elementary school and out-of-school-time settings, reimagining and expanding access to arts learning, and developing audiences for the arts. For more information and research on these and related topics, please visit the Foundation's Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org.

More information about RAND can be found at www.rand.org. Questions about this report should be directed to Catherine Augustine (cataug@rand.org), and questions about RAND Education and Labor should be directed to educationandlabor@rand.org.



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SUMMARY

During the summer, children from low-income families typically have fewer opportunities than their peers from more-affluent families for academic, cultural, athletic, and other activities. Such differences in opportunity can lead low-income students to fall behind their higher-income peers during summer. Free summer learning programs offering academic and enrichment activities provided by school districts can help address this opportunity gap.

To support such programs, The Wallace Foundation launched the National Summer Learning Project (NSLP) in 2011. The NSLP has provided financial support and technical assistance to the public school districts and their community partners in Boston, Massachusetts; Dallas, Texas; Duval County, Florida; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Rochester, New York, to facilitate the offering of voluntary, district-led summer learning programs at no cost to low-income students in urban elementary schools. As NSLP funding drew to a close in 2017, districts and their community partners focused on sustainability efforts to continue providing and, to the extent possible, to scale up high-quality summer programs for students. These efforts demonstrated the need for summer program leaders to navigate and shape policies at the district, city, state, and federal levels to support the scale, sustainability, and quality of their programs.

The Wallace Foundation asked RAND to help shed light on the policy landscape by addressing one question: *How do district, city, state, and federal policies support and constrain the scale, sustainability, and quality of district-provided summer learning programs?* To answer this question, we first defined those attributes of summer learning programs as follows:

- By *scale*, we mean increasing the number of slots available for students in a district's summer program.
- By *sustainability*, we mean that program leaders can assume that the district will continue to offer its program in subsequent summers.
- For *quality*, we use a working definition drawn from previous RAND research: Summer learning programs should span at least five weeks, have consistent student attendance, and

Differences in opportunity can lead low-income students to fall behind their higher-income peers during summer.

instruct students in small classes taught by teachers certified to teach that grade level and subject matter (Augustine, McCombs, Pane, et al., 2016).

This research involved interviews with more than 60 district staff members in Dallas, Pittsburgh, and Rochester between October 2015 and July 2016.¹ Most interviewees were responsible for planning, organizing, or overseeing a district’s summer learning programs, but some held higher-level positions. Concurrently, we interviewed more than 20 policy experts, advocates, and practitioners from federal, state, and city agencies and organizations. This group consisted of employees of government organizations, leaders or members of advocacy groups, directors or employees of nonprofits, and directors of summer programs outside the NSLP districts.

In preparation for and as a result of these interviews, we examined a variety of other sources to learn about policies and how they related to summer programming, such as

- public documents and legislation at the federal, state, and city levels
- board policies from NSLP districts
- existing research and analysis of federal and state policies
- meeting minutes and other documents collected at various NSLP-related meetings.

Here, we summarize our main findings and conclusions and offer recommendations for district-based summer program leaders. We note that, although this study aimed to provide useful information to school district–based summer program leaders as they navigate their policy contexts, it was not intended to represent all the ways in which district, city, state, and federal policy affect summer learning programs. Instead, our goal was to examine the policies identified by the NSLP districts and other interviewees and uncovered through our literature search.

¹ Other NSLP districts are described in the other RAND Summer Learning Series reports. See Augustine, McCombs, Schwartz, et al., 2013; McCombs, Pane, et al., 2014; Augustine, McCombs, Pane, et al., 2016; Augustine and Thompson, 2017; and Schwartz et al., 2018.

Districts Have the Greatest Impact on the Scale and Sustainability of Summer Programs

District leaders, such as superintendents and chiefs, have the greatest impact on summer programs by setting policy and establishing practices that affect summer learning. District policy dictates whether and how to establish or approve summer programs and which students will be served. Districts in states with funding streams that can be used for summer programming or that qualify for specific federal grants must weigh the goal of providing summer learning against other needs. If district leaders support summer programming, they might be more likely to direct funding from federal grants to it and support applications for the use of state discretionary grants for summer programs. Any given district will face incentives and constraints stemming not just from federal and state policy but also from demands from families, opportunities presented by local private funders, and the flexibility of general operating funds. Once a district has decided to offer a summer learning program, district policy is well positioned to affect that program's scale, sustainability, and quality—even if funding comes from other government sources.

Districts Seek Funding from Many Sources to Support Summer Programs

Regular funding is key to supporting the scale and sustainability of summer learning programs. Districts can raise private philanthropic dollars and allocate funds from their own operating budgets for their summer programs. However, because such funds are limited, districts planning to implement summer learning programs typically seek out funding opportunities at the federal and state levels—and occasionally at the city level, beyond monies already allocated to school districts via city taxes. Strong district capacity is needed to obtain and administer (and combine) federal and other grant funding. This capacity hinges on such factors as the ability of summer program leaders to convince district leaders that summer programming deserves funding, program evaluation to justify investments, and skilled grant writing for competitive grants.

Federal Funding Opportunities

Districts in our study reported getting the majority of their summer program funding from federal sources, and an earlier study

District leaders, such as superintendents and chiefs, have the greatest impact on summer programs by setting policy and establishing practices that affect summer learning.

examining six districts (Augustine, McCombs, Schwartz, et al., 2013) found that approximately 60 percent of summer program funding came from federal sources.

Table S.1 presents federal funding streams accessed or discussed by our interviewees, presented in order of recent appropriation amounts. We discuss these streams in detail in Chapter Two of the main report.

Formula grants distributed to states using targeted populations are the main mechanism through which federal policy affects summer programming. Some of these are U.S. Department of Education (ED) grants associated with ESSA (Pub. L. 114-95),² such as Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies (Title I, Part A), which supports students from low-income families; the Migrant Education Program (Title I, Part C); and Improving Teacher Quality State Grants (Title II, Part A). Some are grants from other agencies, such as the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Although most of these policies support the scale and sustainability of summer programs through the provision of funds, they can also affect the quality of summer programs.

Some programs are supported by federal funds accessed through a competitive application process. The main competitive federal grant used to support summer programming is the ESSA 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) grant (Title IV, Part B), which supports out-of-school-time (OST) activities. Other competitive grant programs under ESSA are the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Program (Title IV, Part A); Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) State Literacy Discretionary/ Competitive Grant (Title II, Part B); the Promise Neighborhoods Discretionary/Competitive Grant (Title IV, Part F); and the Full Service Community Schools Program Discretionary/Competitive Grant (Title IV, Part F). It takes skilled grant writers to win such competitive funding.

Although most of these policies support the scale and sustainability of summer programs through the provision of funds, they can also affect the quality of summer programs. For example, ESSA Title I funding requires that certified teachers deliver academic instruction, which supports program quality, and 21st CCLC requires states to develop eligibility criteria (e.g., summer programs must last at least four weeks) that might affect quality.

² All subsequent references to ESSA titles and parts can be found in Pub. L. 114-95.

TABLE S.1

Examples of Federal Funding Streams That Support District Summer Learning Programs

Type	Funding Program	Department	Recent Appropriations
Formula grants	Grants to Local Educational Agencies (ESEA/ESSA Title I, Part A)	ED	FY 2019: \$15.9 billion
	National School Lunch Program’s Seamless Summer Option	USDA	FY 2018: \$13.8 billion ^a
	Extended School Year (IDEA Part B, Subpart B, Sec. 300.106)	ED	FY 2019: \$12.4 billion ^b
	Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants (ESEA/ESSA Title II, Part A)	ED	FY 2019: \$2.1 billion
	Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (ESEA/ESSA Title IV, Part A, Subpart 1)	ED	FY 2019: \$1.2 billion
	Language Acquisition State Grants (ESEA/ESSA Title III, Part A)	ED	FY 2019: \$737.4 million
	Summer Food Service Program	USDA	FY 2018: \$500 million
	Migrant Education (ESEA Title I, Part C)	ED	FY 2019: \$374.8 million
	Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) ^c (ESEA/ESSA Title V, Part B, Subparts 1 and 2)	ED	FY 2019: \$180.8 million
Competitive grants	21st CCLC (ESEA/ESSA Title IV, Part B) ^d	ED	FY 2019: \$1.2 billion
	AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America)	CNCS	FY 2018: \$504.3 million
	Comprehensive Literacy Development Grants (ESEA/ESSA Title II, Part B, Subpart 2, Section 2222) [known as Striving Readers under the No Child Left Behind Act]	ED	FY 2019: \$190 million
	Promise Neighborhoods (ESEA/ESSA Title IV, Part F, Subpart 2, Section 4624)	ED	FY 2019: \$78.3 million
	Innovative Approaches to Literacy (ESEA/ESSA Title II, Part B, Subpart 2, Section 2226)	ED	FY 2019: \$27 million
	Full-Service Community Schools (ESEA/ESSA Title IV, Part F, Subpart 2, Section 4625)	ED	FY 2019: \$17.5 million

SOURCES: CNCS, undated; Congressional Research Service, 2018; National Education Association, 2018; Pub. L. 108-46; Pub. L. 115-245; ED, 2020; USDA, 2019.

NOTES: Appropriations listed represent the total appropriations for grant funding, not just the amount specified for or spent on summer in these fiscal years. ESEA = Elementary and Secondary Education Act; FY = fiscal year; IDEA = Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

^a The USDA does not separate funding for the Seamless Summer Option from the National School Lunch Program. This amount represents the overall funding for school-year and summer meals in FY 2018.

^b IDEA does not designate the exact grant amount for extended school year services. This funding level represents all grants to states for special education.

^c Funds appropriated for REAP are divided equally between two programs: the Small, Rural School Achievement program and the Rural and Low-Income Schools program—i.e., each distinct program received \$90.4 million in FY 2019 (National Education Association, 2018).

^d Funds for 21st CCLC—which are associated with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—are distributed to states using the formula used to distribute ESEA/ESSA Title I, Part A dollars; states then distribute the funds to eligible entities using a competitive process.

State Funding and Support

A few states—such as California, New Mexico, and Wyoming—have created funding streams that are considered to be as significant as federal sources. As of 2018, California’s After School Education and Safety Program was the single-largest state funding stream dedicated to OST programs (California Department of Education, 2018). New Mexico and Wyoming have provided formula funding for summer programming to all school districts with vulnerable populations. Other examples are Massachusetts’ Quality Enhancements in After-School and Out-of-School Time Grant Program and the New York Department of Education Community Schools Grant Initiative.

The main way that most states affect summer programs is through the interpretation, regulation, and administration of federal funding streams—which can influence whether summer learning programs are funded. States distribute federal formula grants and have some leeway in determining whether to allow (or require) summer programs to receive this funding. For competitive grants, some states dictate their own priorities by listing additional requirements of grantees above and beyond federal requirements. For example, a few states require that 21st CCLC grantees provide summer programming (in addition to other OST programming, such as after-school instruction).

States can also affect program scale and sustainability through mandates encouraging or requiring summer programs. As of 2014, 18 states mandated or recommended summer school or a summer reading program for students who were not reading at grade level. States also have created councils or caucuses to support or explore summer programming options and to signal their support for OST programming in general.

City Funding

Some cities have established funding streams to support program scale and sustainability, albeit with fewer dollars than a district could receive from a state or a federal stream. Such cities as Oakland, California, and Seattle, Washington, have used ballot initiatives, budget set-asides, and property tax levies to create pools of dollars that can be used to fund summer programs (among other uses).

There Are Several Challenges to Obtaining Funding for Summer Programming

Several factors influence the availability of federal funding for summer programs, such as the ability to use funding for other purposes, restrictions on which students can be supported by grant funding, district capacity to access (and combine) federal grant money, and substantial competition for funds. When a district does win a competition for funding, such as through the 21st CCLC program, that funding is typically provided for a limited duration. State funding poses similar challenges for districts, such as variable and short-term funding streams not targeted just at summer programming. The biggest challenge associated with city funding streams is persuading city residents to support ballot initiatives that raise taxes or set aside general funds.

District and State Policies and Practices Affect Summer Program Quality

Policies and practices at the district level, such as those affecting which teachers can be hired for summer and how they are selected, affect program quality. For example, some districts' summer program staff observe instruction or refer to teacher evaluation ratings in selecting summer teachers.

Districts can also influence program quality through decisions about the type of programs to offer. Some districts have official board policies on summer learning; others establish summer planning councils or teams to decide which programs to fund, which students to serve, the amount of funding to provide, and other aspects of summer programming. According to our interviewees, a central team can provide many benefits—structuring hiring practices to minimize competition for summer staff, for example, or requiring that programs implement certain features, such as a minimum program length, teacher qualifications, time spent on academic subjects, or curricular emphasis.

States can influence quality by layering program requirements onto federal funding streams and by requiring specific practices in exchange for funding summer programs with state money. Some states also specify features of summer programs in legislation. For example, Pennsylvania's 2016 request for proposals for 21st CCLC funding (which required grantees to include summer programs) requested that applicants provide a minimum of six weeks of

The biggest challenge associated with city funding streams is persuading city residents to support ballot initiatives that raise taxes or set aside general funds.

summer programming of at least 12 hours per week or provide justification for why this threshold could not be met.

The federal government and city governments are less likely to have an impact on quality, although the goals of some federal policies, such as ensuring equity for all students, align broadly with the goals of summer learning programs, and some federal policies might indirectly influence quality, such as grants requiring that certified teachers deliver academic instruction. Recent requirements to select evidence-based programs might also influence the quality of summer programming. Several federal funding sources, such as LEARN and Full-Service Community Schools, feature a competitive preference for evidence-based programs. We did not identify examples of how city funding had influenced quality.

Conclusions

We found that policies at every level—from federal to district—can affect the scale, sustainability, and quality of district-provided summer learning programs. The precise ways in which summer programs are affected depend on the specific context and policies involved. Federal, state, and local policies make it possible to carry out summer learning but do not necessarily promote it. There is funding for summer programs but securing it can take a great deal of work—although summer programming is an allowable use of funding, it is not usually the only possible use. The recommendations in this report, therefore, are designed to help summer program leaders identify allowable funding sources, make a case for summer learning as an attractive use of those funds, and consider local actions. It is essential to focus locally on district policies and priorities, which have a strong influence on the quality of programming and how external dollars are spent to attain that quality.

Recommendations for Summer Program Leaders

Based on our conclusions regarding the effects of various policies on the scale, sustainability, and quality of summer learning programs, we recommend that summer program leaders and other district personnel supporting summer programs adopt the following practices. Some of these, such as developing advocacy campaigns within a city, are more relevant for urban district leaders, whose perspective largely guided this study.

There is funding for summer programs but securing it can take a great deal of work.

Make Summer Programming an Official Board Policy and Authorize a Central Body to Carry Out Summer Programming Decisionmaking

An official school board policy requiring summer programming affects program scale and sustainability. A central committee can then catalog all summer opportunities in the district in one place to anchor discussions and decisions affecting logistical efficiency and quality across programs. In this report, we provide specific recommendations regarding student targeting and recruiting, along with staffing and compensation decisions.

Measure and Communicate the Impact of Summer Programming

Summer program leaders need evidence of their programs' effectiveness to justify spending dollars on them. In addition, if summer leaders decide to advocate new policies or changes to policies at the district, city, state, or federal level, they need to demonstrate the importance of their programs. Clear messages about the importance of summer programming to students' academic (and other relevant) outcomes can influence district leaders and city, state, and federal grantors. These messages should be based on rigorous evaluations of summer programs to demonstrate a link between student participation and improved student outcomes. A recent RAND report can help in this regard: McCombs, Augustine, et al., 2019, identified more than 40 summer programs meeting the top three evidence tiers stipulated in ESSA. When applying for federal funding, program leaders with similar programs can point to this report to demonstrate that their program is evidence based.

Identify and Address Policies or Practices at the District Level That Create Barriers to the Scale, Sustainability, and Quality of Summer Programs

We suggest that summer leaders assess all of the tasks involved in planning and running summer programs and identify the policy and practice barriers they encounter in completing them. Once compiled, this list can help focus program leaders' efforts to address these barriers by advocating changes to the status quo or adapting their own practices to reduce conflict. For example, summer program leaders in one district were able to negotiate with

A central committee can . . . catalog all summer opportunities in the district in one place to anchor discussions and decisions affecting logistical efficiency and quality across programs.

their teachers' association to develop a hiring procedure that did not favor teacher tenure but instead centered on activities, such as interviews and observations of teaching, that were designed to identify motivated and qualified teachers.

Cultivate Relationships with District, City, and State Policymakers

Not all summer program leaders have direct access to district leaders, city officials, state education agency (SEA) employees, or state legislators. However, cultivating relationships at these levels can provide a variety of benefits. Forming relationships with superintendents, chief academic officers, funding coordinators, and other district leaders and using those relationships to create buy-in for summer programming might have the greatest impact, given the role these individuals play in determining how revenue is allocated and in setting policies that affect summer programming. Persuading district leaders to champion summer programming can ensure that there are summer advocates sitting in budget and strategic planning meetings at which decisions are made about the disbursement of federal, state, and district funds. Forming relationships with city council and mayoral staff can lay the groundwork for developing new campaigns designed to support youth or for allocating city funds for district summer programs. Summer program leaders might want to launch or join coalitions in their cities to advocate a new tax or a city budget set-aside. To rally support for ballot initiatives favorable to summer learning, campaigners should publicize the problems that young people in the community face and the ways that summer learning programs can help address those problems. Building relationships with state legislators and state executives can allow summer program leaders to advocate the insertion of language related to summer programming in legislation. Summer program leaders can also introduce legislators to examples of other state funding streams. SEA employees write statewide ESSA plans, which could specify that federal funding will be used to support summer programming. This is more likely to be the case if these policymakers understand the key attributes and outcomes of high-quality, sustainable summer programs.

Forming relationships with city council and mayoral staff can lay the groundwork for developing new campaigns designed to support youth or for allocating city funds for district summer programs.



Advocate Clearer Messages from State Leaders on Funding Available for Summer Learning

To access federal and state funding that can support summer programs, district staff need to know what is available. They can ask federal and state officials to clarify the funding sources that can be used to pay for summer programs and communicate that information to districts. Federal guidance could include the provision of (1) a list of all programs that can be used to address summer learning and (2) clarity in federal grant applications about whether summer programming is an eligible use of the funding. SEA employees should be able to clarify allowable uses of state and federal funds and to communicate new opportunities on an annual basis. We also suggest following the work of summer advocacy organizations, such as the National Summer Learning Association and the Afterschool Alliance.

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Several RAND staff members contributed to this report. Stephanie Lonsinger assisted with editing and formatting. During the quality assurance and production process, Brian Phillips and Cathy Stasz provided careful reviews and valuable feedback. We also wish to thank Rachel Gwaltney, the National Summer Learning Association's Director of Policy and Partnerships, for her close reading and insightful suggestions. The input of all these individuals improved the quality of this report.



ABBREVIATIONS

21st CCLC	21st Century Community Learning Centers
ASES	After School Education and Safety
ASOST-Q	Quality Enhancements in After-School and Out-of-School Time
CBO	community-based organization
CNCS	Corporation for National and Community Service
ED	U.S. Department of Education
ELL	English language learner
EITC	Educational Improvement Tax Credit
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act (Pub. L. 114-95)
FY	fiscal year
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	individualized education plan
LEA	local education agency
LEARN	Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation
NCLB	No Child Left Behind (Act)
NSLP	National Summer Learning Project
OFCY	Oakland Fund for Children and Youth
OST	out-of-school-time
REAP	Rural Education Achievement Program
RFP	request for proposals
SEA	state education agency
STEM	science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture



CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

During the summer, children from low-income families have fewer opportunities than their peers from more-affluent families for academic, cultural, athletic, and other activities (Heyns, 1979; Cooper et al., 1996; Downey, Von Hippel, and Broh, 2004; Pew Research Center, 2015). For example, in 2014, 56 percent of youth aged 6 to 11 from the highest-income families participated in sports outside school, compared with 24 percent of students from the lowest-income families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Differences in opportunities for these kinds of enrichment activities, as well as for academic pursuits, can lead low-income students to fall behind their higher-income peers during summer (Augustine, McCombs, Pane, et al., 2016). Past research has identified academic benefits from summer learning programs (Jacob and Lefgren, 2004; Borman, Benson, and Overman, 2005; Schacter and Jo, 2005; Chaplin and Capizzano, 2006; Matsudaira, 2008; Borman, Goetz, and Dowling, 2009; McCombs, Kirby, and Mariano, 2009; Augustine, McCombs, Pane, et al., 2016).

In 2011, The Wallace Foundation initiated the National Summer Learning Project (NSLP) to expand summer opportunities for low-income students and gain understanding about whether and how district-led, voluntary summer learning programs—which feature both academic instruction and enrichment opportunities—can improve outcomes for these students. The Foundation funded programs in five urban districts: Boston, Massachusetts; Dallas, Texas; Duval County, Florida; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Rochester, New York.

Differences in opportunities for these kinds of enrichment activities, as well as for academic pursuits, can lead low-income students to fall behind their higher-income peers during summer.

When NSLP funding ended in 2017, districts and their community partners focused on finding options for sustaining and, to the extent possible, scaling up high-quality summer learning programs. These efforts emphasized the need for summer program leaders to navigate and shape policies at multiple levels: district, city, state, and federal. The Wallace Foundation asked the RAND Corporation to examine the impact of policies at the district, city, state, and federal levels in furthering—or constraining—the scale, sustainability, and quality of district-provided summer learning programs.

Focus of This Study

In this report, we aim to provide useful information to summer program leaders in school districts who are attempting to improve and sustain their programs. This exploratory study addressed one question posed by The Wallace Foundation: *How do district, city, state, and federal policies support and constrain the scale, sustainability, and quality of district-provided summer learning programs?* To answer this question, we first defined those attributes of summer learning programs as follows:

- By *scale*, we mean that districts can increase the number of seats available for students in their summer programs.
- By *sustainability*, we mean that program leaders can assume that the district will continue to offer its program in subsequent summers.
- For *quality*, we use a definition from previous RAND research, which indicated that high-quality summer learning programs should span at least five weeks, have consistent student attendance, and instruct students in small classes taught by teachers who are certified to teach both that grade level and subject matter (Augustine, McCombs, Pane, et al., 2016).

This research involved learning about the local, state, and federal policy contexts for summer learning programs. In 2015, we interviewed representatives from three NSLP districts (Dallas, Pittsburgh, and Rochester) about policies at the federal, state, city, and district levels that affected their district summer learning programs.³ At the same time, we investigated other state and city policies through additional interviews with policy experts and

³ Other NSLP districts are profiled in the other RAND Summer Learning Series reports. See Augustine et al., 2013; McCombs et al., 2014; Augustine et al., 2016; Augustine and Thompson, 2017; and Schwartz et al., 2018.

further research into specific legislation. Although we broadened our lens through these additional activities, our findings and recommendations are likely to be most useful to summer program leaders of urban school districts.

Types of Policies Examined in This Study

Policies refer to formal, approved laws or regulations, whether at the federal, state, city, or district level. We directed our research at each level as follows:

- **Federal:** We addressed policies written into legislation or approved by legislative or executive bodies.
- **State:** We reviewed both policies that were similar to those enacted at the federal level and policies that resulted from voter referenda.
- **City:** We examined policies resulting from city council regulations, mayoral initiatives, and voter referenda.
- **District:** We examined policies that were approved by a board or written into strategic plans by district leaders. In addition, when we interviewed district representatives about policies, we learned that what might be considered a policy in one district might be known as a routinized practice in another. Therefore, when we describe such district activities in this report, we have added the term “practices” to signal that these actions (such as offering summer program slots to low-performing students) might not be codified as official board policy.

Funding Opportunities

The district employees and policy experts we interviewed tended to focus on policies that provide funding because these have a clear impact on summer program scale and sustainability. Here, we describe the types of funding opportunities that we uncovered and define some general terms used to describe them. We also describe the types of policies affecting summer programming that are not linked to funding.

Sources of Funding

Funding to support summer learning programs comes from a variety of sources, including federal, state, and local education

agencies (LEAs). We also considered examples from federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). At the state and city levels, funding can come from governors' initiatives; departments related to children, health, or families; tax-exempt donations and set-asides from city budgets; and education-focused tax increases. There are many other federal and state agencies providing smaller or more-targeted grants that also could be a source of supplemental funding for summer programs.

Distribution of Funding

Almost all funding—regardless of its source—is awarded to summer programs through grants. Even if a city raises a levy to support summer learning, that money is typically distributed to districts or other summer providers through a grant application process. Grants from government agencies at all levels are generally awarded through one of two processes: formula funding or a competitive application process. Federal, state, or agency regulations determine which of these methods are to be used to distribute the total funding amount among eligible recipients. This total can change from year to year depending on budget allocations.

Formula Grants

Grants distributed via *formula* are typically federal or state grants awarded to state education agencies (SEAs) or LEAs. Formula grant dollars are allocated to all eligible state and/or local governments or to programs directly through a formula that weights the amount received by such factors as population, income, or other individual characteristics (e.g., the number of migrant children in the state).

Competitive Grants

Unlike formula grants, *competitive grants* are not guaranteed to all eligible entities; instead, they are allocated using selected applications. Eligibility for such grants can be contingency based. For example, states might be required to pass specific legislation prior to becoming eligible for federal funding. Because of such stipulations, competitive grants can be used as incentives for policy change at the state or local level in a way that formula-based grants cannot (McGuinn, 2012). In cities that disperse monies for summer programming, a committee typically decides which programs receive local funds.

Funding Flexibility

Grant funding can be more or less flexible in terms of allowable uses. Categorical grants are less flexible; block grants are more so.

Categorical Grants

Categorical funding is available only if specific mechanisms are used to attain the desired outcomes. For example, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) grants are intended to be used only for out-of-school-time (OST) programming. These funds can be used only to develop, sustain, or enhance summer or other OST programs (and family involvement in them) and cannot be used for programs and services delivered during the traditional school day.

Block Grants

Other funds might stipulate desired outcomes but not the mechanisms to achieve them. Such funding might be used to address broad outcomes, such as reducing poverty in states (e.g., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), or narrower outcomes, such as reducing violence in schools (e.g., New York Extended School Day/School Violence Prevention grants). This type of funding is often referred to as a *block grant* because of its broad focus and distribution. Districts might be able to spend funds from a block grant on summer programming. For example, if a district receives a block grant intended to help turn around a struggling school, a summer learning program might be one of many potential mechanisms to achieve that outcome.

Many grants or other funding opportunities combine aspects of categorical funding and block grants. For example, at the federal level, the 2009 Race to the Top Fund required states to include particular initiatives or programs to be eligible, alongside other state-proposed plans. Although many grants can be categorized as either categorical or block grants, we were less interested in the overall flexibility of the grant than in whether a grant specifically allows for summer learning opportunities to be funded. A summary of funding types is provided in Table 1.1.

Policies That Affect Summer Programs Without Affecting Their Funding

Other policies can affect summer learning programs without affecting their funding. In our interviews, summer program

TABLE 1.1

Types of Funding Opportunities That Can Be Used for Summer Learning Programs

Funding Mechanism	Definition
Formula grants	Funds allocated to all eligible state and/or local governments or to programs through a formula that weights the amount received by factors such as population, income, or other characteristics
Competitive grants	Funds allocated using selected applications, including contingencies
Categorical funding	Funds available only if specific mechanisms are used to attain the desired outcomes
Block grants	Funds available to achieve a desired outcome but without any requirement to use a specific mechanism to attain the outcome

leaders described such policies at the state and district levels. We examine a few of these policies in Chapters Three and Five, differentiating between those that intentionally target summer learning programs and those that do not. For example, a state might require summer learning to be made available to students but not provide any funding to support this mandate. Alternatively, district policies on employment contracts can unintentionally affect summer programs by creating barriers to hiring specific teachers or administrators for summer positions.

Study Approach

To answer our research question, we consulted the following sources:

- public documents and legislation at the federal, state, and city levels
- board policies from the three study districts
- existing research and analysis of federal and state policy
- interviews with summer program staff and other officials in our studied districts
- interviews with policymakers, leaders, and advocates at the city, state, and federal levels
- meeting minutes and other documents collected through various NSLP-related meetings and events.

We discuss our approach in more detail below.

Review of Policies

To investigate existing legislation and policies, we relied on our interviewees and prior commentary and analysis on this subject to identify relevant government websites; we also examined enacted legislation. We considered legislation and policies from non-NSLP states and cities to represent the potential of policy to support or constrain summer program scale, sustainability, and quality. However, we did not systematically review every federal, state, city, or district policy that does or could affect summer learning programs.

Interviews

We interviewed more than 60 district leaders and staff members in Dallas, Pittsburgh, and Rochester between October 2015 and July 2016. Some were high-ranking district officials; most were directly responsible for planning, organizing, or overseeing summer learning programs.

Concurrently, we interviewed more than 20 policy experts, advocates, and practitioners at the federal, state, and city levels. These experts were employees of government organizations, leaders or members of advocacy groups, directors or employees of nonprofits, and directors of summer programs not connected to school districts.

Our semistructured interview protocol covered policies with which we were familiar from previous research while also giving interviewees the chance to describe additional policies affecting district summer programs. Interview topics varied by participant. With district interviewees, we asked about federal, state, city, and district policies that affect funding; we also asked about various summer tasks, such as budgeting, recruiting, developing curricula, and hiring administrators. With policy experts, we asked which policies they were familiar with that affect summer program scale, sustainability, and quality; we also asked about specific policies that we learned of from our district interviews or other research.

Each protocol was further tailored to the interviewee using our knowledge of their role, research about the interviewee's organization, and existing publications related to summer program policies. These interviews helped us gain a better understanding of

how policies at each level affected summer programs and of some of the barriers or benefits associated with these policies.

Interviews lasted between 20 minutes and two hours depending on the interviewee's experiences with policies affecting summer programming. Many of our interviews with district employees were conducted in person during scheduled site visits. All other interviews were conducted by phone. We audio-recorded and took notes during all interviews, referring back to the recordings to fill gaps in our notes.

We analyzed interview notes using Dedoose v7.0, a web-based application for mixed-methods research. We first organized responses by policy or practice. For example, we synthesized all responses focused on ESSA Title I federal funding. When interviewees made comments that were not connected to individual policies but instead related to general trends or opinions, we grouped them to allow for easier identification of general enablers and challenges associated with policy. We then performed a second round of coding on each set of policy responses to identify how the policy affected the scale, sustainability, and quality of summer programs and to identify how districts accessed or learned about the policy.

Study Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. It is, for the most part, focused on urban districts; challenges faced by suburban and rural districts might differ. This is an exploratory study—data on district policies were drawn from three urban districts, limiting generalizability. The policies selected for this report were identified by our interviews and literature search; it is likely that we have missed examples of policies that affect summer programs. We also recognize that policies change with time. This being the case, we do not intend for this report to represent all of the ways in which federal, state, city, and district policies affect summer learning programs. Our goals are to identify what our studied districts recognized as influential policies and to present examples of ways in which policy at all levels has affected district-provided summer programs. Our conclusions and recommendations are based on policy known to us at the time of writing. To better



inform their decisionmaking, program leaders should confirm policy language because it is subject to change.

Report Organization

The remainder of the report is organized in five chapters:

- Chapter Two focuses on policies at the federal level, particularly national funding streams that can be used for summer learning programs.
- Chapter Three provides examples of the wide variety of state-level policies that provide funding for summer programming and regulate those programs.
- Chapter Four briefly explores examples of how city policy can affect district summer programming.
- Chapter Five provides examples of how district policies and practices can affect the scale, sustainability, and quality of summer programs.
- Chapter Six provides conclusions and recommendations for summer learning program leaders who are navigating policy across the four levels explored in this study.



CHAPTER TWO

Federal Policies’ Impact on Summer Learning Programs

In this chapter, we describe the effects of federal policies on the scale, sustainability, and quality of summer learning programming. Although summer learning programs are developed and implemented at the district level, federal policy can affect these programs in various ways, mainly through funding streams.

We begin by discussing two goals of federal policy that are especially relevant for summer programming: (1) ensuring equity and (2) pairing local flexibility with accountability. We then examine federal funding sources that can be used to pay for summer learning programs. Although this support is clearly important to program scale and sustainability, there are challenges associated with securing and maintaining an ongoing stream of federal funds.

How Does Federal Policy Affect Summer Learning Programs?

Federal Policy Goals Are Broadly Supportive of Summer Learning

Two goals of federal policy—ensuring equity in education and giving states and local governments flexibility over policy decisions in exchange for accountability—provide opportunities for

summer learning program leaders, although neither goal is specifically focused on summer learning.

Ensuring Equity for Students

The passage of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA; Pub. L. 89-10) solidified the federal government's role in ensuring equity for students across and within schools by providing additional resources for low-income students (U.S. Department of Education [ED], 2015a).⁴ Since then, laws with similar goals have been passed to ensure protections for other populations. For example, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA; Pub. L. 108-446, originally passed into law in 1975 as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act) protects students with disabilities. This focus on equity was furthered with the 2001 reauthorization of ESEA, renamed No Child Left Behind (NCLB; Pub. L. 107-110; Maranto and McShane, 2012). This legislation focused on increasing the accountability of schools serving low-income students and represented the first time that the federal government mandated that states report data by school and by disaggregated student characteristics. The 2015 reauthorization of ESEA (renamed the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA; Pub. L. 114-95) continues the requirement for disaggregated reporting and accountability for student groups.⁵

District reporting of student outcomes by student groups brought achievement gaps to the surface, increasing pressure on districts to provide supports for low-performing, low-income, and minority student populations. This emphasis has provided a boost for summer learning programs: Leaders of academically focused summer programs have positioned them as interventions for low-performing students, thus aligning these programs with this federal government priority.

Divesting Authority to State and Local Governments While Emphasizing Accountability

A second federal policy goal affecting summer learning is the trend toward divesting authority from federal to state and local governments. This shift is evidenced, first, by the increase in the number of federal block grants supporting education since the 1960s (Finegold, Wherry, and Schardin, 2004). For example,

⁴ All subsequent references to ESEA titles and parts can be found in Pub. L. 89-10.

⁵ All subsequent references to ESSA titles and parts can be found in Pub. L. 114-95.

through the 2009 Race to the Top Fund, the ED awarded large, competitive block grants to states using proposals to improve student achievement in ways aligned to the ED's education priorities (ED, 2016). Second, in the past decade, ESSA continued the divestment trend by providing even more latitude to states to determine how to measure and report student performance and address low-performing schools (ED, undated-a; Pub. L. 114-95; Poiner, 2016). In exchange for greater authority, local governments are encouraged to give preference to evidence-based interventions when making funding decisions (ED, undated-a; Pub. L. 114-95). Many district-provided summer learning programs are evidence based (for examples, see Jacob and Lefgren, 2004; Borman, Benson, and Overman, 2005; Schacter and Jo, 2005; Chaplin and Capizzano, 2006; Matsudaira, 2008; Borman, Goetz, and Dowling, 2009; McCombs, Kirby, and Mariano, 2009; Augustine, McCombs, Pane, et al., 2016). A recent RAND report (McCombs, Augustine, et al., 2019) identified more than 40 specific summer programs that met the criteria for the top three evidence tiers as specified by ESSA.

These trends can affect summer learning programs in two ways. First, federal policy emphasizes district autonomy in choosing programs—including summer learning—that will best improve student achievement; thus, federal policy might encourage summer learning programs without mandating their use. Second, the emphasis on accountability encourages district leaders to choose evidence-based summer learning program models that advance equity to fulfill federal requirements for funding, with a potential benefit to the quality of the programs implemented.

Federal Funding Streams Directly Affect the Scale and Sustainability of Summer Programs

The federal government directly affects district-provided summer learning programs through its funding streams. Unlike the lesser impact of federal funding (as opposed to state and local funding) on school-year operations, federal grants make up the largest portion of many summer learning programs' budgets, and thus can have significant impact on scale and sustainability. Since 2005, the federal government has provided between \$400 billion and \$700 billion per year to states in the form of grants to support policy goals in health, education, infrastructure, and a variety of other social needs—and, in many cases, these grants can be

The emphasis on accountability encourages district leaders to choose evidence-based summer learning program models that advance equity to fulfill federal requirements for funding, with a potential benefit to the quality of the programs implemented.

used to support summer learning programs.⁶ In addition, many districts that spend their own general operating funds on summer programming are able to do so because federal funding, such as Title I monies, pays for other activities during the school year.

Table 2.1 presents federal funding streams accessed or discussed by our interviewees, presented in order of recent appropriation amounts.⁷ We discuss these streams in more detail, focusing first on formula grants and then on competitive grants.

Formula Funding

Guaranteed Funding

A few formula-funded grants are *guaranteed* for some LEAs (e.g., districts with large populations of students from low-income families) and focused on the summer time frame. The two best examples of these fund school lunches and are administered by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service. The National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option allows any organization that offers school-year meals to students through the National School Lunch Program to continue offering free or low-cost summer meals to eligible participants.⁸ Summer programs typically provide free meals to all, reimbursing what they can through the Seamless Summer Option and paying the difference from other revenue sources. If a school or site does not participate in the National School Lunch Program, a summer program at that site can be reimbursed for meal spending through another source of funding, called the Summer Food Service Program (USDA, 2017).

Another formula grant to support summer learning is available through IDEA, which requires schools to provide free appropriate public education for all students. Some students' individualized education plans (IEPs) require year-round education services, referred to as extended school year (ESY) services, to meet the law's requirements. If a student's IEP requires ESY services during the summer, then a portion of the IDEA grant must be

⁶ According to The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2016, the federal government provided \$589 billion to states via grants in FY 2014. There is some variation in exact dollar amount depending on sources. For example, in FY 2011, the Congressional Budget Office put the value at \$607 billion; Pew placed it closer to \$560 billion (Congressional Budget Office, 2013).

⁷ For a more comprehensive list of summer-allowable federal funding streams, please see the National Summer Learning Association's 2016 Funding Resource Guide (2016).

⁸ Students living below 130 percent of the poverty line are provided free meals; students below 185 percent of the poverty line have fully reimbursable meals (USDA, 2017).

TABLE 2.1

Examples of Federal Funding Streams that Support District Summer Learning Programs

Type	Funding Program	Department	Recent Appropriations
Formula grants	Grants to Local Educational Agencies (ESEA/ESSA Title I, Part A)	ED	FY 2019: \$15.9 billion
	National School Lunch Program's Seamless Summer Option	USDA	FY 2018: \$13.8 billion ^a
	Extended School Year (IDEA Part B, Subpart B, Sec. 300.106)	ED	FY 2019: \$12.4 billion ^b
	Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants (ESEA/ESSA Title II, Part A)	ED	FY 2019: \$2.1 billion
	Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (ESEA/ESSA Title IV, Part A, Subpart 1)	ED	FY 2019: \$1.2 billion
	Language Acquisition State Grants (ESEA/ESSA Title III, Part A)	ED	FY 2019: \$737.4 million
	Summer Food Service Program	USDA	FY 2018: \$500 million
	Migrant Education (ESEA Title I, Part C)	ED	FY 2019: \$374.8 million
Competitive grants	Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) ^c (ESEA/ESSA Title V, Part B, Subparts 1 and 2)	ED	FY 2019: \$180.8 million
	21st CCLC (ESEA/ESSA Title IV, Part B) ^d	ED	FY 2019: \$1.2 billion
	AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America)	CNCS	FY 2018: \$504.3 million
	Comprehensive Literacy Development Grants (ESEA/ESSA Title II, Part B, Subpart 2, Section 2222) [known as Striving Readers under the No Child Left Behind Act]	ED	FY 2019: \$190 million
	Promise Neighborhoods (ESEA/ESSA Title IV, Part F, Subpart 2, Section 4624)	ED	FY 2019: \$78.3 million
	Innovative Approaches to Literacy (ESEA/ESSA Title II, Part B, Subpart 2, Section 2226)	ED	FY 2019: \$27 million
	Full-Service Community Schools (ESEA/ESSA Title IV, Part F, Subpart 2, Section 4625)	ED	FY 2019: \$17.5 million

SOURCES: CNCS, undated; Congressional Research Service, 2018; National Education Association, 2018; Pub. L. 108-46; Pub. L. 115-245; ED, 2020; USDA, 2019.

NOTES: Appropriations listed represent the total appropriations for grant funding, not just the amount specified for or spent on summer in these fiscal years. CNCS = Corporation for National and Community Service; FY = fiscal year.

^a The USDA does not separate funding for the Seamless Summer Option from the National School Lunch Program. This amount represents the overall funding for school-year and summer meals in FY 2018.

^b IDEA does not designate the exact grant amount for extended school year services. This funding level represents all grants to states for special education.

^c Funds appropriated for REAP are divided equally between two programs: the Small, Rural School Achievement program and the Rural and Low-Income Schools program—i.e., each distinct program received \$90.4 million in FY 2019 (National Education Association, 2018).

^d Funds for 21st CCLC—which are associated with the ESSA—are distributed to states using the formula used to distribute ESEA/ESSA Title I, Part A dollars; states then distribute the funds to eligible entities using a competitive process.

used to secure those individualized services—which are paid for on a per-student basis. IDEA funds can support services only for students with an IEP determining they need these services. States and districts might set eligibility for these services under IDEA.

Block Grants

Most monies used to support summer programming in the districts we studied came from block grants (such as those provided through various funding streams of ESSA) that distribute funds to SEAs, which, in turn, distribute monies to LEAs via SEA formulas. Many ESSA funding streams, referred to as Title I, Title II, etc., provide latitude to states, districts, and schools in the form of flexible block-style grants to support specific student populations. These grants provide common sources of funding for districts offering summer learning programs.

Although summer learning is not always mentioned in the grant language, districts in our study strategically positioned their summer programs to support the purposes of the grant programs in order to access funding. In one study of six school districts, approximately 60 percent of summer program funding came from federal sources, notably Title I, Title II, and 21st CCLC in Title IV of NCLB (Augustine, McCombs, Schwartz, et al., 2013). Here, we describe key federal funding sources, all of which are administered by the ED.

ESSA, Title I. Title I of the ESSA legislation authorizes a total of approximately \$62.5 billion of education spending between 2017 and 2020 in the form of formula grants to states. The legislation permits funds to go to academic support and learning opportunities generally, and specifically mentions summer programming as an allowable use in Title I, Part A and Part C. Title I, Part A of ESSA (Improving Basic Programs Operated by State and Local Educational Agencies) allocates funding to support districts and schools serving large proportions of low-income students. The grants are large and can be used for a variety of services that support the goal of improving basic programs operated by local educational agencies. All of our studied districts used Title I, Part A funding for their programs. Title I, Part C of ESSA (Education of Migratory Children) also specifically references summer programming as a strategy for improving educational outcomes.

ESSA, Title II. Title II, Part A (Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants) provides formula funds to be used for improving educational outcomes by increasing the quality of teachers, principals, and other schools leaders in schools and increasing the number of high-quality teachers, principals, and other school leaders in schools serving low-income populations. Districts use most of the funding provided to states through Title II for professional development activities for teachers or for hiring additional teachers to reduce class sizes (ED, 2015b; National Education Association, 2018). The legislation does not prohibit Title II spending for summer programs; one of our studied districts was able to allocate more than \$300,000 in Title II funding to professional development activities associated with its summer programs.

ESSA, Title III, Title IV, Part A SSAE, and Title V. Three titles of ESSA affect specific populations of students via block grants and specifically mention summer OST as an allowable use. Two of these grants are Language Acquisition State Grants (Title III, Part A) and the REAP (Title V, Part B, Subparts 1 and 2).⁹ Similar to the Migrant Education grant program, summer programming is only one of a variety of allowable uses for these grants. The third grant is new: The Student Support and Academic Enrichment Program (Title IV, Part A, Subpart 1) offers funding opportunities to support three desired outcomes: (1) providing student access to a well-rounded education, (2) improving school conditions for learning, and (3) improving the use of technology for achievement and digital literacy. Although neither the legislation nor its guidance specifically mention summer programs, the guidance suggests that this would be an allowable use by including references to after-school programs and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics STEM enrichment to improve student achievement.

Competitive Funding

Grants Mandating Out-of-School Time

The largest competitive federal funding stream focused on OST programing is the 21st CCLC (ESSA, Title IV, Part B). This grant program targets school or community providers who work with students outside the normal school day or as part of an extended day—before school, after school, during the weekend, and in summer programs. The grants are intended to increase academic

⁹ This program is made up of two funding streams: Small, Rural School Achievement Program and Rural and Low-Income Schools Program.

achievement but also to provide students with a broad array of activities and programs that complement academics and engage their families.

States receive 21st CCLC funding as a formula grant; however, the law requires funds to be distributed competitively among LEAs and other summer program providers, such as community-based organizations (CBOs). ESSA stipulates that programs receiving awards must provide academic enrichment opportunities to students, prioritizing those from high-poverty areas or low-performing schools.

Grants Supporting Summer Programming as an “Allowable Use”

Other competitive grant opportunities for states or LEAs include summer programming as an allowable use. Such grant programs under ESSA are the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Program (Title IV, Part A); Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) State Literacy Discretionary/Competitive Grant (Title II, Part B); the Promise Neighborhoods Discretionary/Competitive Grant (Title IV, Part F); and the Full Service Community Schools Program Discretionary/Competitive Grant (Title IV, Part F). AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), two initiatives managed by the CNCS, provide another potential source of support for summer programs. Instead of funding, these grants offer subsidized or free labor to support programs. District staff can apply directly for these competitively awarded grants.

Federal funding provided most of the support to summer programs in our studied districts.

Other Competitive Opportunities

Many other competitive grant programs administered through a variety of federal government departments can be used to support youth in the summer, but they are much smaller than the funding streams discussed here and could have additional requirements or specifications for applicants.¹⁰

Federal Grants Were an Important Source of Funding for Summer Programs in the Districts We Studied

Federal funding provided most of the support to summer programs in our studied districts. Interviewees provided insight on what enabled them to access federal funding. All of our studied

¹⁰ For additional funding opportunities, readers are encouraged to consult the National Summer Learning Association’s 2016 Funding Resource Guide (2016) and the National Education Association’s ESSA federal funding guide (2018).

districts worked on increasing buy-in for summer learning among district leadership. Summer program leaders are usually not included in budget meetings or in districts' strategic decisions, and having champions of summer programming in those meetings helped secure access to federal funds in the study districts.¹¹ This is particularly important for such funding streams as ESSA Title I, which are often spent out during the school year. Typically, a high-level district official must set aside Title I dollars for summer programming in the face of competing school-year needs. Gaining district leadership buy-in on the importance of summer programming also helps when seeking state funding, as we discuss in Chapter Three.

Federal Policies Can Affect the Quality of Summer Learning Programs

As indicated by the discussion above, most federal funding opportunities used for summer programs have flexible rules and are not targeted specifically to summer programs; thus, their impact on summer learning program quality has been limited. However, ESSA Title I funding requires that certified teachers deliver academic instruction, which supports program quality. In addition, USDA funding for meals might allow program leaders to offer full-day summer programs, which could contribute to more-consistent student attendance (for children of working parents) and thus to positive student outcomes. Other federal funding streams, such as 21st CCLC, require states to develop eligibility criteria (e.g., summer programs must last at least four weeks) that might affect quality; we describe this process in our discussion of state policies in the next chapter.

What Challenges Are Associated with Federal Policies?

Although summer programs clearly benefit from the availability of federal funding, there are a variety of challenges associated with acquiring and relying on these funds.

There Is High Competition for Limited Funds

Relatively speaking, there are few federal funds available and high competition for them. One interviewee noted, "There's not

Summer program leaders are usually not included in budget meetings or in districts' strategic decisions, and having champions of summer programming in those meetings helped secure access to federal funds in the study districts.

¹¹ For more information on buy-in and its impact on district summer programs, see Augustine and Thompson, 2017.



enough to cover the demand by a long shot.” Although there are many grants that can be used to fund summer programs, this interviewee emphasized that most “are very small pots of money, or they are bigger pots with many other uses and only a small amount actually goes to support after-school and summer [programming].” In a given year, other initiatives, such as early childhood or career and technical education, might receive funding that went to summer programs in years past. This creates challenges for year-to-year sustainability and can mean that summer program leaders need to defend their programs and communicate results to district and state representatives on an annual basis. Even established summer programs can lose funding in any given year; many federal grants are funneled to a specific district for only a defined period of time.

Some Funds Can Be Used for Only a Specific Population of Students

ESSA’s focus on providing funding for specific populations can also create challenges for districts that serve a mix of students in their summer programs. For example, if 10 percent of a summer program’s enrollment is composed of English language learner (ELL) students, it might not be possible to access the ELL-specific funding under ESSA Title III for these students because most of the costs of the program would support non-ELL students. Some districts find ways to blend, braid, or otherwise combine funding targeted to specific groups with other funding for their summer programs; others resort to running separate summer programs for such subgroups as ELL students.

Strong District Capacity Is Needed to Access and Administer Federal Grant Funding

Finally, accessing any of the funding described here requires district capacity. To access federal funding, summer program leaders need to convince district leaders that summer programming deserves funding; that, in turn, typically necessitates program evaluation or an awareness of evaluation results from studies of similar programs. For competitive grants, districts need skilled grant writers (and, again, summer program leaders might have to persuade district leaders to allow grant writing for summer programming). Also, because federal grant opportunities shift year to year as legislation and regulations change, staying current on all federal streams and their allowable uses requires an ongoing investment of time by district staff. If districts want to combine different sources of funding to support summer programs, this also requires specific knowledge.

Key Takeaways

- Federal funding programs under ESSA and other forms of federal support can affect program scale and sustainability. Among the districts we studied, federal funding provided most of the monetary support for their summer programs.
- Federal policies can also affect the quality of summer learning programs, such as by requiring certified teachers to deliver academic instruction or requiring states to develop eligibility criteria for distributing federal funding.
- The availability of federal funding can be influenced by the high level of competition for available funds, restrictions on which students can be supported by grant funding, district leader support for summer programming, and whether a district has sufficient capacity to access (and perhaps combine) federal grant money.
- Although federal funding streams are important in sustaining summer learning programs, federal policy does not prioritize summer programming above other approaches to educating students (as is, of course, the case for many education interventions).

To access federal funding, summer program leaders need to convince district leaders that summer programming deserves funding; that, in turn, typically necessitates program evaluation or an awareness of evaluation results from studies of similar programs.



CHAPTER THREE

State Policies Affecting Summer Learning Programs

In this chapter, we describe how state policies affect program scale, sustainability, and quality; we also describe the challenges and enablers associated with these policies. State policies affecting summer learning programs vary widely across the country. In the districts we studied, summer program leaders had difficulty identifying state financial support for their programs, but some noted other ways in which state policies affected their programs.

Some states, however, including California and Wyoming, have provided a significant amount of funding for district-based summer programs. States sometimes add criteria or special priorities for accessing federal funds. What follows is by no means a comprehensive examination; rather, it is an illustration of how state policies can affect district-provided summer learning programs, using the policies identified by our literature search and our interviewees.

How Do State Policies Affect Summer Learning Programs?

States Can Have Significant Impact by Interpreting and Regulating the Use of Federal Funds

The main way that state policies affect summer programs is through the interpretation, regulation, and administration of federal funding streams. Many federal funding programs are first awarded to SEAs, which then have authority to distribute funds to LEAs. How those funds are distributed depends partly on federal program mandates but also on SEA decisions. States can write additional requirements and set some of the terms for distributing federal funding. For formula grants, states have some freedom in interpreting federal regulations or guidance, which can restrict allowable uses. In some cases, states can also set their own formulas for distributing funds and can choose which measures are used in those calculations.

Interpretation of Allowable Uses

SEAs interpret allowable uses of federal funds. For example, for an SEA to access ESSA Title I funds, it needs to submit detailed plans specifying distribution formulas and uses of the funding. Districts go through a similar process to access funding from states. They have to document the uses of ESSA Title I monies, for example, and get state approval to move forward with those plans.

State Title I coordinators could impose more-rigorous restrictions on district plans than those required by federal guidelines. And the authority that states have to interpret federal guidance might increase in the coming years, given the greater state-level authority conveyed by ESSA. As states are granted greater freedom to make decisions about how to support schools and hold them accountable, it is likely that states also might get more freedom to interpret statutory requirements of federal funding streams. How states decide to act could affect district-provided summer learning programs.

State Allocations of Federal Funds

SEAs also distribute federal funds. When states receive funding from ESSA Title IV, Part B, or from 21st CCLC, they set the requirements in the requests for proposals (RFPs) using what the state agency perceives as the particular needs of the statewide

student population. These requirements must meet federal expectations, but states might ask for plans, assurances, and uses of funds from districts.

In 2016, nine states required 21st CCLC grantees to provide summer programming and eight other states prioritized funding providers that delivered summer and after-school programs. Certain states' RFPs also called for minimum program hours during the summer or after school, maximum student-to-staff ratios, adherence to standards, and other requirements that can affect program quality. For example, Pennsylvania's 2016 RFP (which required grantees to include summer programs) requested that applicants provide a minimum of six weeks of summer programming of at least 12 hours per week or provide justification for why this threshold could not be met.

State Laws Restricting the Use of Federal Funds

Finally, some states have passed laws related to the use of federal funding. For example, California passed SB798 in 2010. This legislation requires 15 percent of any increase in 21st CCLC funding from the federal government to be set aside for funding summer programs. This is an example of how a state can (1) enforce its own priorities for how federal funding will be used and (2) generate additional financial support for summer programming.

Some States Also Provide Funding to Support Summer Learning

States can designate certain amounts of their budgets for grants to LEAs or individual schools. These grant programs' budgets are typically—but not always—smaller than federal programs because of the smaller size of states' budgets, but some of them are focused on summer funding in ways that federal funding streams are not. Across the country, different states have created a variety of grants that have been or can be used to fund district-led summer learning programs. Some have mandated particular program models, mainly to support vulnerable student populations; others have offered more-flexible (although often competitive) streams. Aside from these formula and competitive state funding streams, other state policies could fund summer programming indirectly. Table 3.1 presents examples of these three types of funding programs; we discuss each below.

TABLE 3.1
Examples of State Funding That Supports District Summer Learning Programs

Type	Grant Program	State	Recent Appropriations
Formula grants	K-3 Plus Program	New Mexico	FY 2016: \$24 million ^a
	Bridges	Wyoming	FY 2014: \$16.5 million ^b
	Supplemental Academic Instruction	Florida	FY 2016: \$656.8 million ^c
Competitive grants	After School Education and Safety (ASES) program	California	FY 2018: \$550 million ^d
	Quality Enhancements in After-School and Out-of-School Time (ASOST-Q) program	Massachusetts	FY 2017: \$2.7 million ^e
	Community Schools Grant Initiative	New York	FY 2018: \$150 million ^f
	Extended School Day/School Violence Prevention Program	New York	FY 2017: \$24.3 million ^g
Other funding	Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program (EITC) program	Pennsylvania	FY 2017: \$137.5 million ^h
	Student Success Initiative	Texas	FY 2017: \$15.9 million ⁱ

^a Nott, 2017.

^b Frazer, 2014.

^c Florida Legislature, 2016.

^d California Department of Education, 2018.

^e Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, 2016.

^f New York State Education Department, 2016; 2017a.

^g New York State Education Department, 2017c.

^h This amount represents the total funds donated to EITC organizations in the 2017–2018 cycle, not all of which would support summer programs. Hardison, 2019.

ⁱ Texas Legislature, 2015.

States can affect the quality of summer programs by funding only specific programming models, as occurs in New Mexico, or requiring specific quality components, as does Massachusetts’ ASOST-Q Grant Program (discussed later in this chapter). As of 2016, several states provided recommendations or requirements for factors associated with quality, such as teacher qualifications, program duration, class size, and minimum attendance in their grant applications (Borman, Schmidt, and Hosp, 2016).

State Formula Funding

Some states have created funding streams to support summer learning programs. Funds are distributed to all districts on the basis of student demographics or distributed to certain districts that meet a threshold of vulnerability. Although we refer to these

funding streams as *formula grants*, it should be noted that accessing these funds still requires districts to complete applications, documentation, and a significant amount of work.

For example, in 2004, the Wyoming Legislature created a pilot to allow districts to access funds to support programs outside normal school hours (Frazer, 2014). The pilot ultimately became a statewide opportunity—Wyoming Bridges—that funded summer programs provided by districts for students most at risk of failure; i.e., students receiving free- or reduced-price meals, ELL students, migrant students, and students at risk academically as identified by their district. Districts could create their own summer program model as long as it met certain specifications related to duration, time spent on academics, curriculum, and class size. In 2013, all but one school district participated in the Wyoming Bridges program, which paid for 80 percent of these districts’ summer expenditures. Furthermore, 80 percent of students identified as at-risk participated, and evaluators concluded that almost all students met at least some of the goals identified in their individualized learning plans (Wyoming Department of Education, 2014).

New Mexico’s statewide grant program, though more prescriptive than Wyoming Bridges, also targeted at-risk students in the summer. Called New Mexico K-3 Plus, it focused specifically on schools receiving low-performing ratings or schools serving large populations of at-risk students in kindergarten through third grade (New Mexico Legislature, 2017). The program was piloted in 2007 and converted into a statewide program in 2012 (New Mexico Legislature, 2017). New Mexico K-3 Plus required districts to run a summer program that offered daily instruction in mathematics and reading for 25 days before the start of the school year. Funding was distributed to all eligible districts as long as they submitted a plan for implementation and proof that they qualified.¹² The grant program might have affected the quality of summer programs: Every school receiving K-3 Plus funding implemented a similar model set by the Public Education Department, which specified curriculum, dosage, teacher qualifications, and more (New Mexico Legislature, 2017).

**[A]ccessing
[state] funds
. . . requires
districts to
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documentation,
and a
significant
amount of
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¹² This program was repealed and renamed as the K-5 Plus program in April 2019. Shrinking budgets and increasing numbers of schools and districts applying for funding led to some schools being notified that they were not funded through the New Mexico K-3 Plus programs for summer 2017 (New Mexico Legislature, 2017; Nott, 2017).

States can also provide financial support to summer programs through formula grants that have flexible allowable uses. For example, Florida’s Supplemental Academic Instruction distributed formula grants to all districts using the characteristics of their student populations. Although some priorities for funding use were not associated with summer (such as an extra hour of daily reading instruction during the school year), the language of the legislation specifically stated that “instruction may be provided to a student in any manner and at any time during or beyond the regular 180-day term” (2016 Florida Statute, Title XLVIII, Section 1011.62). Because of this flexibility, some Florida districts have used these funds to offer summer programming opportunities for students.

**Some states
... have ...
large and
flexible grants to
support summer
programming.**

Competitive Funding

Another strategy to support summer learning at the state level is to create optional, competitive grants that can be spent on summer programming. Unlike the grants described above, these are not available to every qualifying school district; instead, districts, schools, or community partners are required to participate in a competitive application process. These types of grants are uncommon, but we describe two states that have had large and flexible grants to support summer programming.

As of 2016, California’s ASES program was the largest state funding stream dedicated to OST. In that year, the program was equivalent to half the size of the federal appropriations for 21st CCLC, and approximately 6 percent of annual funds were spent on summer programs (Pitcock, 2016). It was approved by a voter initiative in 2002 with the intent to “encourage schools and school districts to provide safe and educationally enriching alternatives for children and youth during non-school hours” (California Department of Education, 2018). In 2017, an additional \$50 million in ongoing funding was allocated to the program. Although not formula-based, ASES gave preference to programs serving at-risk youth. Eligible programs were required to focus on literacy or another academic subject, provide enrichment, and employ staff members who qualified as instructional aids in the district.

Another example of a competitive grant, Massachusetts’ ASOST-Q program, was intended to fund programming for students that supported “children’s and youth’s academic, social,

and emotional development outside of the regular school day” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, undated). ASOST-Q was not nearly as well funded as ASES in California, but appropriations steadily increased from 2014 through 2017.

ASOST-Q prioritized summer programs that addressed barriers to participation and met specific quality guidelines. These guidelines covered providing both enrichment and academic supports, forming partnerships with community organizations, serving ELL students or students with disabilities, involving family members, hiring qualified staff members, and creating a comprehensive evaluation system (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, 2016).

Finally, some states have created education-related grant programs that are not specific to summer programs but can be used for them. Across the country, state grants primarily intended to fund programs that address STEM skills, college readiness, violence prevention, workforce development, and community schools initiatives can be used for summer programming. As of 2017, the New York Department of Education offered two such grant opportunities. The Community Schools Grant Initiative offered funds for districts or schools that were working to create on-site wraparound services to better support learning (New York State Education Department, 2017b). This funding could be used to support mandatory summer programming in community schools. The Extended School Day/School Violence Prevention Program offered funds that CBOs and school districts could apply for; applications could specify curbing school violence through a summer programming strategy (New York State Education Department, 2017c).

Other State Funding Opportunities for Summer Learning Programs

Tax Benefits for Donations

In addition to grants, some state legislation supports funding to educational programs via tax benefits for donations. Pennsylvania’s EITC program is one such approach provided by the state’s Department of Community and Economic Development. Each year, the state legislature sets aside a

[Some] state grants primarily intended to fund programs that address STEM skills, college readiness, violence prevention, workforce development, and community schools initiatives can be used for summer programming.

maximum amount of EITC funding—around \$100 million in 2017. Eligible businesses in the state can donate to three types of nonprofits: K–12 scholarships, pre-K scholarships, or educational improvement organizations (Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, undated). As of 2020, approximately \$30 million per year is slated for educational improvement organizations, many of which offer multiple summer programs throughout the state. School districts cannot receive this funding but can partner with organizations that do. The donating organizations receive tax credits for up to 75 percent of the donation—or 90 percent if the business agrees to make a similar payment the following year (Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, undated).

Online Curricula

Texas has used another funding strategy through the state’s Student Success Initiative. Students in grades five and eight who fail state assessments in mathematics and/or reading are required to receive remediation prior to the next testing administration. Because of school schedules, this remediation programming often takes place during the first few weeks of summer. Although Texas had provided formula grants to districts to serve these students, the state moved to providing statewide licenses for online curricula instead. For example, during the 2016–2017 school year, Texas bought licenses for Istation to support reading in grades three through five, Compass Learning for reading in grades six through eight, and Apex Learning for high school English. To support mathematics in all grades, the state bought a license for Imagine Math (Expanded Learning Opportunities Council, 2016). These licenses could lower the costs of summer programs but were not direct grants to summer programs.

City and County Taxation Authority

Another state-level mechanism for raising money for summer programming is granting cities or counties new taxation authority. For example, in 1987, the Florida Legislature passed a bill enabling counties to create independent special districts that can levy taxes to support children’s services. A council made up of various county stakeholders was given decisionmaking power over the funding (2016 Florida Statute, Title XI, Section 125.901). As of 2017, summer learning programs in some county school districts,

such as Miami-Dade and Broward, were using funding raised and administered by these councils.

Other State Policies Can Affect Summer Programs (Without Funding Them)

Some states have policies that affect but do not directly fund summer programs. We explore two types of these policies below: mandating summer programs and creating councils to make recommendations about OST programs.

Mandates for Summer School or Summer Reading

As of 2014, 18 states, plus Washington, D.C., required or recommended summer school or a summer reading program for students reading below grade level, which can help support summer program scale and sustainability. However, not all of them provided concomitant funding. In the six regions where summer programs were required—Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Missouri, and Washington, D.C.—the requirement was contingent on available state funding (Workman, 2014). The other 13 states recommended summer as an option for remediation. Half of the 18 states, plus Washington, D.C., required that summer schools, when offered, be run using “research-based practices,” with three outlining some program specifics (Borman, Schmidt, and Hosp, 2016). For example, Washington, D.C., required that summer programs monitor student attendance and that students have fewer than three absences during the summer to be promoted to the next grade level.

Councils Focused on Out-of-School-Time Learning Opportunities

Another example of state policy that might affect summer programming is the recent creation of state-level OST councils. For example, a Texas bill created the Texas Expanded Learning Opportunities Council in 2013 to study issues related to OST and review programs available outside the school day (Texas Education Agency, 2014). It started its work by releasing a strategic plan in 2014 identifying the need for additional state funding and acknowledging the importance of summer learning (Expanded Learning Opportunities Council, 2014). A Pennsylvania group of state legislators called the After School Caucus has focused on OST and summer learning, although this group was established voluntarily rather than by legislation (Aument, 2015). As of 2017,

As of 2014, 18 states, plus Washington, D.C., required or recommended summer school or a summer reading program for students reading below grade level, which can help support summer program scale and sustainability.

similar councils or caucuses existed in Massachusetts, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington, among other states. These groups have advocated more state funding and continued federal funding and have highlighted data on program quality.

What Challenges Are Associated with State Policies?

The challenges associated with state policies are, for the most part, similar to those connected to federal policy.

Funding Streams Are Unreliable

As with federal funds, state funding streams are unreliable as a result of shifting legislative priorities and changes in governorship. New Mexico's K-3 Plus program experienced budget shortfalls in 2017, and funding for the Wyoming Bridges program has been combined with other state support to schools as a result of changing school funding models (Watson, 2017). And because state funding, like federal funding, is scarce, available funding is often dispersed via competition. Significant capacity is needed at the district level to apply for competitive funds and then to ensure that all requirements are met, particularly if combining different funds.

Some Sources of State Funding Are Difficult to Obtain

In addition, some sources of state funding that could be used for summer programming are, in reality, hard to access for this purpose. There are a variety of state policies with specific goals or initiatives in mind (e.g., community schools, youth employment, and STEM education) that could provide funding for summer programming as a means to these other goals. If districts want to use these funds for summer programming, they must align their programs with the funding priority. There are also some states that recommend summer programs for remediation but do not provide funding for them.

As with federal funding, interviewees suggested advocating within their districts to prioritize summer programming and pursuing state funding. Persuading district leaders to apply for state grants that could be used to support summer learning was easier if program leaders had data demonstrating the benefits of such programs.

As with federal funds, state funding streams are unreliable as a result of shifting legislative priorities and changes in governorship.

Interviewees also recommended engaging with SEA employees who work in the office that regulates compliance with ESSA. Through such engagement, one of our studied districts was able to access Title I funding for enrichment costs associated with its summer learning program even though the district proposal was first denied. Other interviewees concurred, and one recommended that districts create one-page fact sheets explaining why summer learning programs should be funded through ESSA. She stressed that state policymakers should be pleased to learn about programs aimed at increasing academic achievement that are based on evidence. Similar advocacy at the city level was also mentioned; in the next chapter, we explore some examples of the ways in which city policies can affect summer learning programs.

Interviewees also recommended engaging with SEA employees who work in the office that regulates compliance with ESSA.

Key Takeaways

- The main way that state policies affect summer programs is by interpreting, regulating, and administering federal funding streams. SEAs also distribute federal funds through statewide competitions. Some states have passed laws that set aside some portion of federal funds for state priority programs.
- State requests for applications for federal funding might require staffing models, minimum program hours, maximum student-to-staff ratios, and how the program will adhere to standards. How program leaders answer these questions might affect funding decisions, which can also influence the quality of summer programs.
- State funding has less impact on the scale and sustainability of summer learning programs than federal funding because states provide funding at lower levels. However, a few states—such as California, New Mexico, and Wyoming—have created funding streams that are arguably as significant as federal sources.
- Other state policies, such as mandates on summer programs and OST councils, can affect summer programs, even if they do not provide funding.
- The sustainability challenges associated with state policies are, for the most part, similar to those connected to federal policy.
- Summer program leaders need to be cognizant of state funds that explicitly or implicitly include summer as an allowable use.



CHAPTER FOUR

City Policies Affecting Summer Learning Programs

As is the case with state policymakers, city leaders can support summer programs in a variety of ways, and city policies vary greatly across the country. Most of these policies result from city residents organizing to support youth programming. Based on our literature search and interviews, we outline a few examples in this chapter to highlight some of the ways that city policy can support district-provided summer learning programs.

How Do City Policies Affect Summer Learning Programs?

City policy can affect the scale and sustainability of district-provided summer learning programs by setting aside funds in the city's budget or by generating new revenue for summer programming. Although cities can also act as strategic partners to district programs in other ways, such as by hiring youth for summer employment programs who then work in the district programs or by partnering in citywide partnerships to improve access to quality summer opportunities, we do not discuss these practices here.

Some Ballot Initiatives Result in City Leaders Setting Aside Funds to Support Education and Other Initiatives

Some city leaders have set aside funding to support education, health, and other initiatives for children and families. For example, in Oakland, California, the city set aside some of its annual budget to pay for the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth (OFCY). The fund was originally created by a ballot initiative in 1996 as Kids First! and was reauthorized by voters in 2009 with expanded funding. Each year, the mayor, the city council, and community members decide in committee how to allocate 3 percent of the city's general funds to support OFCY's strategic plan. In the most recent 2016–2019 strategic plan (Bright Research Group, 2015), one strategy focused on summer enrichment opportunities, and in 2015, OFCY provided close to \$1 million dollars to the Oakland Unified School District for summer learning.

Voters have passed beverage taxes to support educational or youth and family initiatives in other cities. This could also be a strategy to support summer learning.

Other Ballot Initiatives Generate New Revenue for Summer Learning

Other cities have passed ballot initiatives to garner new tax dollars to support summer learning programs. Voters in Seattle, Washington, approved a ballot initiative in 1990 to dedicate funds to families and education, and the initiative has been approved every seven years since. Instead of setting aside funding from its general operating budget, the city raised a property tax levy called the Seattle Families and Education Levy, which is administered by the city's Office of Education in collaboration with the Seattle Public Schools. Although not all of the funding went to support summer programming, the levy lists that as a specific priority. In 2018, the city invested almost \$4 million in summer learning programs that served specific types of students. The levy raised \$220.4 million over its seven-year term (2012–2019) (Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning, undated; 2019). Although not specific to summer learning, voters have passed beverage taxes to support educational, youth, and family initiatives in other cities (e.g., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Berkeley, California; and Boulder, Colorado). This could also be a strategy to support summer learning.

Both the Oakland and Seattle initiatives appear to have gained voter support over time. In Oakland, the 1996 ballot passed with 57 percent of the vote. In 2009, the OFCY was reauthorized for 12 years with 72 percent of the vote (Ballotpedia, 2009).

The Seattle Families and Education Levy passed with 56 percent of voters in support in 1990. The 2011 reauthorization and levy increase passed with 63 percent of voters in support (Ballotpedia, 2011).

City Funding Does Not Appear to Have a Significant Impact on Quality

City funding that goes toward district-provided summer programs might affect sustainability and scale, but we did not identify examples of how it has influenced quality. It is possible that the committees overseeing the distribution of city funds could set guidelines for summer program quality, but we have not observed this. Some cities, such as Seattle, set expectations for the kinds of students targeted by the funded programming (such as ELL students, students from low-income families, etc.), but these targets are intended to expand access to subgroups rather than to improve program quality.

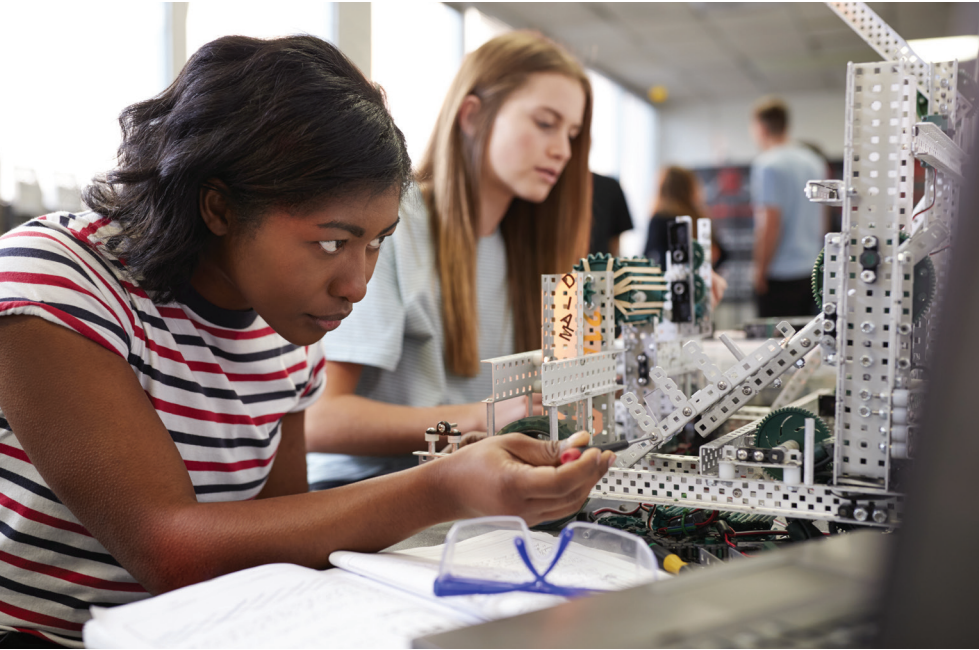
What Challenges Are Associated with City Policies?

City Funding Often Requires Voter Support

The key challenge associated with directing city funding to district-provided summer programs is that it often requires voter support. Creating coalitions and voter support to pass ballot measures that raise taxes can be difficult work, and a variety of efforts have failed. However, once these measures are passed initially, it might be easier to pass renewals in subsequent ballots, as we have observed.

Some advocates in cities that have created voter-approved funding programs have written accounts of what enabled their success. For example, supporters of the initial Oakland Kids First! initiative in 1996 framed the funding debate not around how the new money would be spent but around the problems (faced by children) that the initiative was trying to alleviate (HoSang, 1997). That made it more difficult to stand in opposition. Organizers also involved youth in visible ways throughout the campaign by inviting them to meetings and providing matching T-shirts to increase visibility. Supporters also addressed concerns raised by other organizations that benefit from city funding—such as unions, senior citizen organizations, and the school district.

Creating coalitions and voter support to pass ballot measures that raise taxes can be difficult work, and a variety of efforts have failed.



Key Takeaways

- City policy affects the scale and sustainability of district-provided summer learning programs mainly by setting aside funds in the city’s budget or by generating new revenue earmarked for summer programming.
- We did not identify examples of how city funding has influenced quality.
- The key challenge associated with directing city funding to district-provided summer programs is that it often requires voter support.
- Some advocates of summer learning have built support for voter initiatives by (1) emphasizing the problems faced by children that the initiative was designed to address and (2) involving youth visibly in the campaign.

CHAPTER FIVE

District Policies and Practices Affecting Summer Learning Programs

In this chapter, we explore the types of district policies that affect summer learning programs in our study districts.¹³ Regardless of the availability of federal, state, or city funding, school districts largely decide on the type and number of summer programs they offer. District policies structure how federal, state, and city resources are used and determine the allocation of general operating dollars toward summer programming. In so doing, district leaders might compare the merits of funding summer programs with those of funding other interventions, such as pre-K education, after-school programming, or new school-year curricula. Districts also serve as gatekeepers to many of the funding streams discussed in previous chapters. Federal formula funding, after being filtered through state governments, is typically dispersed to LEAs. State funding is also typically dispersed through LEAs. District leaders ultimately decide whether to use available funding for summer programs. For this reason, efforts to secure funding typically start with local advocacy. No amount of federal or state funding will guarantee summer programming without district leaders' support.

Efforts to secure funding typically start with local advocacy. No amount of federal or state funding will guarantee summer programming without district leaders' support.

¹³ Although we interviewed leaders of other summer programs, the number of interviews we conducted in the three study districts allowed us to explore district policies in these three cases in much greater detail.

In districts that have decided to offer summer learning programs, several district-level policies and practices have additional impacts on program scale, sustainability, and quality. We remind readers that, as described in Chapter One, what is considered a policy in one district might simply be a practice in another. Therefore, our discussion in this chapter focuses on both formal policies and regular practices.

In this chapter, we also provide recommendations specific to three summer programming tasks affected by district policies and practices. We reserve more-general recommendations about district policy for Chapter Six. The recommendations in this chapter are based on the experiences of our study districts and might be most relevant, therefore, for urban school districts.

How Do District Policies and Practices Affect Summer Programs?

District policies and practices regarding many issues—hiring, transportation, curriculum, and other factors—can affect summer program sustainability, scale, and quality. Here, we provide examples of policies and practices related to three key summer program tasks: (1) establishing and approving programs, (2) targeting and recruiting students, and (3) hiring and compensating staff. The program approval process affects both scale and sustainability, as does deciding which students to serve (because different students have different costs associated with them). Staffing and compensation policies affect how many and which staff can be hired—both of which affect quality. We acknowledge that there are many other summer program tasks undertaken in districts; we selected these because of the variation in approaches that we observed in our studied districts.

Districts Approve Summer Learning Programs in Various Ways

Districts use various mechanisms to establish or approve summer learning programs, such as setting board policies related to summer programming or creating committees to approve programs. Board policies might specify whether an individual principal or an outside CBO can run a summer learning program in a district building.

Board Policies and Planning Councils

Districts can establish board policies stipulating the provision of summer programming, which can facilitate program sustainability. This was the case in Dallas, for example, and summer program leaders there could assume their programs would continue from year to year and thus plan for summer early in the year. When programs are not mandated, there can be uncertainty about their continuation, which creates the risk of delayed planning efforts.

Some districts without official board policies establish summer planning councils or teams to decide which programs to fund, which students to serve, the amount of funding to provide, and other aspects of summer programming. These centralized bodies can also be responsible for logistical planning, such as coordinating transportation and scheduling program dates, as was the case in Rochester.

According to our interviewees, central teams provide many benefits, which can contribute to program scale, sustainability, and quality. Coordinating multiple programs within a district might lead to efficiencies. A central team can help ensure that program logistics (dates, times, etc.) are organized to minimize transportation and building costs. A central team can also help structure hiring practices to minimize competition for summer staff. Furthermore, central teams can require programs to implement certain features, such as a minimum program length, teacher qualifications, time spent on academic subjects, or curricular emphasis, to receive district funding.

Allowing Principals and CBOs to Run Summer Programs

Some districts allow principals or CBOs to run programs in school buildings over the summer, which has many potential benefits. In these districts, principals can allocate some of their operating or ESSA Title I budgeted funds or apply for school-specific federal or state grants if they want to offer summer programming to their students. CBOs can use their own funding to run programs, and their costs are lowered if the district allows them to use a building free of charge. These arrangements can therefore bring additional financial and human resources to bear, increasing a district's capacity to serve summer students and therefore the total number of students served. Moreover, principals and teachers at a particular school might have already earned the trust of parents, which could help them in recruiting and retaining

When programs are not mandated, there can be uncertainty about their continuation, which creates the risk of delayed planning efforts.

If principals and CBOs share information and consent to be evaluated, the district can use information about students in various summer program models to learn which practices work best for which students.

students during the summer. Compared with central office district staff, principals might have better knowledge of their students' needs and how best to meet them. And, if principals and CBOs share information and consent to be evaluated, the district can use information about students in various summer program models to learn which practices work best for which students.

District Policies and Practices for Targeting and Recruiting Students Can Affect the Scale of Summer Programs

Districts might have policies prioritizing the types of students that should be served by summer programming. Typically, districts focus on students with greater learning needs, such as those at risk of grade retention, those with IEPs, or ELL students. Districts that target services in this way arguably serve the students who need special services the most. Indeed, mandatory programs for students at risk of grade retention have been demonstrated to improve students' academic outcomes (for example, see, McCombs, Kirby, and Mariano, 2009). Furthermore, some ED grants can be spent on summer programming if the program is targeted to specific subgroups of students—such as grants under ESSA for migrant youth, ELL students, and American Indian youth or IDEA-provided funding for students with IEPs, as discussed in previous chapters. Thus, districts might be able to leverage additional funds for summer depending on the students who are served.

An alternative to targeting specific groups of students for summer programs is to allow any student to enroll. Districts with this policy acknowledge that summer programs can benefit all students, not just those with specific learning needs or characteristics. This approach also avoids the complications associated with identifying and recruiting specific groups of students and can allow planning and recruitment to start earlier in the year.

Some districts ask school-based staff—such as teachers, principals, and counselors—to identify and recruit students for centralized, district-provided summer programs. This strategy can be advantageous. Parents might trust their own school staff more than those in a central district office and thus might be more willing to heed their advice about summer programming. School-based staff members are probably the best informed about students'

individual needs and therefore best placed to make recommendations for academic support in the summer. Moving this task to schools can also free up time for centralized summer office staff to prepare other aspects of the summer programs.

Staffing and Compensation Policy and Practice Affect the Quality of Teachers and Other Staff

A third set of policies and practices associated with summer learning programs relates to staffing and compensation. Given the key roles that teachers and other staff play in summer learning programs, the approaches used to recruit and retain them can affect program quality.

In our study, we found that some program leaders recruited summer teachers in the winter, which allowed strong candidates to be contacted before they committed to other summer employment opportunities. Along with an early timeline, some districts' summer program staff members have implemented rigorous hiring practices for summer teachers and site leaders, such as requiring candidates to agree to be observed as part of the application process. Some districts, such as Dallas and Pittsburgh, used teacher performance data to help ensure that "distinguished" teachers were recruited first. These policies or practices might benefit programs in terms of staff quality.

Summer professional development opportunities can be offered within the context of a summer program, which can benefit teachers and allow access to monies from the ESSA Title II funding stream. In Rochester, the summer teachers taught from 8 a.m. to noon and then engaged together in professional development facilitated by the internal district team from noon to 2 p.m. In a program in Dallas, mentor teachers co-taught with inexperienced teachers in the summer. These kinds of opportunities can both attract teachers to summer programs and further district goals to improve educator effectiveness.

Some program leaders recruited summer teachers in the winter, which allowed strong candidates to be contacted before they committed to other summer employment opportunities.

What Challenges Are Associated with District Policies?

There Are Challenges and Complications Associated with Approving Summer Learning Programs

Although having a centralized team can help with program decisionmaking and continuity, there are challenges associated with having a team approve programs and make funding decisions. Team members might have to decide whether a summer program should continue without evidence of effectiveness. Not all districts have the resources to gather information about program outcomes. Also, when a central team holds decisionmaking power over programs throughout a district, it can diminish the authority and autonomy that might otherwise be granted to individual program leaders, such as school principals interested in hosting summer programs.

Principals might need support for such tasks as budgeting, arranging summer food service, developing a summer curriculum, and working with the union representing custodians.

Although having principals or CBOs manage summer learning programs presents an opportunity to take advantage of existing leadership capacity within the district or the local community, there can be complications associated with delegating the management of summer programs in this way. If these types of program leaders can select their own schedules and sites, costs associated with transportation and facilities might increase (as might competition for specific sites or students). Often, districts try to manage costs by co-locating programs in regions, but this gets complicated when principals or CBOs want to work with particular sites or students. Furthermore, not all principals have experience running summer programs. Principals might need support for such tasks as budgeting, arranging summer food service, developing a summer curriculum, and working with the union representing custodians. A few principals we interviewed suggested that support for their programs was lacking:

Getting keys to get in, getting materials sent over—those are some things you don't necessarily think about . . . It was my first time overseeing or being in charge. There wasn't really a logistics-planning meeting.

There Are Trade-Offs Associated with Deciding Which Students to Serve

By prioritizing certain subgroups, such as students at risk of grade retention, summer learning programs might leave some other students' needs unmet. For example, there might be students on the cusp of passing or being retained, low-income students who do not have free summer program options, or students who do not have safe places to be during the summer.

Also, in the words of one SEA employee, "If a [program targets] some high-needs students, that can really eat up the budget" because of the additional services and spending required for students with additional needs (e.g., social workers, aides). For example, students might need (or be required by law to have) special education teachers, bilingual educators, or social workers in attendance along with the classroom teachers providing academic instruction.

Finally, if districts prioritize at-risk students, they might not be able to identify these students until late in the school year. Not knowing which students will be served during the summer complicates planning for facilities and transportation routes and means that parents will not know their child's eligibility status until soon before the program starts.

An open enrollment strategy, however, is not without its own challenges. Without a specific target group to plan for, curriculum staff need to design lessons and activities to cater to a variety of ability levels. As one district employee said:

When we wrote the program, we wrote it under the assumption that the target group was students that were struggling readers, who needed help with comprehension, vocabulary use. . . . But what we found when we met with [program] staff after last summer was they actually had a large group of students who were on level or beyond.

This staff member was told that the curriculum as designed was not adequate for all attending students.

School-based staff can help in targeting students, but one drawback to this strategy is that it requires school-based staff to understand and support the district's summer programming structure. Principals or individual teachers who do not believe that the summer learning programs are a worthwhile venture might not

By prioritizing certain subgroups, such as students at risk of grade retention, summer learning programs might leave some other students' needs unmet.

identify students or recommend summer programming to parents. This approach can make it difficult to ensure equal access. As one interviewee noted, “some are aware of it and largely supportive . . . but for a lot of teachers, it’s not on their radar.”

Recruiting High-Quality Summer Program Staff Can Be Challenging

Summer programs benefit from high-quality personnel, but recruiting them can be challenging. As with most intensive processes, there are drawbacks to rigorous hiring practices for summer learning program staff. Aligning these practices with union regulations can be difficult because unions sometimes require seniority-based hiring for summer teaching positions. If practices that are not based on seniority are allowed, program leaders have to find the time to manage and complete the recruiting process, which can be resource-intensive. A district in our study in which summer program leaders hired early reported that some teachers accepted positions and then backed out later in the school year when new opportunities arose.

Some teachers might choose not to participate in summer learning because they want or need to engage in professional development during the summer. Districts often provide training for teachers right after the school year ends or just before the new school year begins. Scheduling all professional development opportunities around summer programming might be challenging, but conflicts prevent programs from hiring some teachers.

Although teachers might be attracted to various summer opportunities because of compensation or opportunities for professional development, other district staff who already work on 12-month contracts might be less enthusiastic. Some districts ask these administrators to lead summer program sites during summer months without extra pay. This can mean cost savings for the program, but it can also lead to resentment if staff members feel they are being asked to do something in addition to their normal summer duties. One district leader said:

When they choose people to be the [summer] principals, it’s usually assistant principals, and it seems like they are chosen by the short straw. Assistant principals and principals used to get paid, but now it’s considered part of their job. So it’s not “yay” because there’s no extra pay.

Recommendations Related to Establishing Programs, Targeting Students, and Staffing

Here, we have developed a set of recommendations for establishing and approving programs, targeting and recruiting students, and providing staffing and compensation. We acknowledge that there are many other summer programming tasks we could have addressed; for a more comprehensive set of recommendations around planning, launching, and executing summer programs, see Schwartz et al., 2018.

Summer program leaders often run up against roadblocks associated with working in a district environment mostly focused on the regular school year. District policies and practices, whether intentionally created to affect summer programming or not, can benefit and challenge summer programs. Each district will have to identify its own barriers and solutions. The list below might help summer program leaders consider how best to approve programs and then recruit students and staff for them. There are many other summer program tasks that leaders could interrogate by cataloging the relevant policies and practices that affect them, and then addressing those that serve as barriers to program scale, sustainability, and quality.

Establishing and Approving Programs

Because of the benefits described by our interviewees, we recommend an official board policy stipulating (1) summer programming and (2) that a central body make subsequent decisions about summer programming and conduct the following tasks:

- Catalog all summer opportunities in the district in one place. Even if a central body does not have program approval authority, centrally gathering program information can lead to conversations about logistical efficiency and quality across programs.
- Collect outcomes data on all summer programs. Not only does this create opportunities to build buy-in if student outcomes are positive, it also gives a district the opportunity to compare best practices across programs and use this information to improve quality. These data can also be used in local advocacy efforts and in support of grant applications.

- Hold principals and community providers to standards of quality. If districts choose to allow principals or CBOs to use district facilities for summer programming, they could set minimum quality expectations, such as the number of hours dedicated to academics during the program.
- Let principals know in advance what support the district will and will not provide if they want to run their own summer program.
- Similarly, if community programs are using district sites, jointly develop recruiting and enrollment policies to minimize competition with district- or school-run programs.

Targeting and Recruiting Students

When targeting and recruiting students, we recommend the following:

- If programs are open to a broad array of students, start developing the curriculum in the fall. It will take longer to develop the different materials needed to meet a wide variety of students' academic needs.
- If targeting students with special needs, budget for the higher-cost implications to ensure sufficient student support.
- If selecting students on the basis of risk of grade retention, determine these students early in the spring, either by developing a formula based on past years' data or using third-quarter testing results so that parents can be notified early.
- To ensure that students in all schools have an equal opportunity to apply, encourage school-based recruiting supplemented with district-level recruiting.

Staffing and Compensation

In terms of staffing and compensation, we recommend that summer program leaders do the following:

- Hire early but create a process through which other summer programs are aware of commitments made by teachers to ensure minimum staff loss before the summer.

- Work with teacher associations to develop rigorous selection procedures to recruit effective and motivated educators.
- Enlist human resources staff to manage or assist with labor-intensive recruiting processes.
- Meet in the fall with the professional development department to discuss training opportunities as part of the summer programs and communicate dates to try to avoid scheduling conflicts.
- Talk with district leadership about providing incentives for 12-month–contracted employees to work in summer programs, such as making leadership of a summer program a factor in career advancement for prospective principals.

Key Takeaways

- District leaders and the policies they set have the greatest impact on summer learning programs.
- District policy dictates (1) whether to offer and how to establish and approve summer programs and (2) which students can participate.
- Although the amount of available funding depends largely on other government levels, district leaders decide how to use this funding. Districts must weigh the goal of providing summer learning with other needs. Districts can also allocate dollars from their own operating budgets for their summer programs.
- Strong district capacity is needed to access and administer federal and state grant funding (particularly if combining funds).
- District policies and practices can affect the cost of programming, which affects scale and sustainability.
- District policies and practices (e.g., on staffing and compensation) can also affect summer program quality.



Conclusions and Recommendations

Policies at every level—from federal to district—can affect the scale, sustainability, and quality of district-provided summer learning programs. The precise ways in which summer programs are affected depend on the specific context and policies involved. Federal, state, and local policies provide the possibility of carrying out summer programming but do not necessarily prioritize it. There are many potential sources of funding for summer programs, particularly at the federal level, but few dedicated streams. This is not dissimilar to the context for other education interventions, and voluntary summer learning programs provided by school districts are a relatively new type of intervention, making it unsurprising that there are not dedicated sources of funding for them. Securing funding for summer programs can take a great deal of work—just because such programming is an allowable use of funding does not mean that it is the only possible use.

It is ultimately up to school districts to decide whether to offer summer programming and which students to serve. Any district will face incentives and constraints stemming not just from federal and state policy but also from demands from families, opportunities presented by local private funders, and the flexibility of general operating funds. Once a district has decided to offer summer learning programs, district policy will affect the

programs' scale, sustainability, and quality, even if funding comes from other government sources.

Conclusions on Scale and Sustainability

- Federal funding programs under ESSA and other forms of federal support can affect program scale and sustainability. The availability of federal funding can be influenced by the high level of competition for funds, restrictions on which students can be supported by grant funding, and district capacity to access (and combine) federal grant money.
- The main source of leverage for states involves the state role in interpreting, regulating, and administering federal funding streams—which can influence whether summer learning programs get funded.
- A few states—such as California, New Mexico, and Wyoming—have created funding streams that might be as significant as federal sources. Some cities have also established funding streams to support program scale and sustainability, albeit with fewer dollars.
- State and district mandates requiring summer programming also affect programs' sustainability.
- District leaders and the policies they set have the greatest impact on summer learning programs. Districts can allocate dollars from their own operating budgets for their summer programs. Although the amount of available funding depends largely on other government funding levels, district leaders decide how to use this funding, and district policies and practices can affect the cost of programming, which affects scale and sustainability.
- Accessing (and combining) any of the funding described here requires (1) district capacity, including the ability of summer program leaders to convince district leaders that summer programming deserves funding; (2) program evaluation, or an awareness of other evaluations, to justify the investment; and (3) for competitive grants, skilled grant writers.

Conclusions on Quality

- Policies at the district level, such as those affecting which teachers can be hired for summer, affect program quality.

- States also influence quality by layering program requirements into federal funding streams and by requiring specific practices in exchange for funding summer programs with state money. Some states also specify features of summer programs in legislation, such as specific staffing models, minimum program hours, maximum student-to-staff ratios, and adherence to standards.
- Federal and city governments are less likely to have an impact on quality although the goals of some federal policies, such as that of ensuring equity for all students, align broadly with the goals of summer learning programs, and some federal policies, such as grants requiring that certified teachers deliver academic instruction, might influence quality.

Recommendations for Summer Learning Program Leaders

Our recommendations are designed to help summer program leaders identify the funding sources that are out there, make a case for summer learning as an attractive use of those funds, and consider local actions, such as city campaigns and audits of district policy. It is essential to focus locally on district policies and priorities, both of which influence how external dollars are spent. To access those dollars and improve summer learning quality, we recommend that district and summer program leaders adopt the following practices.

Make Summer Programming an Official Board Policy and Authorize a Central Body to Carry Out Summer Programming Decisionmaking

An official board policy requiring summer programming affects program scale and sustainability. A central committee can catalog all summer opportunities in the district in one place to anchor discussions and decisions affecting logistical efficiency and quality across programs. Chapter Five provides specific recommendations related to (1) targeting and recruiting students and (2) making decisions on staffing and compensation.

Measure and Communicate the Impact of Summer Programs

When applying for federal or state grants, program leaders need to describe the evidence base for summer programming and provide sufficient documentation of effectiveness. Similarly, if summer leaders decide to advocate new policies or changes to policies at the district, city, state, or federal level, they need to demonstrate the importance of their programs. These messages are most effective if based on rigorous evaluations of summer programs that demonstrate a link between student participation and improved student outcomes. If a district has not done its own rigorous evaluation, *Investing in Successful Summer Programs* (McCombs, Augustine, et al., 2019) presents evidence on summer programming that should be useful in these efforts. This report lists more than 40 summer programs that meet the top three evidence tiers stipulated in ESSA. It is likely that at least one of these programs will be similar to any given district program.

Identify and Address Policies or Practices at the District Level That Create Barriers to the Scale, Sustainability, and Quality of Summer Programs

We suggest that summer leaders assess all of the tasks involved in planning and running summer programs and identify the policy and practice barriers encountered in completing them. Having a clear understanding of how various policies and practices affect a summer program would allow program leaders either to advocate policy change or to adapt their own practices to the status quo to reduce conflict. For example, summer program leaders in one district negotiated with their teachers' association to develop a hiring procedure that did not favor tenure and instead centered on activities (such as interviews and observations of teaching) designed to identify motivated and qualified teachers.

Cultivate Relationships with District, City, and State Policymakers

Forming relationships with and creating buy-in for summer programming among superintendents, chief academic officers, funding coordinators, and other district leaders might have the greatest impact, given these individuals' roles in determining how revenue is allocated and in setting policies that affect summer

programming. Persuading district leaders to champion summer programming can ensure that there are summer advocates sitting in budget and strategic planning meetings at which decisions about federal, state, and districts monies are made.

Forming relationships with city council members and mayoral staff might also lead to new funding. City leaders can lay the groundwork for new campaigns designed to support youth or allocate city funds toward district summer programs. Summer program leaders might want to launch or join coalitions in their cities advocating a new tax or a city budget set-aside. In some cities where these efforts have succeeded, new funds have been funneled to district summer programs. Some strategies used in successful campaigns have been sending youth to public meetings, creating coherent marketing strategies, meeting with skeptics, and highlighting the problems that will be solved rather than how the money will be used.

Relationships with SEA employees and state legislators are also beneficial. SEA employees write statewide ESSA plans, which could specify that federal funding will be used to support summer programming. Building relationships with state legislators can allow summer program leaders to advocate the insertion of language related to summer programming in legislation. Summer program leaders can also introduce legislators to examples of other state funding streams, such as those in New Mexico and Wyoming.

Advocate Clearer Messages on Funding from State Leaders

We identified opportunities to support summer programs that were not previously known to summer program leaders we interviewed. Although it can be daunting to track policy, we suggest following the work of such groups as the National Summer Learning Association and the Afterschool Alliance. Local councils or caucuses that focus on OST or summer learning might have additional information on grant opportunities. State officials should also be valuable resources for information about new opportunities. Summer program leaders can ask state officials to communicate with districts about funding sources that can be used to pay for summer programs. SEA employees should be able to clarify allowable uses of state and federal funds and communicate new opportunities annually.



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Summer programs offered by school districts can provide academic support and enrichment opportunities to students from low-income families who often lose ground over the summer to their peers from higher-income families. In 2011, The Wallace Foundation launched the National Summer Learning Project (NSLP) to expand summer program opportunities for students in urban districts.

Through the NSLP, The Wallace Foundation provided support to the participating public school districts and their community partners in Boston, Massachusetts; Dallas, Texas; Duval County, Florida; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Rochester, New York. RAND researchers assessed the effectiveness of these districts' voluntary, district-led summer learning programs and found near-term academic benefits in mathematics for all students and benefits in reading and social-emotional domains for students with ample program attendance. These academic benefits also persisted through their school year.

As the NSLP wound down in 2017, these districts and their partners turned their attention and efforts toward increasing the scale of, continuing to improve the quality of, and sustaining these programs. In this sixth report in a series, the authors consider how policy environments constrain or support districts' attempts to scale and sustain quality summer programs and aim to help summer program leaders in school districts across the country navigate policy contexts at the district, city, state, and federal levels.

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