AMERICAN SCHOOL DISTRICT PANEL

Research Report

MELISSA KAY DILIBERTI, SAMANTHA E. DiNICOLA, HEATHER L. SCHWARTZ

# Districts Continue to Invest in Summer Programs

## Selected Findings from the American School District Panel

Summer programming has historically been a staple in school districts' arsenals to help students keep up academically and recover from summer break–related academic setbacks (i.e., the "summer slide"). In addition to academic support, summer programs may have a positive impact on students' physical and mental health, development of interests, and development of social and life skills (McCombs et al., 2019; Schwartz et al., 2018). The importance of quality summer programs has intensified in recent years because they have been one of two main ways (along with tutoring) that districts across the United States have used to help students recover from coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic–related academic setbacks (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2022; Diliberti and Schwartz 2024; Schwartz et al., 2018).

To help at least elementary-age students reap the benefits of district-run summer programs, the National Summer Learning Project (NSLP) has recommended that districts do the following (Schwartz et al., 2018):

- plan for five to six weeks of programming, with three to four hours of academic instruction each day
- include both enrichment and academic activities
- hire effective and experienced district teachers with expertise in specific content areas

## KEY FINDINGS

- Eighty-four percent of school districts nationally offered programs in summer 2024—a percentage that is on par with the percentage of districts that offered programs in summer 2023.
- Although districts' largest summer programs were typically free for families and offered at least three hours of academic instruction daily, only about one-third of districts' largest summer programs met the other recommended academic quality indicators (e.g., district-prepared lesson plans, instruction delivered by district teachers who taught the same grade level and subject as they taught during the school year).
- In both 2023 and 2024, urban districts offered more summer programs than their suburban and rural counterparts and offered programs that met more quality indicators.
- About one-half of districts (56 percent) anticipate a decrease in funds for programs in summer 2025.

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- provide teachers with the appropriate professional development and curriculum materials to align with the goals of the program.

In this report, we investigate the prevalence of school district summer programs in 2024. We also gauge whether districts' summer 2024 programs—no matter the grade levels of students served—adhere to NSLP recommendations. We also discuss anticipated funding levels for future district summer programming. This report is the second annual analyses we have done on these topics (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2024). Therefore, some background information is restated in this report.

Our analyses draw on findings from surveys fielded by the American School District Panel (ASDP). The ASDP is a research partnership between RAND and the Center on Reinventing Public Education. The panel also collaborates with several other education organizations, including MGT and the Council of the Great City Schools. We developed the survey questions we analyze in this report to capture the extent and type of summer programs that school districts offer and how the characteristics of the programs offered compare with the recommendations from the NSLP. About 300 districts completed our fall 2024 survey on summer 2024 programming, and about 200 completed our fall 2023 survey on summer 2023 programming. For both surveys, we weighted districts' responses to make them representative of all K–12 public school districts across the country. The data presented in this report are cross-sectional snapshots of districts' summer programming in 2023 and 2024. The same districts did not participate in both survey waves. (There is some overlap, but it is incidental.)

Because experiences with summer learning programs can vary by district context, we examined differences in districts' survey responses by locale (urban, suburban, rural), poverty status (low poverty, middle poverty, high poverty), student racial/ethnic composition (majority White students, majority students of color), and enrollment size (small, medium, large). Throughout this report, we describe only those differences among district subgroups that are statistically significant at the 5-percent level, unless otherwise noted. Additional details about our methods (including how we defined these subgroups) and the survey administration are included in the "How This Analysis Was Conducted and Limitations" box at the end of this report. For more information, see also Diliberti et al. (2025). The full set of survey results can be viewed and user-friendly charts can be created in Bento, a free data visualization tool. To learn more about Bento, go to www.getbento.info/about or email bento@mgt.us.

**Abbreviations**

| | |
|---|---|
| ASDP | American School District Panel |
| AEP | American Educator Panels |
| CBO | community-based organization |
| COVID-19 | coronavirus disease 2019 |
| ELA | English language arts |
| ESSER | Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief |
| NSLP | National Summer Learning Project |
| STEM | science, technology, engineering, and math |

## An Overview of Summer Programs in 2023 and 2024

In this section, we examine the share of school districts that offered programs in summer 2024, how many programs districts offered, whether those programs involved partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs), and what share of students attended programs. (See the box below for details about how we defined summer programs on our surveys.) When possible, we investigate how districts' programming in summer 2024 compares with programming in summer 2023. We also investigate

**How We Defined Summer Programs on Our Surveys**

The term *summer program* refers to any summer program that districts partially or fully funded from any source. Districts, contractors, and/or one or more community partners might have run the programs. Summer programs can have any academic or other focus.

to what extent such programming differed across district context, especially by district locale (that is, across urban, suburban, and rural areas).

## Eight in Ten School Districts Offered Summer Programming in 2023 and 2024

We had anticipated that fewer districts might offer programming in summer 2024 than in 2023 because of the anticipated expiration of federal stimulus funds in September 2024 that were helping support such programming. But this was not the case. Instead, we found that large majorities of all types of districts offered summer programming in 2024. As shown in Figure 1, the majority of public school districts nationwide (84 percent) offered programming in summer 2024. This is roughly on par with the 81 percent of districts that offered such programming the preceding year in summer 2023.

Furthermore, we did not observe notable changes in districts' provision of summer learning programs across any of the four district contexts we examined. As in summer 2023, virtually all urban districts and large districts (categories that greatly overlap) offered programming in summer 2024.

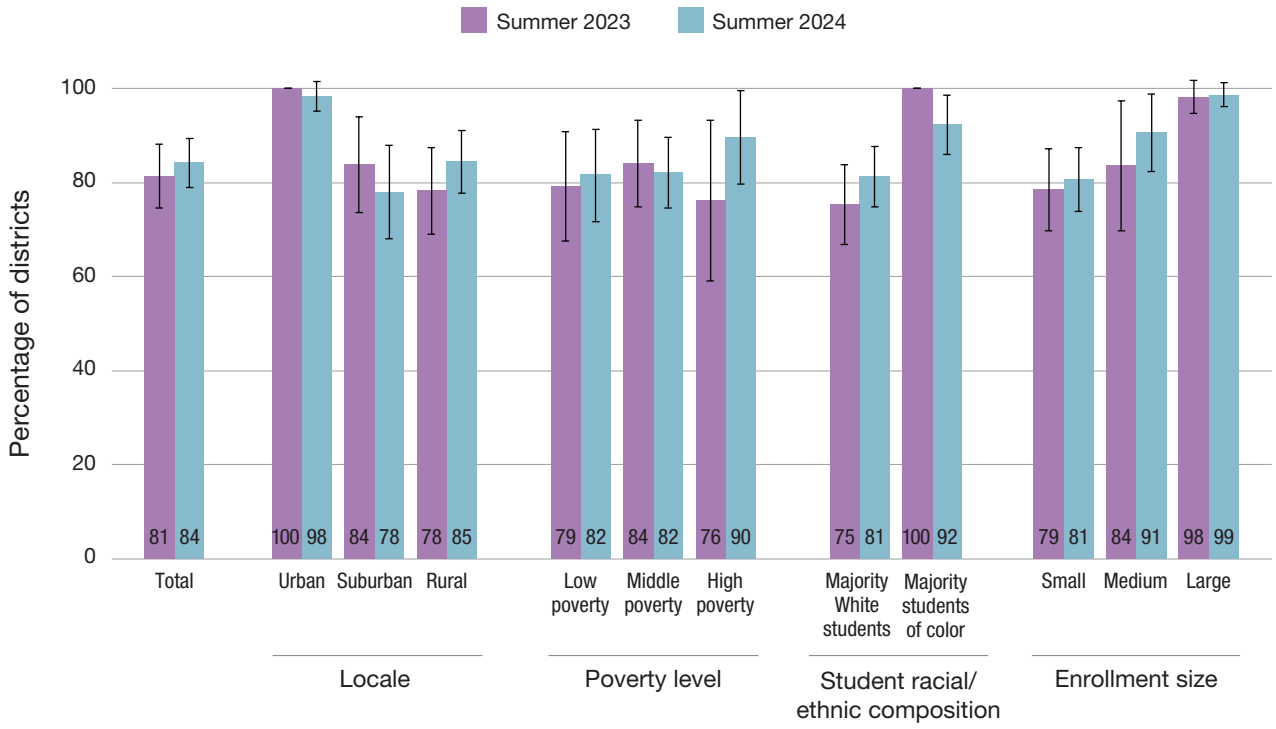
## Urban Districts Continued to Offer the Greatest Number of Summer Programs

In summer 2024, urban districts all but universally offered at least one summer program, and 75 percent of urban districts offered four or more summer programs (see Figure 2). As was the case in summer 2023, the larger (or more urban) the district, the more likely it was to offer more than one or two programs in summer 2024.

More specifically, 75 percent of surveyed urban districts offered four or more summer programs in summer 2024, which is 5 percentage points less than

FIGURE 1

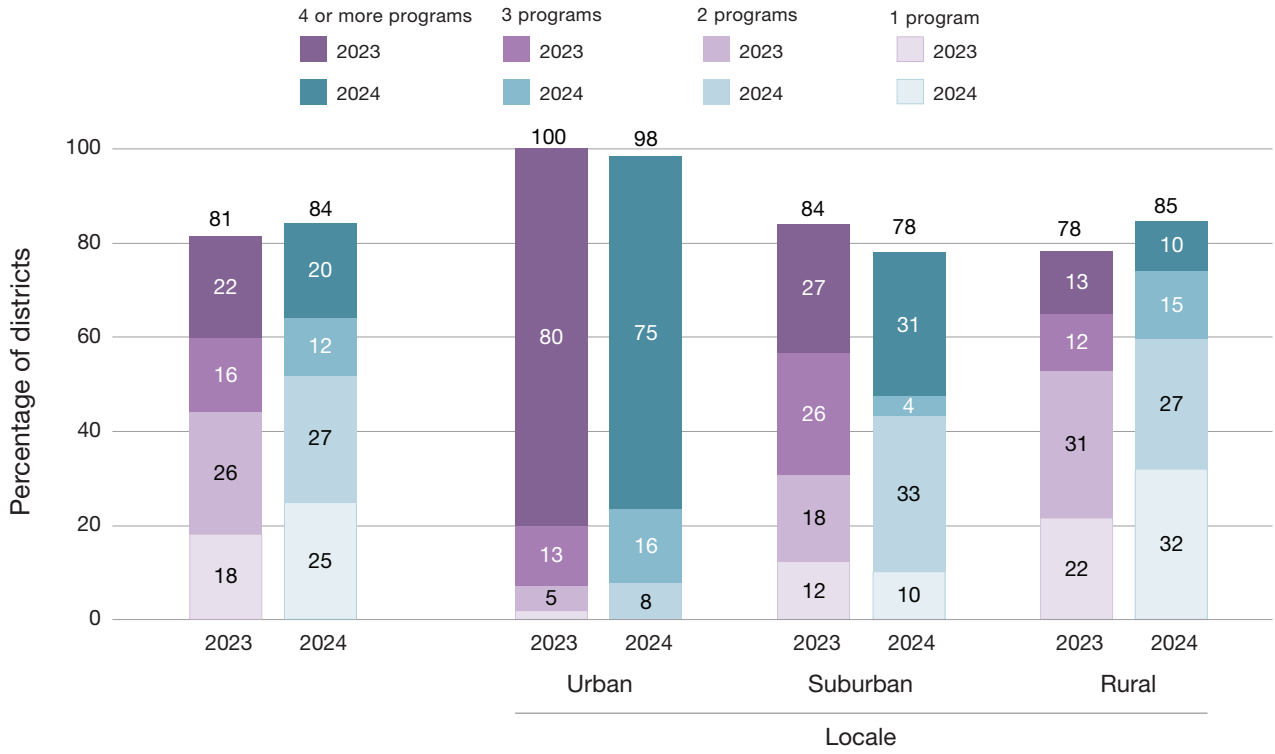
Percentage of Districts That Offered Programming for Students in Summer 2023 Versus Summer 2024, by District Subgroup




NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: "Did your district offer programming for students in summer [year]?" ($n$ = 216 in fall 2023, $n$ = 234 in fall 2024). The black bars represent 95-percent confidence intervals.

FIGURE 2

## Percentage of Districts That Offered Programming for Students in Summer 2023 Versus Summer 2024, by District Locale and Number of Programs Offered




NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey questions: "Did your district offer programming for students in summer [year]?" and "How many different summer programs did your district offer in summer [year] in total to students in any grades PK–12?" ($n$ = 216 in fall 2023, $n$ = 234 in fall 2024). Only those districts that said their district offered programming in summer [year] saw this question. The bars might not sum to totals because of rounding. We omitted data labels for some bars for readability. PK = prekindergarten.

those that did in summer 2023. However, we cannot be sure that this trend holds nationally because of the small number of urban districts that responded to our survey. Despite this potential decline, urban districts were still much more likely than their suburban and rural counterparts to offer multiple programs. Thirty-one percent of suburban districts offered four or more programs in summer 2024, and only 10 percent of rural districts did similarly.

As we discussed at length in our previous report, we presumed that district enrollment size closely tracked with demand for summer programming; the availability of program partners to help host programming; and the summer availability of facilities, staff, and transportation options (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2024). We did not collect information on districts' reasoning for offering more than one program or whether the programs varied by student populations served, program focuses, or timing (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2024).[1] However, it is clear from prior research that school districts design summer programming to address a variety of needs,

> including mandatory programs for students at risk of being held back in a grade, programs to pass individual courses that a student had failed or did not complete, voluntary (and often more comprehensive) summer programs for the general student population, and extended school year services with specialized instruction for some students with disabilities (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2024, p. 5).

## Community-Based Organizations Played Many Roles in Urban School Districts' Summer Programs

As shown in Table 1, about one-half of districts engaged CBOs in their programming in summer 2024. This was also the case in summer 2023 (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2024).

In fall 2024, we posed additional questions about the type of roles CBOs played in summer 2024 programming. Districts' responses suggest that CBOs played a variety of roles in summer programs, and no single type of role was dominant. As shown in Table 1, 28 percent of districts reported that CBOs served as the destination for a field trip, 24 percent reported that CBO staff taught enrichment activities, 18 percent reported that CBO staff taught academic programming, and 15 percent reported that a CBO served as a host site.

Urban districts and large districts were the most likely to engage CBOs in some capacity to assist with summer programming. These districts were especially likely to have CBOs teach enrichment activities and host the summer program. These patterns align with prior research showing that urban areas have more youth-serving organizations than suburban or rural areas (America After 3PM, 2021). As we noted in our previous report, we believe this is primarily because urban areas' larger populations provide a sufficiently large number of students to make it more financially viable for youth-serving nonprofits to operate (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2024).

## Fewer Than 10 Percent of Students Attended Summer Programming in Most Districts

Last year, we found that fewer than one-half of eligible students enrolled in districts' largest summer 2023 programming (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2024). However, this did not capture how many students actually *attended* such programming. Enrollment

TABLE 1

Percentage of Districts That Indicated Community-Based Organizations Played Various Roles in Their District's Summer 2024 Programs

| | | Locale | | | Student Racial/Ethnic Composition | | Enrollment Size | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CBO Role | Total | Urban | Suburban | Rural | Majority White Students | Majority Students of Color | Small | Medium | Large |
| CBOs were involved in summer programming to some degree | 48 | 84* | 36 | 46 | 44 | 56 | 41* | 57 | 70* |
| CBO served as the destination for a field trip for one or more district summer programs | 28 | 48* | 21 | 28 | 27 | 33 | 23* | 44* | 40 |
| CBO staff taught enrichment activities at one or more district summer programs | 24 | 70* | 23 | 18* | 15* | 46* | 18* | 22 | 61* |
| CBO staff taught academic programming at one or more district summer programs | 18 | 33 | 17 | 15 | 12* | 30* | 14 | 22 | 30 |
| CBO served as the host site for one or more district summer programs | 15 | 55* | 13 | 10* | 12 | 22 | 9* | 20 | 46* |
| Other | 2 | 15* | 2 | 1 | 1* | 7* | 2 | 2 | 9 |

NOTE: This table depicts response data from the following survey question: "What kinds of role(s), if any, did community-based organizations (CBOs) have in your district's summer 2024 programs?" ($n$ = 199). Respondents were instructed to select all that apply. Only those districts that said their district offered programming in summer 2024 saw these questions. An asterisk (*) indicates that the subgroup percentage of districts reporting that CBOs were involved in a certain way is statistically significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from the remainder of districts not in that subgroup that said the same.

measures overestimate actual attendance in summer programs because not all students who enroll in summer programming actually show up. In fact, a prior study of five districts' summer programs for elementary school–age students found that enrollees attended approximately three-quarters of summer program days on average (Augustine et al., 2016).

In fall 2024, we asked districts to estimate approximately how many students attended one or more days of summer 2024 programming.[2] (This wording was intended to capture an upper bound of students who attended at least some programming in summer 2024. Although our survey item asked districts to include all students who attended "one or more days of the program," we presumed very few students attended only a single day.) We then estimated the percentage of students who attended summer programming as a share of the district's total enrollment using federal data for district enrollment counts.

Districts estimated that, on average, about 14 percent of their students attended programming in summer 2024. However, this average masks substantial variation. One-half of surveyed districts reported that fewer than 10 percent of their students attended summer programming. This includes one-fifth of districts that indicated that fewer than 5 percent of their students attended summer programs. Meanwhile, roughly one-quarter of districts served somewhere between 10 percent and 20 percent of their students through summer programming. It was rare for districts to have larger shares of their students in summer programming.

We observed some differences across district contexts, as shown in Figure 3. As we noted above, districts overall estimated that 14 percent of their students, on average, attended summer programming. However, high-poverty districts and middle-poverty districts estimated that 16 percent and 15 percent of their students, respectively, attended summer programming. In comparison, low-poverty districts estimated that 8 percent of their students attended summer programming. Rural districts estimated slightly higher attendance (15 percent) than their suburban counterparts (9 percent), with urban districts falling in between (13 percent). However, because urban districts enroll many more students than their suburban, and especially, rural counterparts, urban districts still served many more students in summer programming, on average, according to estimates from our districts.

Overall, about 14 percent of students attended programming in summer 2024, but half of surveyed districts reported that fewer than 10 percent of their students attended summer programming.

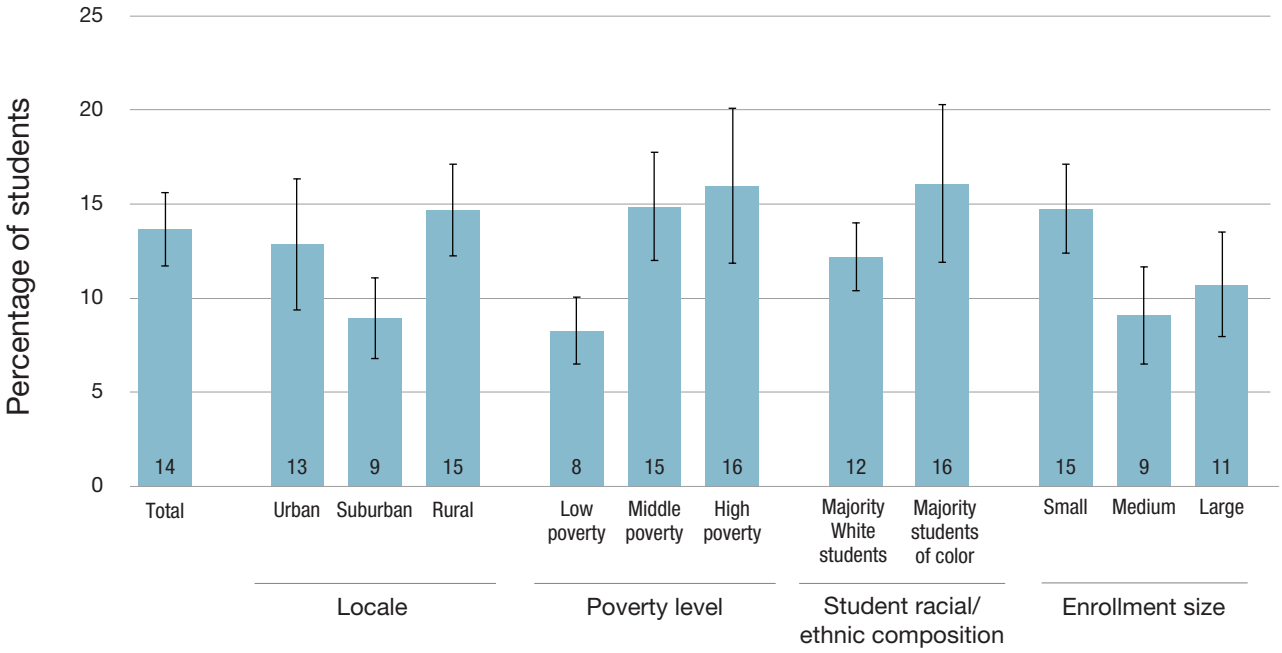
## Profile of Districts' Largest Summer 2024 Learning Programs

Because many districts offer more than one summer program, we limited the burden on district respondents by posing a detailed set of questions about only the summer program with the most slots offered by a district (i.e., districts' largest summer programs). Therefore, the sample of districts we refer to in this section is restricted to include only the 84 percent of districts that offered at least one program in summer 2024. (For districts that offered only virtual summer programs, we asked that districts respond about their largest virtual program.) Throughout the rest of this report, we refer to these programs as districts' largest summer programs.

We analyzed these survey questions to develop a profile of what these largest programs looked like in summer 2024 across districts nationwide and

FIGURE 3

Average Percentage of Students Who Attended One or More Days of Summer Programming in Summer 2024, by District Subgroup




NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: "Please think about all the summer program(s) your district offered in summer 2024. Approximately how many students in total attended one or more days of the program?" ($n$ = 184). Only those districts that said their district offered programming in summer 2024 saw these questions. Districts' responses are reported as a percentage of their district's total enrollment. The black bars represent 95-percent confidence intervals.

whether these programs met the recommended guidelines that prior research found to be associated with academic gains (Schwartz et al., 2018). To preview our results, we found that districts' largest summer programs tended to meet some, but not all, of the NSLP quality indicators. That is, districts' largest summer programs were typically free for families and offered at least three hours of academic instruction daily. But only about one-third met the other recommended academic quality indicators (e.g., district-prepared lesson plans, instruction delivered by district teachers who taught the same grade level and subject as they taught during the school year). Although we lack a direct comparison of 2024 data with summer 2023 data on each and every quality indicator, where we have them, we found that districts' largest summer programs in 2024 looked very similar to those in 2023.

## Districts' Largest Summer Programs Typically Served Students in Both Elementary and Secondary Grades

We asked districts to select which grade levels (e.g., kindergarten, grade 5, grade 12) of students were eligible to attend their largest summer 2024 programs. (We clarified that districts should select the grade levels into which eligible students would rise as of fall 2024.)

As shown in Table 2, districts' largest summer learning programs tended to serve students in both elementary *and* secondary grades: 58 percent of districts indicated that students in both elementary and secondary grades were eligible to attend their largest summer learning program. This includes 28 percent of districts that said eligibility was for elementary and middle school students, 2 percent who said that eligibility was for elementary and high school students, and 28 percent who said that elementary, middle, and high school students were eligible. In

TABLE 2

Percentage of Districts Whose Largest Summer Programs Served Each Grade Level

| Grade Levels Served | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Prekindergarten or kindergarten only | <1 |
| Elementary grades only | 27 |
| Elementary and secondary grades | 58 |
| Elementary and middle school grades | 28 |
| Elementary and high school grades | 2 |
| Elementary, middle, and high school grades | 28 |
| Secondary grades only | 14 |
| Middle school grades only | 2 |
| High school grades only | 8 |
| Middle and high school grades | 5 |

NOTE: This table depicts response data from the following survey question: "Which grade levels of students were eligible to attend your largest summer 2024 program? Select the grade levels into which eligible students would rise as of fall 2024" ($n$ = 198). Only those districts that said their district offered programming in summer 2024 saw this question. Respondents were asked to select all grades that apply from prekindergarten through grade 12. We categorized grades 1–5 as elementary school, grades 6–8 as middle school, and grades 9–12 as high school. All grade levels may also include prekindergarten or kindergarten.

total, 85 percent of districts indicated that elementary students were eligible for their largest programs, and 73 percent indicated that secondary (middle and/or high school) students were eligible for their largest summer programs.

## Districts' Largest Summer Programs Almost Always Had an Academic Focus, but Often Offered Other Activities Too

As shown in Figure 4, districts' largest summer learning programs almost always included an academic focus. Ninety-one percent of districts overall said that their largest summer learning programs had an academic focus, most often in the form of small group or one-on-one academic tutoring or literacy instruction. Forty-four percent of districts' largest summer programs included academic instruction in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

Many districts' summer learning programs (65 percent) included nonacademic enrichment activities too. For example, 41 percent of districts said that their largest summer learning programs included arts programming (e.g., music, theater, visual art), and 28 percent of districts' programs included outdoor activities (e.g., hiking, outdoor survival skills, agriculture, gardening, kayaking).

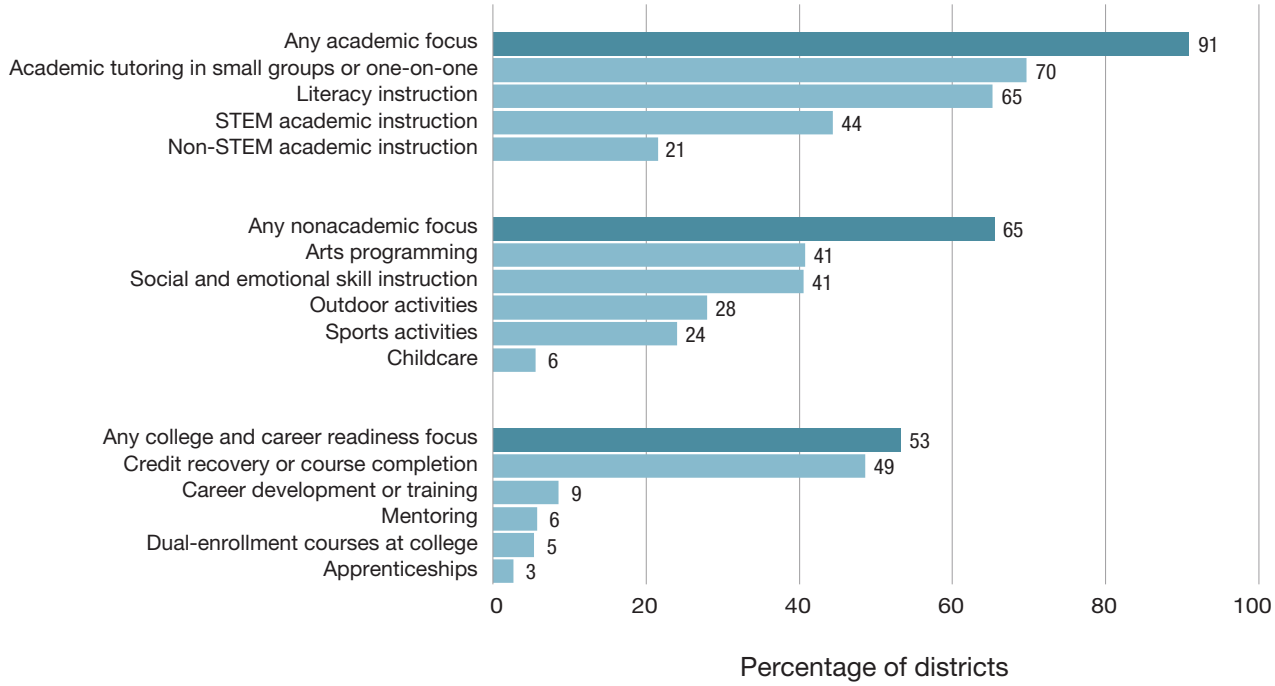
Fifty-three percent of districts also had summer programs that had some focus on college and career readiness. This nearly always took the form of credit recovery and course completion. However, a small percentage of districts (less than 10 percent) said that other activities, such as mentoring, career development and training, and apprenticeships, took place in their largest summer learning programs.

## High School Programs Tended to Focus on Credit Recovery; Programs for Earlier Grades Had More of a Mix of Academic and Nonacademic Activities

The activities that took place in districts' largest summer learning programs on a near-daily basis depended on the grade (age) of students that the programs served. In Table 3, we display the activities that districts indicated took place in their largest summer programs by the grade level of students who districts indicated were eligible for the program. Several takeaways emerged from this analysis. First, credit

FIGURE 4

Percentage of Districts Whose Largest Summer Learning Programs Included Various Activities on a Near-Daily Basis




NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: "What types of activities or programming took place on a near-daily basis in the largest summer 2024 program?" (*n* = 194). Only those districts that said their district offered programming in summer 2024 saw this question. Respondents were asked to select all that apply. The question also included an "other" option (selected by 5 percent of districts) and a "not applicable; none of these activities" option (selected by 1 percent of districts). For arts programming, we listed music, theater, and visual arts as examples. For outdoor activities, we listed hiking, outdoor survival skills, agriculture, gardening, and kayaking as examples.

recovery or course completion appeared to be a focus of districts' programs that targeted the secondary but, especially, high school grades. Eighty-two percent of those districts with high school–only summer programs said they focused on credit recovery or course completion. Conversely, literacy instruction appears to be a wider focus of districts' summer learning programs for students in earlier grades. For example, 71 percent of districts that have elementary grades–only summer programs indicated that literacy instruction took place on a near-daily basis. Nonacademic activities also appeared to skew toward programs serving students in the early (elementary and middle school) grades.

## One-Half of Districts Restricted Their Largest Summer Programs to Specific Student Subgroups

In summer 2024, about one-half of districts (53 percent) reported having open enrollment programs, meaning any grade-eligible student could enroll. Rural districts were especially likely to have open enrollment programs: 60 percent of rural districts indicated that their largest summer programs were open enrollment compared with 36 percent of suburban districts and 41 percent of urban districts.

The remaining 47 percent of districts said their largest summer learning programs were restricted to certain types of grade-eligible students. In summer 2024, 36 percent of districts restricted enrollment to students performing below grade level, and 9 percent restricted eligibility to English language learner students. These patterns in districts' eligibility restric-

TABLE 3

## Percentage of Districts Whose Largest Summer Programs Included Various Activities on a Near-Daily Basis, by Grade Level of Eligible Students

| Near-Daily Activity | Elementary Grades Only (*n* = 52) | Elementary and Middle School Grades (*n* = 51) | Elementary, Middle, and High School Grades (*n* = 57) | High School Grades Only (*n* = 16) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Academic activities | | | | |
| Any academic focus | 96 | 90 | 100 | 62 |
| Academic tutoring in small groups or one-on-one | 78 | 61 | 79 | 48 |
| Literacy instruction | 71 | 62 | 86 | 18 |
| STEM academic instruction | 32 | 59 | 50 | 6 |
| Non-STEM academic instruction | 17 | 19 | 30 | 14 |
| Nonacademic activities | | | | |
| Any nonacademic focus | 59 | 79 | 77 | 20 |
| Arts programming | 39 | 55 | 42 | 10 |
| Social and emotional skill instruction | 34 | 50 | 50 | 10 |
| Outdoor activities | 24 | 43 | 25 | 5 |
| Sports activities | 14 | 38 | 31 | 3 |
| Child care | 7 | 9 | 2 | 0 |
| College and career readiness activities | | | | |
| Any college and career readiness focus | 22 | 32 | 89 | 87 |
| Credit recovery or course completion | 19 | 24 | 86 | 82 |
| Career development or training | 2 | 7 | 17 | 11 |
| Mentoring | 2 | 10 | 6 | 8 |
| Dual-enrollment courses at college | 2 | 6 | 11 | 3 |
| Apprenticeships | 5 | 2 | 2 | 0 |

NOTE: This table presents response data from the following survey questions: "Which grade levels of students were eligible to attend your largest summer 2024 program? Select the grade levels into which eligible students would rise as of fall 2024" and "What types of activities or programming took place on a near-daily basis in the largest summer 2024 program?" (*n* = 176). Only those districts that said their district offered programming in summer 2024 saw this question. For both questions, respondents were asked to select all that apply. The question also included an "other" option (selected by 5 percent of districts) and a "not applicable; none of these activities" option (selected by 1 percent of districts). For arts programming, we listed music, theater, and visual arts as examples. For outdoor activities, we listed hiking, outdoor survival skills, agriculture, gardening, and kayaking as examples. Although there were programs that served students in other grade levels (see Table 2), we removed these programs from this analysis because of small sample sizes.

tions are on par with what we observed for summer 2023 (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2024). The patterns suggest that, when districts did target their summer programs, they typically targeted them to academically struggling students.

## Summer 2024 Programming Scorecard

### Districts' Largest Programs Typically Met Two Quality Criteria, but Fell Short on Several Academic Quality Markers

Next, we turn to the quality indicators set forth by the NSLP for district-led, voluntary summer programming for elementary school–age students. These were markers of programming that yielded academic benefits for students who attended those programs (Augustine et al., 2016). See the box on page 12 for the rationale behind the NSLP quality indicators.

Table 4 shows the proportion of districts' largest summer programs—regardless of which grade levels of students were served by the program—that met the recommended NSLP criteria. Note that we assumed these markers of quality applied regardless of the grade level of the summer program.

Table 4 shows that most districts (85 percent) offered their largest 2024 summer programs free of charge to families. Likewise, almost all districts offered at least three hours of academics daily (87 percent of districts' largest summer programs). This is on par with the roughly nine in ten districts that did similarly in their largest elementary summer programs in summer 2023 (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2024). On average, districts estimated that their largest summer programs offered 3.8 hours of academic instruction per day in summer 2024 (and 3.9 hours at the elementary grade level and 4.1 hours at the secondary grade level in summer 2023) (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2024).

Beyond those two quality markers, the percentage of districts' summer programs that met the other quality indicators dropped off markedly. Although we lack a direct data comparison with summer 2023 data on each point, where we have data, they are similar to summer 2024:

- Two-thirds of districts' largest summer programs included nonacademic activities (almost always in addition to academic ones).
- About one-third of districts' largest summer programs had academic instruction led by district teachers who taught the same grade level and subject as they taught during the school year. (Most of the rest—i.e.,

TABLE 4

Quality Indicators of Districts' Largest Summer Learning Programs

| | Percentage of Districts | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Quality Indicators for Districts' Summer Learning Programs** | **All Districts** | **Urban** | **Suburban** | **Rural** |
| Three or more hours of academic instruction per day in a five- to six-week summer program | 34 | 34 | 56* | 28* |
| At least five weeks long | 42 | 38 | 62* | 37* |
| At least three hours of academic instruction per day | 87 | 97* | 88 | 85 |
| Includes nonacademic (enrichment) activities | 65 | 54 | 74 | 64 |
| Academic subjects primarily taught by district teachers who teach the same grade and subject as during the school year[a] | 35 | 46 | 28 | 36 |
| Academic lessons selected or developed by district[a,b] | 31 | 76* | 41 | 23* |
| Offered to families for free | 85 | 95* | 79 | 85 |

NOTE: Only those districts that said their district offered programming in summer 2024 saw questions about their largest summer learning programs. An asterisk (*) indicates that the subgroup percentage of districts is statistically significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from the remainder of districts not in that subgroup.

[a] This question was only posed to districts that reported offering at least one hour of academic instruction per day.

[b] Includes either a summer program director or someone else in the district.

**Rationale for the Quality Indicators**

The NSLP study found that elementary students who received at least 25 hours of math and 34 hours of language arts instruction in the voluntary summer program that they attended performed better on subsequent spring state exams (Augustine et al., 2016). This study also found that students can obtain this amount of instruction by attending programs that operate for at least five weeks with 90 or more minutes of math and 120 or more minutes of English language arts (ELA) per day. This program length allows a typical student who attends 75 percent of program days to obtain the 25 hours of math and 34 hours of ELA instruction that the NSLP study found was correlated with improved achievement on subsequent state exams. The NSLP simplified this finding into a recommendation that elementary summer programs offer three or more hours of academic instruction per day in a five- to six-week summer program (Schwartz et al., 2018). Offering enrichment activities in addition to academic activities may promote attendance and help students develop other nonacademic skills (Schwartz et al., 2018).

The NSLP study also recommended that instruction be delivered by teachers with both relevant content knowledge and grade-level expertise (Schwartz et al., 2018). For example, it is ideal to hire a district grade 5 science teacher to teach grade 5 science during the summer instead of having a grade 1 teacher cover that content. This is because teachers who teach the same grade level and subject in their regular teaching schedule are likely to be more up-to-date on academic standards, know what content is and is not covered during the school year, and know how to deliver instruction that is appropriate to the age level.

Likewise, when teachers had to write their own lesson plans, quality suffered. Therefore, NSLP recommended that districts provide teachers with the appropriate professional development and curriculum materials to ensure that they align with the goals of the program (Schwartz et al., 2018). Finally, offering a program that is free of charge to families is critical for access.

SOURCE: Diliberti and Schwartz, 2024

58 percent—hired district teachers to deliver academic instruction in summer programs—just not necessarily the ones who taught the same grade level or who taught the same subject during the school year. It is possible—even likely—that many of these teachers have similar levels of expertise as their counterparts who were teaching the same grade and subject during summer programming as they taught during the school year.)

- One-third of districts' largest summer programs used lesson plans the district selected. More commonly, instructors selected or developed their own lessons.
- One-third of districts' largest summer programs offered a combination of at least three hours of daily academic instruction in programs that were five weeks long. On average, districts' largest summer programs operated for 4.5 weeks, although districts reported summer programs that ran between one week and eight weeks.[3]

As was the case in summer 2023, large districts and urban districts (again, categories that greatly overlap) in summer 2024 were more likely to meet a larger number of the quality markers, especially compared with their rural counterparts. For example, large districts and urban districts were particularly likely to offer summer programs free of charge to families (see Table 4). Large districts (84 percent) and urban districts (76 percent) were more likely to select or develop academic lessons for their largest summer programs in 2024. Larger districts, of course, have more teachers and more central office staff than small districts, which we hypothesize enables them to do more matching of teachers with summer school classes and have the fiscal and staff capacity to select or develop summer curricula. And even though all types of districts typically offered at least three hours of academic instruction per day, urban districts were still more likely to do so. A greater share of urban

districts also reported having academic instruction delivered by teachers who taught the same grade and subject during the school year, although we note this difference is not statistically significant.

There was one area in which suburban districts' summer programs appeared to be outperforming their urban district peers, at least according to district reports: In summer 2024, suburban districts were especially likely to offer summer programs that lasted at least five weeks.

## Anticipated Funding Levels for Summer 2025

### Districts Said Decreased Funding for Summer Programming Is on the Horizon

Districts' COVID-19 relief funds, which were helping fund summer programming (DiMarco and Jordan, 2022), expired in September 2024. This may raise the specter of scaling back summer programming (and other academic interventions implemented for COVID-19 recovery) in the years to come.

In fall 2023, 39 percent of districts anticipated funding decreases for summer 2024 programming, raising our concerns that districts might scale back on their programming in summer 2024 in anticipation of these funding cuts. However, as shown in Figure 1, the percentage of districts nationally offering summer programming in 2024 was largely unchanged from the preceding summer. There are several possible explanations for the incongruence between districts' concerns about funding for summer 2024 and their reports about summer programming levels being virtually unchanged. For one, we do not know by how much districts' funding decreased or even if districts' 2023 concerns about decreasing funding levels actually came to pass in summer 2024. To accommodate funding decreases, districts may have been able to adjust their summer programming at the margins (e.g., reduced the number of slots offered) without eliminating entire programs. It may also be that districts used multiple funding sources—instead of or in addition to—federal stimulus funds to support their summer programs. And since federal stimulus funds did not expire until September 2024, many districts likely still had these funds available to fund summer 2024 programs. Funding summer programming in 2025 and beyond might present greater challenges.

We did see some indication of such potential funding challenges in our data. In fall 2024, 56 percent of districts anticipated funding decreases for summer 2025—an increase over fall 2023 (see Figure 5). Meanwhile, 35 percent of districts anticipate that funding levels will remain about the same, 4 percent expect funding levels will increase, and another 4 percent were unsure. We will have to wait until next year to determine whether districts' heightened anticipation about summer funding decreases—combined with the expiration of federal stimulus funds—translates into a decline in the number of districts offering programs.

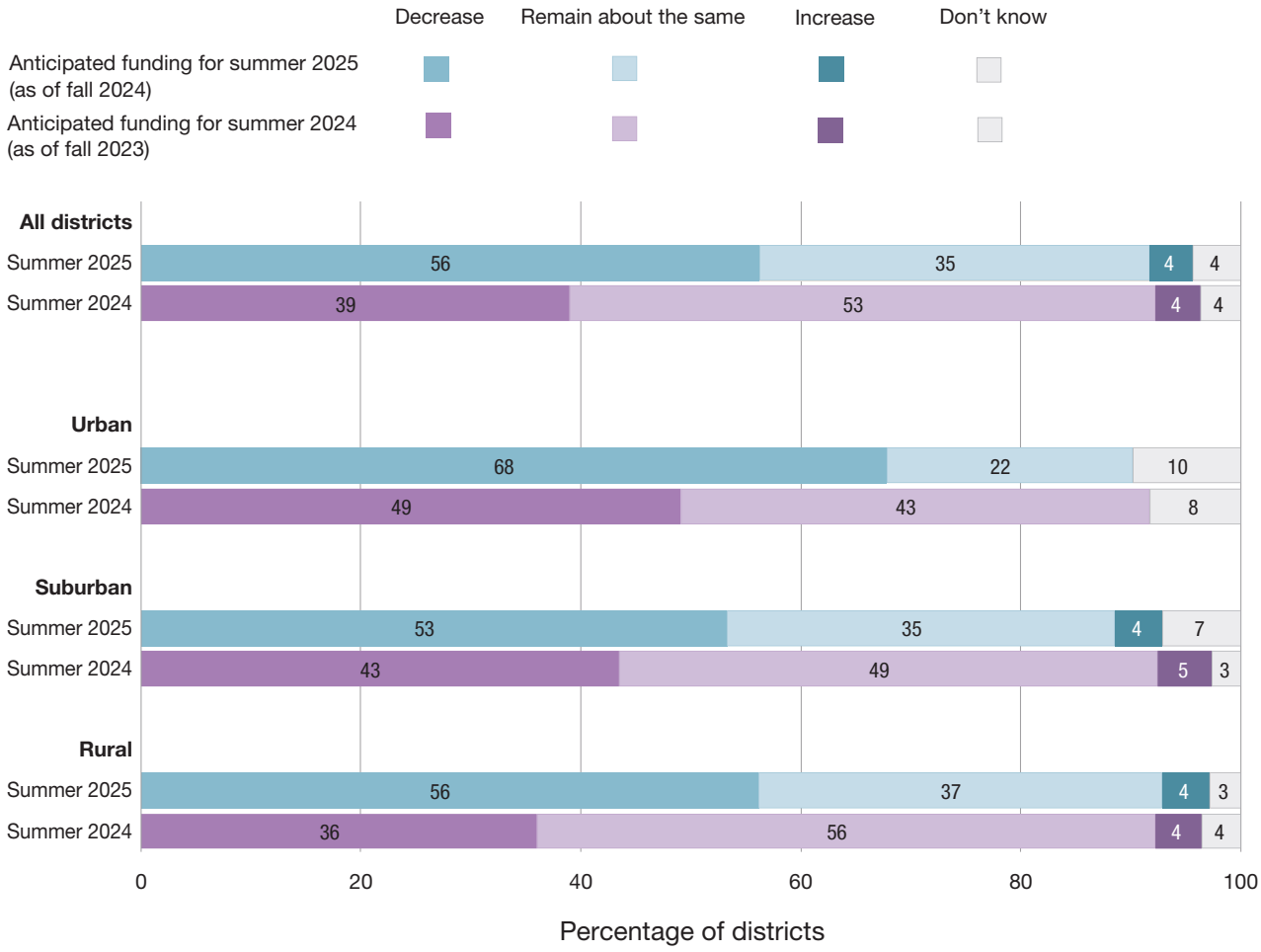
Urban districts appeared most likely to anticipate funding decreases. Sixty-eight percent of urban districts anticipated decreases in funding for programming in summer 2025. Although this difference is not statistically significant from suburban and rural districts, we note it because urban districts have the largest number of summer programs. Furthermore, we observed similar patterns by district enrollment size. Seventy-five percent of large districts anticipated funding decreases for summer 2025 compared with 49 percent of medium districts and 55 percent of small districts.

Because large and urban districts enroll the largest proportion of students nationally and many economically disadvantaged students, urban dis-

In fall 2024, 56 percent of districts anticipated funding decreases for summer 2025—an increase over fall 2023.

FIGURE 5

Percentage of Districts That Anticipate Changes in Funding Levels for Next Summer (Relative to Current Summer), by District Locale




NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: "What kind of change, if any, do you anticipate in your district's funding level for summer programs for summer [next year] compared with summer [current year]?" The question in fall 2024 contained the extra instruction, "In your answer, please think about funding from any source" ($n$ = 185 in fall 2023, $n$ = 198 in fall 2024). Only those districts that said their district offered programming in summer [year] saw this question. The bars might not sum to 100 percent because of rounding.

tricts received a higher share of COVID-19 stimulus money. The combination of declining urban enrollment and expiring Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds may foretell the steepest cuts in summer programming (Tamez-Robledo, 2025).

## Implications

We found that a large majority of districts still offered summer programs at approximately the same high rate in summer 2024 as they did in summer 2023. But districts' largest summer programs were typically shorter than programs that were found to have academic benefits (Schwartz et al., 2018). Urban districts' summer programs met more of the NSLP's indicators of quality, mostly because of their increased ability to provide summer programs for free, a larger pool of CBOs, and an increased capacity to select or create academic lessons for use in summer programs. And yet, many urban districts still did not

offer summer programs of sufficient length (five to six weeks) to offer academic benefits.

The quality of districts' summer learning programs—and students' likelihood of receiving academic benefits—would likely increase if more districts, especially smaller and rural districts, took steps to align their programs with the quality indicators we discuss in this report. For example, districts might consider focusing on hiring teachers for their summer programs to teach the same grade and subject that they do during the school year. Districts might also consider centralizing the selection or development of lesson plans, instead of leaving this to summer program instructors, and lengthening their programs.

Districts' anticipated decrease in funding for summer 2025 programs does not bode well. This is particularly true for large districts and urban districts (again, categories that greatly overlap). Not only do these districts face some of the steepest funding cuts because of ESSER fund expiration and enrollment declines, but they also serve larger numbers of students who are likely in need of such programs.

However, it remains unclear whether any future funding decreases are likely to translate to decreases in quantity or quality. If funding decreases do come to pass, it may be that districts have to reduce *quantity* (e.g., the number of programs offered, the number of summer program slots offered). But even if districts do offer fewer programs, the remaining programs may still be of high quality, as defined by our quality indicators. On the other hand, funding decreases may also translate into a loss in summer program *quality*. For example, districts might choose to cut the length of summer programs (e.g., reduce the number of days or weeks), hire paraprofessionals or community partner staff to deliver instruction instead of district-certified instructors, or reduce the number of enrichment activities.

Poor math and reading achievement nationally, even years after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic (Nation's Report Card, undated-a; Nation's Report Card, undated-b), points to the continued need for districts to provide supplemental instruction to students. Tutoring and summer programs have been the most popular ways districts have responded to the need (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2022), although it remains unclear to what extent the summer programming put in place thus far has helped students to recover academically. Looking ahead, for summer programming to help bend the curve academically, programs will need to be of longer duration and perhaps better targeted toward the students who remain the most academically behind.

### How This Analysis Was Conducted and Limitations

Our methodology for collecting and analyzing survey data remains relatively consistent across survey waves; therefore, the description of our methods here is text that we updated from a previous report (Diliberti and Schwartz, 2024).

The fall 2024 ASDP survey—the tenth in this series—was administered to a national sample of K–12 public school districts between October 24, 2024, and December 23, 2024. Of the 8,017 public school districts that we invited to take our survey, 291 districts completed our survey (a 4-percent response rate).

We designed the ten-minute survey to allow multiple respondents from the same district central office to complete portions of the survey—for example, a superintendent, human resources director, or research director can answer questions about district staffing levels and an academic director can complete questions about math instruction. We suggested that the person who oversees summer programming in the district would be best suited to answer the questions that we analyze in this report. We do not know which person(s) in each district completed the survey on behalf of their district.

We developed survey weights that, when applied, make the districts in our sample look similar to the national population of K–12 public school districts, at least on such observable characteristics as district locale, enrollment size, poverty level, and student racial/ethnic composition. The application of these survey weights allows us to interpret our results as nationally representative. Importantly, the survey responses were weighted to be representative of the national population of public school *districts*, not the national population of public school *students*. Students are not evenly distributed across school districts. More specifically, among the population of 13,000 school districts in the United States, only 7 percent are in urban areas, whereas 24 percent are in suburban areas and 69 percent are in rural areas (Diliberti et al., 2025). Yet, roughly 30 percent of the country's 50 million public school students are enrolled in urban districts (National Center for Education Statistics, undated-a). And the country's 120 largest school districts alone (many of which are urban and represent less than 1 percent of all public school districts) account for roughly 20 percent of all student enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, undated-b). Thus, although rural districts represent a majority of school *districts*, they do not represent a majority of public school *students*. For more information about the sampling and weighting procedures for the fall 2024 ASDP survey and to view demographic characteristics for our sample relative to the national population of K–12 public school districts, see Diliberti et al., 2025.

Because districts' experiences vary, we examined differences in districts' responses by district context. We obtained data on district demographics by linking survey data files with the 2022–2023 Common Core of Data issued by the National Center for Education Statistics (2024). We analyzed the following four categories, which yielded 11 subgroups:

- locale: *urban*, *suburban*, and *rural*
- student racial/ethnic composition: We categorize districts in which more than one-half of students are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or of two or more races as having *majority students of color*, with the remaining districts categorized as having *majority White students*
- poverty level: We divided public school districts into quartiles based on the family poverty rate of their 5- to 17-year-old population in the district's attendance boundary. Per National Center for Education Statistics guidance, we chose our cut points for these quartiles such that each quartile contains roughly the same number of students. *Low poverty* districts are those in the first quartile (that is, those with the fewest families below the federal poverty rate). *Middle poverty* districts are those in the second and third quartiles. *High poverty* districts are those in the fourth quartile (that is, those with the highest shares of families below the federal poverty rate)
- enrollment size: We categorize districts that enroll fewer than 3,000 students *small* and districts with more than 10,000 students as *large*; we categorize the remaining districts as *medium*).

It is important to keep in mind that each district that took our survey belongs to four of the 11 subgroups—for example, a single school district that is large, suburban, low poverty, and enrolls mostly White students. Thus, patterns observed across district contexts might be driven by the same set of districts that share multiple characteristics. Because of our small sample size, we are unable to disentangle these relationships.

In this report, we describe only those differences among district subgroups that are statistically significant at the 5 percent level, unless otherwise noted. In each survey year, we conducted significance testing to assess whether subgroups were statistically different at the $p < 0.05$ level. Specifically, we tested whether the percentage of districts in one subgroup reporting a response was statistically different from the remaining districts that took the survey (e.g., urban districts versus other districts that are not urban). However, we did not conduct formal significance testing of differences across survey waves (e.g., comparing districts' responses on survey items in fall 2024 versus fall 2023) because of a lack of longitudinal survey weights that properly accounted for the partial overlap in respondents and changes in representativeness of survey respondents across years. Comparisons across time points should be made with caution because some differences that appear to be changes over time might actually be survey error. Furthermore, because of the exploratory nature of this study, we did not apply multiple hypothesis test corrections.

## Notes

[1] This is because after we determined the total number of summer programs offered, we restricted subsequent survey questions to focus on districts' largest summer programs.

[2] Seven percent of districts were not sure how many students attended at least one day of the summer program.

[3] We excluded two districts that reported implausibly long summer programs (more than 20 weeks long).

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### About the American School District Panel

The American School District Panel conducts nationally representative surveys of public school district leaders twice a year, in addition to focused interviews to gather more context for select survey topics. For more information, visit www.americanschooldistrictpanel.org.

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## About This Report

In this report, the authors use a survey administered to a nationally representative sample of K–12 public school districts to investigate the prevalence and quality of districts' summer programming in summer 2024. This report is part of a series that provides brief analyses of district leader viewpoints on topics of immediate interest to policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. For more information on survey recruitment, administration, and sample weighting, please see *Technical Documentation for the Tenth American School District Panel Survey* (Diliberti et al., 2025).

The American School District Panel (ASDP) is one of the American Educator Panels (AEP), which are nationally representative samples of teachers, school leaders, and K–12 public school districts across the country. The panels are a proud member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research's Transparency Initiative. The ASDP is a research partnership between RAND and the Center on Reinventing Public Education. The panel also collaborates with several other education organizations, including the Council of the Great City Schools and MGT. If you are interested in using AEP data for your own surveys or analysis or in reading other publications related to the AEP, please email aep@rand.org or visit www.rand.org/aep.

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