

System Summer Learning Planning Guide



SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMMING: THE GREAT EQUALIZER

The summer space differs fundamentally from the school year space in numerous ways that affect program design, implementation, and quality. During the school year, children in both affluent and historically marginalized student groups benefit from what is known as the “faucet theory”—learning resources are turned on for all children because of access to public education.¹ However, during the summer, a phenomenon referred to as “summer learning loss” or “summer slide,” which is the loss of academic skills and knowledge over the course of summer vacation, is experienced by students from lower-income households.² High-quality summer programs can be the great equalizer as these programs support academic, social, and emotional learning and development in safe and supportive environments.³ Regular attendance in high-quality summer programs is associated with improved relationship skills,⁴ a sense of agency,⁵ and identity development. Opportunities for children to attend summer learning programs can provide the needed support and experiences to prepare them for new academic expectations in the fall. Therefore, summer programming access and quality should be planned at the state systems level to guarantee offerings are equitable at the local level. Several state departments, including child care, education, juvenile justice, health, and child welfare should work together to collaborate and coordinate services for children during the summer.

ELEMENTS OF A SUMMER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CYCLE

It is essential that state and local governments establish a quality management system that provides positive summer program opportunities to youth. They can take steps towards quality, accessible summer programming through a four-part annual quality improvement cycle known as PEAR: Plan, Execute, Assess, and Reflect.

Plan

Set quality improvement goals then develop and implement a plan for achieving them. For example:

- › Draft at least two quality improvement goals that support equitable access and programming for the upcoming summer then complete a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) (e.g., promote an inclusive culture that engages and draws on the assets of students, families, staff, stakeholders and community members)
- › The QIP should align with state initiatives (e.g., literacy or social and emotional learning) (e.g. Afterschool Program Quality Improvement in Utah)

Execute

Implement activities to promote program quality goals and strategies. For example:

- › Gain buy-in from applicable state departments and committees to focus on quality in programs and organizations that provide summer programming, inclusive of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agencies and State Education Agencies (SEAs), out-of-school time (OST) intermediaries, local program representatives, etc.
- › Engage state department leads regarding summer learning quality practices to create a shared summer learning vision. (e.g. Case Study: Scaling summer learning to boost student success in Tulsa – Recommendation #3 – Form a Summer Steering Committee)

Assess

Look for evidence of quality improvement in program offerings. For example:

- › Develop a plan to collect information and make objective assessments of program quality while the programs are in session and in alignment with the QIP.
- › Conduct quality assessments (e.g. California After School Program Quality Assessment Tool)
- › Support programs, organizations, and districts in capturing feedback from multiple culturally-diverse stakeholders on their satisfaction with the programs
- › Build the capacity of programs to conduct their own quality assessments.

Reflect

Review summer program data and debrief with key state stakeholders. For example:

- › Support programs, organizations, and districts in analyzing youth outcomes data (e.g., attendance, skill, and behavior) (e.g. Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs Quick Reference Guide)
- › Facilitate reflection and planning training for program leaders.



INDICATORS OF EFFECTIVE SUMMER LEARNING SYSTEM

System-level collaborative efforts—often initiated by local funders seeking to build capacity and sustainability of summer programs—have led to more efficient coordination between multiple entities, resulting in a real impact on local families. Community-based organizations, schools, public housing authorities, public libraries, and other partners have increased the quality of programs and services offered and implemented more efficient systems and infrastructure within programs. To bring summer learning to scale, funders, intermediaries, and state child care and education agencies need to know the following:

- What's working and what's not: State child care and education agency leaders and funders are well positioned to encourage and facilitate evaluations that assess the impact and quality of programs in their state.
- Who should be engaged: State child care and education agency leaders can work together to identify stakeholders and engage them in change efforts.
- How to facilitate and plan for a collaborative approach: State child care and education agency leaders can work with intermediaries/programs to develop methods to collect and share program information to drive equity and planning and to help keep the work on course.
- What quality looks like: Following system-level evaluation and results-focused planning, state child care and education agencies can provide targeted training and professional development to impact specific youth development outcomes.
- How to understand impact: With a shared focus on the intended outcomes, funders and intermediaries can work with state child care and education agencies to create systems to track the skills youth are gaining within programs and across the state.

Following are six domains, each with specific indicators, to consider when building and assessing an effective summer learning system.

1. Shared Vision and Statewide Coordination

A shared vision for summer learning, which informs the creation of a statewide summer learning action plan, should be developed to guide and coordinate the efforts of a diverse group of stakeholders and to support statewide collaboration.

Indicator	Description
<i>Statewide summer learning action plan</i>	<p>A group of stakeholders, inclusive of different state departments, uses a statewide summer learning action plan to drive the work around specific summer learning goals and activities.</p> <p>Resource – Stakeholder analysis⁶</p>
<i>Components of the summer learning action plan</i>	<p>The summer learning action plan sets the direction for action in five areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engaged leadership 2. Data management 3. Continuous quality improvement 4. Sustainable resources 5. Marketing and communications <p>The action plan includes expectations, objectives, outcomes, data collection, and the names of persons responsible for each.</p>
<i>Scope of summer learning action plan</i>	<p>The summer learning action plan includes targets and goals that set the direction for action for three or more years. It can be aligned with other plans (e.g., state CCDF plan, state ESSER⁷ Fund plan)</p>
<i>Objectives and measures for system development</i>	<p>The summer learning action plan includes common objectives and standardized measures for system development.</p>
<i>Adoption of youth development approaches</i>	<p>A majority of SEAs target youth outcomes aligned with the summer learning action plan.</p>
<i>Connection of summer learning to other state priorities</i>	<p>The summer learning action plan includes goals that are linked to other initiatives, and these goals are reflected in the work of other initiatives.</p> <p>Resource – The Oregon Department of Education’s Summer Learning Best Practice Guide</p>
<i>Summer learning action plan updating</i>	<p>A standard process is developed for assessing and updating the summer learning action plan every year.</p>
<i>Partner memorandum of understanding</i>	<p>Memoranda of understanding exists among external partners about the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Planning and management › Budget › Professional development › Curriculum and enrichment offerings › State support › Communications and marketing › Resource depository › Data

2. Engaged Leadership

In conjunction with a state child care and education agency team, summer learning work is led by a stakeholder group that represents key OST education agencies existing at the state level. Stakeholder group members share accountability for the development and implementation of action plans. State leaders act as champions and support local initiatives.

Indicator	Description
<p><i>State department coordination</i></p>	<p>There is a coordinating cross-divisional structure within the state departments (members, roles, responsibilities, expectations). Suggested members can come from these departments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agency ➤ 21st century program lead ➤ Chief academic officer ➤ School improvement representative ➤ Federal programs representative ➤ Special education and/or English learner representative ➤ Content program representative (English language arts, math, STEM) ➤ Career and technical representative ➤ Head Start Collaboration Office ➤ State Afterschool Networks ➤ Other OST Intermediaries <p>Resource – You can find your State Afterschool Network lead/ liaison here.</p>
<p><i>Out-of-school time (OST) state agency coordination</i></p>	<p>A coordinating structure for key OST state education agencies and partners is necessary. Suggested members include children’s cabinet representative and members from state agencies serving children and youth. The State Afterschool Network or the National Afterschool Association Affiliate usually leads this structure. External partners are chosen based on requirements and expectations.</p> <p>*NCASE Regional Technical Assistance Liaisons can assist with connecting CCDF Lead Agencies with State Afterschool Network Affiliate Representatives. You can find your NCASE TA Liaison by emailing ncase@ecetta.info.</p>
<p><i>Summer learning champions</i></p>	<p>Champion(s) help build awareness about summer learning investments and opportunities and influence supportive policies and practices across the state.</p> <p>Resource – Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network Afterschool Community Champions</p>
<p><i>Mutual accountability</i></p>	<p>All stakeholders share accountability for performance targets outlined in the summer learning action plan through a transparent system. Participation in planning and coordination is included in the annual staffing plan of each agency so engagement is not impacted by personnel and leadership changes.</p>
<p><i>Policy and practice</i></p>	<p>State Child Care and Department of Education policies are in place to support partnerships and coordination of summer learning initiatives. Federal and state plans related to student outcomes, CCDF, and child care practices are in alignment.</p>

Indicator	Description
<i>Broader, supportive laws, policies, programs, and funding laws</i>	Supportive laws (e.g., stimulus funding, summer meals legislation) exist for summer learning and partnerships.

3. Data Management System

Model summer learning systems implement processes for data collection, sharing, and analysis across stakeholders.

Indicator	Description
<i>Standardized data collection and evaluation</i>	<p>There is a standardized process for data collection and evaluation across agencies to identify gaps for all key summer learning data points assessment of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Summer learning investments and opportunities ➤ Participation ➤ Academic and non-academic outcomes ➤ Quality ➤ Who does and does not have access ➤ Workforce needs
<i>Management of summer learning data</i>	There is a centralized, cross-sector process for collecting, storing, and analyzing summer learning system data.
<i>Data-sharing agreements</i>	Data-sharing agreements between a majority of departments allow for cross-system data collection, analysis, and evaluation.
<i>Alignment of data systems</i>	Statewide summer learning data are housed and analyzed as part of a larger statewide data system.
<i>Unique student identifier</i>	All programs participating in the summer learning system use a unique student identifier, if applicable to the state.
<i>Comparison of participants and non-participants</i>	The state team has a process for collecting and comparing data between participants and non-participants.
<i>Comparison year to year</i>	Summer learning data are tracked and compared year to year.

4. Continuous Quality Improvement

Exemplary summer learning systems adopt a process for quality improvement at both the systemic and programmatic levels.

Indicator	Description
<i>Data-driven planning</i>	The summer learning coordinating body uses data on both program quality and program outcomes to update summer learning strategies.
<i>System for quality assessment and program improvement</i>	<p>A majority of SEAs use common standards, tools, and processes for quality assessment and program improvement.</p> <p>Resource – Indiana Afterschool Standards</p>

Indicator	Description
<i>Professional development for summer learning providers</i>	State partnership coordinates professional development and technical assistance linked to common quality standards for all providers involved in the system.
<i>Professional development for summer learning coordinating body</i>	All stakeholders within the coordinating body receive training that is linked to common quality standards to build summer learning competencies.
<i>Networking and collaboration</i>	There are regular, planned opportunities for departments to share resources and best practices connected to common quality standards.

5. Sustainable Resources

State system-building around summer learning should consider the funding targets and strategies for program development and growth and system capacity building.

Indicator	Description
<i>Comprehensive resources</i>	<p>Available resources support all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Prepared workforce (Consider CCDF and other state requirements/ processes (e.g. background Checks, training) <p>Resource – NCASE Out-of-School Time Professional Development System Building Toolkit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Direct services ➤ Program grants ➤ Program capacity building ➤ Statewide marketing and communications ➤ Program evaluation
<i>Diverse funding sources</i>	<p>The system is supported by at least four of the following funding sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ State funding ➤ Federal funding ➤ Local private foundations ➤ Business donations and sponsorships ➤ Local public funding ➤ National foundations <p>Resource – COVID-Relief Funding for Public Schools: FAQs for Accessing Funds to Support Summer and After-School Programs</p>
<i>Cost- effectiveness analysis</i>	<p>Stakeholders assess effectiveness of programs and opportunities across a range of per-student costs and program models.</p> <p>Resource – OST Cost Calculator</p>
<i>Resource coordination</i>	<p>Multiple funding sources are coordinated to support programming and system development.</p>

Indicator	Description
<i>Resource management</i>	An intermediary organization manages all of the following if applicable in the state: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Resource distribution ➤ Financial reporting ➤ Compliance across the system
<i>Summer learning coordinator</i>	An intermediary or lead organization has secured resources for at least one designated staff member to manage the coordination of stakeholders and the development and maintenance of summer learning strategies.

6. Marketing And Communications

Exemplary summer learning systems identify statewide strategies to understand the demand for summer learning, to build an awareness of need and available resources, and to support culturally and linguistically diverse student recruitment and enrollment.

Indicator	Description
<i>Message alignment</i>	Members of all of the following stakeholder groups align messaging with the summer plan and advocate for connecting summer learning strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ State departments ➤ City or county agencies ➤ Program providers ➤ Schools ➤ Funders ➤ Intermediary or coordinating body ➤ Parents and youth <p><i>Resource – 2021 California Summer Learning Guide: Investing in Resilience and Relationships</i></p>
<i>Awareness building</i>	Statewide strategies are in place to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Build awareness about the need for summer learning and the availability of summer opportunities ➤ Educate state bodies, such as governors, state department leads, and legislators
<i>Dissemination of statewide results</i>	Statewide structures are in place to share best practices with all school districts, child care providers, and partners.
<i>Recruitment and enrollment</i>	A statewide coordinating team provides strategies to drive recruitment and enrollment in a majority of programs across the state.
<i>Centralized program information</i>	The state coordinating team has a centralized resource with current information on a majority of available program opportunities.
<i>Collaborative marketing</i>	State child care and education agencies are knowledgeable about the majority of opportunities within the state and can make referrals to them. (e.g. State Child Care Lead Agency Consumer Education websites)

Indicator	Description
<p><i>Ongoing communication with Families</i></p>	<p>State-level communication with partners (e.g., CCDF Lead Agency, Department of Education, Pre-K, and Head Start) about summer learning takes place throughout the year.</p> <p>Partner with Child Care Resource and Referral to help get the word out to parents/caregivers about the importance of summer as a strategic learning opportunity and what things they should consider when choosing a summer program.</p> <p>Resources – <i>Summer Learning and Enrichment: Tips for School-Age Care Providers</i> and <i>Summer Learning Fun: Tips for Parents and Caregivers</i></p>

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The quest to develop an equitable summer learning landscape to meet the needs of children and families in your jurisdiction(s) can be actualized by using the PEAR approach and addressing the six domains. Systems should plan early to best synchronize timing for funding, budget and grant cycles, etc. because programs that plan early are able to run programs more efficiently. Continually work to build partnerships so that summer learning programs can be successful; collect, analyze, and share strong outcome data to prove that summer learning programs are successful; and make communities, schools, and parents aware of summer programs and their benefits in order to build support and advocacy.⁸ Use of these strategies can make summer the Great Equalizer for All children and their families.

Endnotes

- 1 O’Connell, K.M. (2020). Making Summer Learning Equitable for Students in a Rural, Title I School District: Turning on the Faucet of Resources. *The Interactive Journal of Global Leadership and Learning*, 1(1).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Naftzger, N. and Newman, J. (2021). Harnessing the Power of Afterschool and Summer Programs to Support Recovery and Reengagement. AIR Research Brief.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Smith, L. W. (2000). Stakeholder analysis: a pivotal practice of successful projects. Paper presented at Project Management Institute Annual Seminars & Symposium, Houston, TX. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.
- 7 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief
- 8 NCASE (2018). NCASE Summer Learning Brief.

