

How can schools and communities partner to provide summer learning experiences?

Over 80% of students' waking hours are spent outside of school. This means families and community partners, including afterschool and summer learning programs, play a critical role in ensuring students have access to [transformative learning experiences](#).

In his book *Summers Matter*, Matthew Boulay explains, "Coaches don't tell their athletes to quit training during the off-season. Instead, our challenge is to keep our child's brain awake and humming all summer long." Through meaningful engagement of families and community partners, this "off-season" can become a time to help students accelerate learning through participation in high-quality programs.

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

[Strategic partnerships](#) between schools and community organizations ensure students receive the resources and support needed to meet their academic, social and emotional needs. Partnerships should be based on mutual trust and respect to ensure everyone benefits.

In many instances, community partners are already engaging youth through summer programs offered by tribal nations, parks and recreation departments, and more.

School and community partners should have a shared understanding of and commitment to quality program practices. Together, the Forum for Youth Investment, National Summer Learning Association and David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality identify four key areas for [continuous improvement](#) when planning summer programs.

Questions to consider when planning include, first, is the environment safe? Does it provide emotional safety, a healthy environment, emergency preparedness and health and nutrition? Second, is the environment supportive? Does it provide a warm welcome, strong program flow, active learning, skill building and encouragement, conflict reframing and opportunities to manage feelings? Next, does the program ensure positive interactions? Does it provide a sense of belonging, strong collaboration and leadership, and effective adult partners? Finally, is the program engaging? Does it include opportunities for choice and reflection, engaging learning strategies and higher-order thinking skills?

It is important to recognize that student attendance in summer experiences is voluntary. Partnerships that focus on program quality and shared professional learning and value [student voice](#) in

KEY INSIGHTS

- Dedicate time to explore and connect with existing summer programs within the community. Working together, identify opportunities for partnership, innovation and improvement.
- Develop a plan, remembering to include student recruitment, joint professional development, engaging programming and equitable access that meets the unique needs of summer learners.
- Schedule time to reflect on what worked well, what could be changed and how to move forward with community partners to continue to support students during their out-of-school time.

SEE ALSO

- [How can schools plan for effective summer learning experiences?](#)
- [How can accelerated learning models support students with unfinished learning?](#)
- [How can enrichment experiences support student learning, well-being and success?](#)

program design and implementation experience greater success and more consistent student participation.

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

Summer programs have proven to support traditionally underserved student populations in making [academic gains](#) during the summer months. The focus of school and community partnerships should be these students with equitable access to high-quality summer learning experiences that help them gain the content and skills that support learning on grade level.

Meeting basic needs and removing barriers to participation are essential in addressing equitable access to summer learning. School and community partnerships can help students, families and caregivers meet basic needs (e.g., for food, clothing, housing, medical services, transportation, language and other resources).

Educational opportunities may be fewer and less accessible for traditionally underserved student populations during summer months. Community partners with experience in mobilizing resources can ensure students are able to fully engage in high-quality summer learning experiences.

RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

- Review the [Oklahoma Family Engagement Framework](#) to gain strategies and guidance for school and community partnerships to meet the needs of the whole child in support of learning.
- Consider developing a community partnership [asset map](#) and map existing summer programs prior to planning for the summer.
- Establish a [community vision](#) for summer learning that includes a shared mission, jointly developed, and includes common goals and shared responsibility for obtaining those goals. Ensure that summer programming is aligned to school-year standards and student needs.
- Implement a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) to identify mission, purpose, scope and responsibilities of school staff and community partners and design [intentional summer learning](#) experiences through joint program planning and staff development.
- Collaborate with community partners on a [student recruitment plan](#) that removes barriers to participation (e.g., food, transportation, language, etc.).
- Establish a plan to jointly [assess the quality](#) of summer program offerings and show appreciation for program partners.