How can schools plan for effective summer learning experiences?

Learning during the pandemic has been a struggle for many students. School programs offered in the summer have the potential to accelerate their learning and provide the social and emotional support and connection to peers needed for a successful start to the new school year.

The information in this document was developed to provide flexible, evidence-based guidance for districts to consider as they develop and implement summer programming.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

In-person programs are strongly encouraged and should prioritize safety, relationship-building, accelerating learning, enrichment opportunities and mental health supports.

Consider dividing summer learning into two sessions with small class sizes, one after the school year ends and another before the next begins. The summer learning day could be divided to include targeted support for academics and enrichment opportunities. For sessions designed before school begins, consider creating a "jumpstart" to the school year with younger students so they become familiar with the idea of school. Accelerated learning academies offered before school starts could allow older students to learn key background knowledge and skills needed for upcoming courses.

When inviting students to participate in summer learning, consider looking at multiple student data points (e.g., academic, behavioral, attendance, etc.) to prioritize those who will benefit the most. Consider strategically grouping students and work with groups of 4-6 students to provide individualized support.

Collaborate with partners, including community-based organizations (YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.), libraries, parks, recreation centers, child-care centers, local colleges, 21st Century Community Learning Centers and tribal nations to build on existing programs, reach more students and achieve stronger shared outcomes.

Support services for students and families can be built in to any summer program to provide access to critical services such as child nutrition, healthcare and mental health support. Collaboration with external partners can ensure students have access to the supports they need.

Federal relief funds (ESSER I, II and III) can be braided with existing federal and state funds to

pay for essential services and materials to support summer learning (e.g., curriculum, educator and other staff salaries, materials, student transportation and other services and supplies). Summer learning expenditures meet ESSER III requirements that school districts use 20% of funds to support students with lost learning opportunities.

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

It is important to prioritize students who have been historically underserved and disproportionately impacted by disruptions in learning. This includes students of color, students in poverty, students learning English and students with disabilities.

For students receiving special education and English learning services, summer programming should serve as an extension to existing individualized learning plans.

Providing transportation and child nutrition can remove barriers for access to learning opportunities, as can flexible scheduling for older students and providing recruitment materials in students' home languages.

RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

- Get ideas for how to establish and sustain effective summer learning programs for math and literacy from research conducted by the RAND Corporation and shared in this review of effective expanded learning time from the Education Trust.

- Use a Summer Learning Planning Guide, designed to assist education leaders in thinking through, planning for and making the decisions that will ensure summer learning opportunities are successful for students, families and teachers.

- The Wallace Foundation offers a wealth of resources – including guidance for selecting and modifying curriculum, determining staffing needs and student recruitment and engagement – for planning high-impact summer learning experiences.

- Provide ongoing opportunities for educators to collaboratively plan for summer learning experiences, establish clear learning goals and outcomes for students based on multiple sources of data, and adjust learning opportunities based on the diverse needs of students. Include school-based counselors, psychologists, social workers and other essential personnel in collaborative planning opportunities to address the needs of all students.

OKLAHOMA Education