

A Publication Series from the National Center for Summer Learning



Funding Summer Learning Programs:

A Scan of Public Investments in Maryland



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About the Center for Summer Learning

The Center for Summer Learning's mission is to create opportunities for high-quality summer learning for all young people. Based at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education, the Center is committed to expanding summer learning opportunities for disadvantaged children and youth as a strategy for closing the achievement gap and promoting healthy youth development.

Through its national network of providers and partners, the Center works to make summer learning a priority in communities across the country. Using research-based approaches and models of effective practice, the Center strives to ensure that all children have access to engaging, high-quality learning opportunities during the summer months.

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

While a few schools and districts are experimenting with new academic calendars, for most American children, summertime means time away from the rigors of school. Yet research from Johns Hopkins University underscores the importance of summer learning for school-age children. Differences in children’s long-term academic success can be explained largely by their summer experiences. Little is known, however, about the kinds of programs that are available to lower income children during the summer months.

The Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University partnered with Cross & Joftus, LLC, to collect and analyze data in four local jurisdictions in Maryland to provide critical information to state and local policymakers on public investments in summer programs and to test a data collection methodology that could be replicated in other locales. The four jurisdictions analyzed are the city of Baltimore, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, and St. Mary's County. Five key funding agencies were surveyed for each jurisdiction: the public schools, the local parks and recreation department, the local management board, the local workforce investment board, and the state child care agency.

Following are the key findings of this research.

- **The public schools served the largest number of children in publicly funded summer programs,** with parks and recreation departments and local workforce investment boards coming in a distant second. Child care vouchers supported the smallest number of children in summer programs, and with one small exception, local management boards did not fund summer programs.
- **Among school districts, the number of students served in summer programs ranged from just 6 percent of district enrollment up to nearly 30 percent of district enrollment.** Except for public schools, programs offered by the other funding agencies are serving a fraction of the total student population.
- **Some parks and recreation departments offered a comprehensive set of free or low-cost summer programs.** Most of these programs, however, were fully supported by parent fees and received no public funding.
- **Most publicly funded programs were geared toward elementary-age children;** high school-age children were served primarily in youth employment and summer school programs. Very few programs for middle school students existed.
- **Public spending per program participant varied considerably across both jurisdictions and the various funding agencies,** from a low of \$93 per participant in a parks and recreation program to a high of \$2,043 in a summer youth employment program. This variation can be explained by differences in staffing costs, program length, and/or the degree to which programs relied on parent fees or other private funding in addition to public sources. (Parent fees and other private funding are not included in the spending figures.)
- **Public funding for summer programs comes mainly from local and federal sources** (about 50 percent each), with a very small share from state sources.



I INTRODUCTION

While a few schools and districts are experimenting with new academic calendars, for most American children, summertime means time away from the rigors of school. Many children spend this time exploring new interests; focusing on hobbies; improving skills in sports, arts, and music; visiting friends and family; and seeing new places. These experiences help bolster academic success when students return to school. Yet for children from lower income families, summer often means weeks away from opportunities that support school success.

Research from Johns Hopkins University underscores the importance of summer learning for school-age children. Differences in children's academic success can be explained largely by their summer experiences. Two-thirds of the ninth grade achievement gap between lower and higher income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities, beginning in the elementary school years.¹ Better off children in the study were more likely to go to the library over the summer and take books home. They were more likely to engage in enrichment experiences, such as attending concerts, museums, and field trips. They were more likely to take out-of-town vacations, be involved in organized sports activities, or take swimming or gymnastics lessons. Overall, they had a more expansive realm of experiences. The summer learning gap accumulates over the years, and once students get to high school, it results in unequal placements in college preparatory tracks and increases the chance that children from low socio-economic families will drop out.² ■

¹ K. Alexander, D. Entwisle and L.S. Olsen, Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap, *American Sociological Review* 2007, Volume 27.

² Ibid.



Access to and participation in summer programming is largely income-dependent, as public funding for summer programming is not guaranteed.

Summer programs afford a critical opportunity to level the playing field, and can mirror the experiences of more advantaged youth. Little is known, however, about the kinds of programs that are available to lower-income children during the summer months. Given the growing recognition of the importance of summertime activities, the Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University partnered with Cross & Joftus, LLC, to design and implement a study that would:

1. Develop a methodology to collect data on summer programs supported with public funding. This methodology would yield critical information on the types of programming offered, the number of students served, and the resources used to support current programming. States and communities could use this data to inform resource allocation decisions for summer programs.

2. Collect and analyze data in four jurisdictions in Maryland. These activities would provide critical information to state and local policymakers on public investments in summer programs and test the data collection methodology.

Section 2 of this policy brief details the research methods used to conduct the study; Section 3 describes the analysis and presents findings from the study; Section 4 contains information on lessons learned and their implications for future work; and Section 5 offers the study's conclusion. The appendix contains a short checklist to help other states and communities replicate the methodology. ■

II RESEARCH METHODS

This study sought to examine a wide range of programs for school-age youth that are primarily publicly funded and that operate during the summer months when school is not in session. It included:

- summer school and other programs run by school districts
- recreation and camp programs
- child care arrangements
- summer jobs programs

NOTE Fee-based programs are **not** included in the study. Also not included are public programs in which costs are fully or mostly covered by parent fees and programs that are primarily therapeutic or treatment-oriented (e.g., substance abuse treatment programs). Moreover, Maryland's Extended School Year program for students with disabilities is not included. Because of the special and intensive needs of the children in this program, the investments per student are very high and are not comparable to those of typical summer programs for school-age children.



The Sample

In selecting a sample, the goal was to identify a small number of jurisdictions that would capture a large percentage of the children in Maryland but also reflect the state's geographic and socioeconomic diversity. Four jurisdictions were selected for study: the city of Baltimore, the suburban Washington, D.C., counties of Montgomery and Prince George's, and rural St. Mary's County. These four jurisdictions collectively represent approximately 43 percent of the state's student population. The percentage of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch (known in Maryland as the FARMs rate) ranges from a high of 71 percent in Baltimore to a low of 22 percent in St. Mary's County. Table 1 summarizes key characteristics of the jurisdictions in the study sample.

Specific programs or jurisdictions are not subsequently identified by name in the brief to prevent the natural inclination to compare program offerings and spending across counties. The study sought to provide a snapshot of programming and spending across the state, rather than to compare investments across jurisdictions with very different geographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

TABLE 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF JURISDICTIONS IN THE STUDY SAMPLE

Jurisdiction	Total Student Enrollment*	Percentage of Non-white Students	FARMs rate	Percentage at or above proficient on Maryland School Assessment: Grade 6 Reading (2007)
Baltimore City	88,000	92%	71%	54%
Montgomery County	139,000	58%	22%	84%
Prince George’s County	132,000	94%	43%	70%
St. Mary’s County	17,000	25%	22%	80%
TOTAL	376,000	77% (weighted average)	40% (weighted average)	72% (weighted average)
<i>MARYLAND</i>	<i>870,000</i>	<i>51%</i>	<i>32%</i>	<i>77%</i>

Note: *Enrollment is rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, data for 2005–2006, at www.greatschools.net

Methods

Work began with the hypothesis that most public funding for summer programs in each jurisdiction comes from or through five different agencies:

- the public school system
- the local management board³
- the local workforce investment board⁴
- the local parks and recreation department
- the state child care agency

These five agencies were chosen on the basis of several criteria, including their focus on children and youth, a track record in providing summer programs, and recommendations from a team of researchers and community partners who are very familiar with summer programs in Maryland.

³ Local management boards were created in Maryland to ensure the development and support of local interagency service delivery systems that promote the well-being of children and families.

⁴ The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 required the establishment of local workforce investment boards. These boards are responsible for strategic planning and policy development to support regional workforce development. The duties of the board are carried out by city or county government agencies or, in some cases, by local nonprofit organizations. The names of workforce investment boards vary locally.

In each of the four jurisdictions, representatives from the four local-level agencies were contacted to determine whether they funded summer programs according to the identified criteria and to gather data on program offerings during summer 2007. Information collected on each program included funding level, number of students served, location, and primary focus. For data on public child care spending, information was provided for each county by the Maryland Department of Education, the state child care agency.

The study team recognized that many other public entities fund summer programs, including libraries, military installation programs, 4-H extension programs, and local departments of health. In some cases, attempts were made to contact these agencies if local contacts indicated that these entities’ program offerings were substantial. However, in only one case were usable data from these other funders received. ■

III ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Data gathering for this study relied on voluntary compliance from staff within the various agencies. Table 2 provides a summary of the agencies in each county that were willing and able to provide data. Some agencies reported they did not fund any summer programs, and these instances are noted. In other cases, agency staff did not respond to repeated requests for information.

For each funding agency, data were received from at least three jurisdictions. However, in some cases, the data collection effort produced a finding of “no funding.” Data were received from each of the five agencies in only one jurisdiction. The data allow for basic descriptive statistics for each category by agency. Yet, because of the nature of the research, the small sample size, and issues of incomplete or noncomparable data, wider generalizations about total spending—either by agency or within jurisdictions—are not included.

Several other caveats about these data are worth noting.

- The spending data collected for this study are “point in time” for summer 2007. Many of the contacts reported that spending on programs varies substantially from year to year, and programs come and go depending on local needs and demands as well as the availability of funding.
- Although the focus of this study was on publicly funded programs, many of the providers also charged a fee for their programs or received other private funding to supplement public investments. Therefore, the data on dollars per program enrollee reflects public investments only, not total program spending per enrollee. The total amount spent per enrollee in many programs is sometimes higher than the public investments because of other contributions; the public investment amounts should not be used to gauge the costs associated with any particular program.
- Both within and across the five main funding agencies, some double counting of enrollees is likely. Study participants were able to provide the number of students participating in various programs but were not able to provide unduplicated counts.
- Because no jurisdiction provided complete data on summer program offerings, calculation of the total investment in summer programs by county or by funding agency was not feasible. Furthermore, the data and sample size do not support extrapolation beyond the four jurisdictions to the total state investment in summer programming.

TABLE 2: DATA COLLECTED BY FUNDING AGENCY AND JURISDICTION

Funding Agency	Jurisdiction A	Jurisdiction B	Jurisdiction C	Jurisdiction D	Number Providing Data
Public Schools	✓		✓	✓	3
Parks and Recreation Departments	✓	✓		✓	3
Workforce Investment Boards		✓	✓	✓ (no funding)	3
Local Management Boards	✓ (no funding)	✓ (no funding)		✓	3
Child Care Agency	✓	✓	✓	✓	4

TABLE 3: STUDENTS AND SPENDING DATA FOR SUMMER 2007 BY FUNDING AGENCY

Funding Agency	(1) Number of Students Served*		(2) Program Enrollment as a Percentage of Total District Enrollment		(3) Program Enrollment as a Percentage of District Low-Income Enrollment**		(4) Total Dollars per Program Enrollee (excluding fees and other funding***)	
	LOW	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW	HIGH
Public Schools	1,100	25,400	6%	28%	29%	55%	\$281	\$458
Parks and Recreation Departments	110	6,800	1%	5%	3%	12%	\$93	\$591
Workforce Investment Boards	200	5,500	.2%	6%	.4%	.9%	\$568	\$2,043
Local Management Boards	0	20	§	—	—	—	—	—
Child Care Agency	40	1,100	.2%	1.3%	1.9%	1.0%	\$525	\$791

Source: Data collection by the authors, December 2007 through February 2008, in four Maryland counties.

Notes: * Data are rounded to the nearest 100 students. **School district low-income enrollment was calculated using the school district’s FARMs rate as a proxy for poverty. The FARMs rate represents the proportion of students in the district who are receiving free and reduced-price meals. ***Many publicly funded programs also charge fees to participants and/or receive additional private funds to support their program. These figures only include public funding. § Only one local management board reported providing funding for summer programs, and its program was very small. This information was deemed insufficient to use in calculations.

Findings—Students and Spending Data

Table 3 shows the number of students served; summer program enrollment as a percentage of school district enrollment and of school district low-income enrollment; and the public dollars per program enrollee. Looking at the enrollment figures, the public schools are clearly the largest providers of publicly funded summer programs, with parks and recreation and workforce development programs coming in a distant second. Except for public schools, these programs are serving a very small percentage of the total student population. The percentage is slightly higher when the participant pool is limited to low-income students. Even across the school districts, there were significant differences in the number of students served, with one jurisdiction serving far more students than the others—almost one-third of its enrollment. Interestingly, program enrollment in one jurisdiction represented more than 50 percent of the district’s low-income population.⁵ This comparatively high percentage may be explained by the fact that this school district has a low FARMs rate and a relatively large summer school enrollment.

⁵ Note that the figures in Table 3, column 3, Program Enrollment as a Percentage of District Low-Income Enrollment, do not necessarily represent the percentage of program enrollees who are low-income; most of the programs surveyed are open to families at all income levels, and no program was able to provide income data on participants. This measure attempts to account for the variability in poverty across the jurisdictions surveyed in the study.

The public dollars per program enrollee varies considerably both within and across funding agencies. Reasons for this variation may include differences in staffing costs (e.g., for certified teachers versus seasonal youth workers), in program hours (both length of day and number of days), and in the cost of living across the jurisdictions. Still another reason for the variation may be the additional funding that augments public investments. Any fees or other contributions that support programs have been excluded from the total spending data provided. What is reported is the net public financial support for these programs. Many programs, especially those in schools and parks and recreation departments, charge fees—sometimes quite hefty fees—for summer programs. In this sample, fees ranged from \$25 for six weeks in a parks and recreation program to \$700 for six weeks of high school summer school. Clearly, the relationship between fees and program costs varies widely. Some agencies are setting fees low enough to promote participation, while others are simply trying to recover some of the costs of the programs.

Public funding for summer programs in the study sample comes mainly from local and federal sources (about 50 percent each), with a very small share from state sources.⁶ The Title I compensatory education program provides the largest source of federal funding. The Workforce Investment Act, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program, and child care subsidy funds provide additional funding for summer programming. None of these federal sources has summer programming as its primary focus, and except for the child care subsidy, local agencies have discretion to determine the extent to which these funding sources are used to support summer programming. State funding, which represents less than 5 percent of funding for summer programming, includes the Maryland Summer Youth Connection youth employment program and the State School Improvement Grant.

Findings—Characteristics of Programs

Program schedules varied both within and across the funding agencies. Most of the programs operated four to six weeks of the summer, except for the child care programs, which were available for the 10 weeks school is out of session. A few programs in the study sample operated for only one to two weeks. Programs offered by the largest funder, the public schools, typically ran for half the day, while programs offered by the other funders were open for six to eight hours per day, with some programs operating as long as 12 hours per day. The total number of hours children spent in programs varied from a low of 30 hours during the summer for a one-week program to 240 hours for longer youth employment and child care programs. Most of the programs operated between 80 and 180 hours over the course of the summer.

⁶ State funds may be somewhat underrepresented in the calculations. School districts in the study sample may have reported all nonfederal funds as local funds, even though a portion of the funding for each school district is provided by the state. In addition, several federal grant programs require a state contribution that was not disaggregated in the reported figures.

WHICH FUNDING AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS WERE INCLUDED OR EXCLUDED?

Schools Programs operated or funded by the school district, except those that are fully funded through parent fees or private grants, are included. The summer special education program ESY was excluded. Most, school programs charge fees, but these fees typically do not cover the full cost of operating programs. Figures reported here are net of parent fees and private grants so that they accurately reflect public funding.

Parks and Recreation Departments In most jurisdictions, the cost of youth programs operated by parks and recreation departments are fully covered by parent fees. However, departments were asked to report only those programs that are significantly subsidized with public funding. Fees for these programs are intentionally set to be affordable for all families and require public funding to cover their costs. Figures reported here are net of parent fees so as to accurately reflect public funding for these programs.

Workforce Investment Boards All summer workforce programs for youth were included.

Child Care Agency Subsidized childcare provided in centers was included as a “summer program.” Subsidized childcare provided by families or home-based providers, a much smaller subset of subsidized care, was not included.

Across funding agencies, most programs were geared toward elementary-age children. High school-age youth were served primarily in youth employment programs and summer school programs. Surprisingly, few programs for middle school students existed. Most programs were offered in schools and community centers, with a few offered in churches and other private settings. Schools were the only funder agency that sometimes provided transportation to summer programs. If transportation was provided, typically it was available only for elementary-age children; some districts offered discounted or free fare passes on public transportation for older children. In one jurisdiction, the public housing authority transported residents to the county parks and recreation summer program.

Findings—Patterns by Funding Agency

The study also looked at funding patterns within and across funding agencies. Major findings include these.

Public Schools. Not surprisingly, within each jurisdiction, the public schools were the major funder of summer programs for school-age children—both in terms of dollars and number of children served. Most school programs were geared toward remediation or “credit recovery,” though one county offers a sizable elementary program geared toward enrichment and reinforcement of the school-year curriculum. School programs are typically offered just a few hours per day for four to five weeks of the 10-week summer. In no jurisdiction was attendance at summer school mandatory for any child, though in one jurisdiction, participation in some programs was limited to students who failed to meet promotion standards. One jurisdiction reported offering arts and sciences enrichment programs, but these were offered for much shorter periods—sometimes for just one week—and funding was supplemented by private sources. One jurisdiction is providing summer programs for almost 33 percent of its student population; the district with the next highest percentage was serving just 12 percent of its students. Data also indicated that while summer school programs are funded in large part by local education funds, each county in our sample offered at least one sizable program that was supported by federal Title I funds.

Spending per program participant also was quite varied, from a low of \$281 per participant to a high of \$458 per participant. (Again, these are just the public investments.) One explanation for this variation is that some programs offer many more total hours of service; most school programs operate four hours per day for four weeks, but some programs are more intensive and are offered for six hours per day for six weeks. When the number of hours of programming is considered, the range in spending is still fairly large—from \$2.80 to \$5.30 per child per hour. This wide range in public dollars per child probably reflects the extent to which the school system relies on fees or private funding to cover some summer programming costs. Many summer school programs charge fees, even for children who are failing.

In addition, summer school program allocations per student (public dollars) are high compared with those of other agencies. This is most likely due to staffing patterns; school programs are staffed primarily by certified teachers—though a few exceptions existed in the more comprehensive full-day programs—who command higher salaries than other program staff.

Other interesting findings include these.

- Each jurisdiction offered a sizable Title I summer program for elementary-age children attending Title I schools. The programs were free to participants, and in at least two jurisdictions, these programs were linked with comprehensive full-day summer programs offering additional enrichment and recreation activities.
- In addition to typical “summer school” programs, a few jurisdictions offered smaller targeted programs, including English classes for non-English-speaking students; gifted and talented programs, often supported with grants from private foundations or corporations; and arts programs.
- One school district provided a large grant to a private provider to run a comprehensive reading enrichment summer camp operated at school and community sites. This program also received funding from the Maryland Department of Education.

Parks and Recreation Departments. Across the sample, local parks and recreation departments play a large role in providing summer programs for low-income children and youth—second only to the public schools. These programs typically provide a traditional recreation-based summer experience offering a mix of, for example, swimming, free play, organized games, arts and crafts, and field trips. Many are operated as drop-in programs. One jurisdiction in the study sample offered a program in which the department collaborated with the school district to provide a full-day program with academics in the morning and enrichment and recreation in the afternoon.

Parks and recreation departments are units of county or city government and receive their funding from local taxes.⁷ However, the extent to which local governing bodies require these departments to cover their costs with parent fees varies substantially. Note that the figures reported in this brief are only for specific programs within these departments that purposefully set low fees or reserve free slots for low-income children. Parks and recreation departments, through their well-known athletics and aquatics programs, generally serve many more children of all income ranges. Some jurisdictions offered a comprehensive set of free or very low-cost summer programs. Other agencies were “enterprise entities” within their respective city or county government structure, setting fees so the entire cost of their program was covered.⁸

Public dollars per child vary widely across the study sample’s parks and recreation departments, from a low of \$93 per child to a high of \$591 per child. The high-end figure is for a program that provides daily transportation for children to and from the program site, an arrangement that is not typical for our sample. In fact, several program leaders lamented the lack of funds for transportation and remarked that it is a challenge for them in serving low-income children. Staffing costs for recreation programs likely are lower than for public school programs, because these programs are often staffed with seasonal, noncertified employees.

Child Care. Low-income families that meet certain income and work requirements are eligible to receive state child care vouchers to purchase child care after school and during the summer for their children below age 13. Families must use these vouchers to purchase care from licensed child care providers. In some Maryland counties, this Purchase of Care (POC) program is supplemented to help families with incomes above the state maximum. This funding is very different from the other sources included in this study; POC funds go to parents in the form of vouchers. Parents then must choose programs from a designated set of licensed providers.⁹

The POC figures reported in this brief are for children attending center-based programs. Child care vouchers are available only to eligible low-income families, so the wide range in the number of children served is largely determined by the poverty levels across the jurisdictions in the sample. Funding per child is relatively high compared with school and parks and recreation programs because child care vouchers are offered as a work support to low-income families and are available for use for the entire 10 weeks of the summer. The range in spending per child across the jurisdictions is relatively small because the state sets the voucher rates. When the number of hours children participate in these programs is taken into account, the highest expenditure is \$3.86 per child per hour and the lowest is \$2.92 per child per hour.

⁷ Some locations in Maryland have both a county recreation department and multiple city recreation departments.

⁸ Most recreation departments have fee waiver or reduction programs for low-income children. However, whether this practice represents a public subsidy is not entirely clear. When establishing a fee structure, the department estimates the dollar amount of fee waivers and reductions it expects to provide and then attempts to set program fees so the total fees collected cover program operating costs. The study team was not able to collect data on the number or dollar amount of fee waivers and reductions.

⁹ Licensed providers meet state requirements for their physical space, adult-child ratios, staff education and training, and other criteria.

Not surprisingly, within each jurisdiction, the public schools were the major funder of summer programs both in terms of dollars and number of children served.



Workforce Investment Boards. Through their youth councils, local workforce investment boards fund programs to help high school-age youth—and some college-age youth—develop work-related skills. Youth employment programs provide students with summer jobs in public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private-sector businesses. In the study sample, youth worked six to eight hours per day for six weeks. One jurisdiction also offered a program to send students to a state leadership camp. Not surprisingly, these programs are typically in high demand. The jurisdiction reporting the largest youth employment program had to turn away 1,500 youth in summer 2007.

A combination of public and private funds supports the program, including providing wages for youth as well as administrative support for the program. Two jurisdictions reported youth workforce employment programs and a third did not offer such a program. For these programs, public funding per participant ranged from a high of \$2,043 to a low of \$568. In both cases, the workforce development programs received funding from private sources to augment public investments. According to one jurisdiction, it costs about \$1,200 for each youth worker in the program; private funding is making up the difference between public investments and the full cost of these programs.

The main public funding sources for workforce development programs in Maryland include the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and a state program called Maryland Summer Youth Connections (SYC). State and local WIA and SYC allocations are based on labor market conditions, including the number of unemployed and economically disadvantaged. One county in the sample reported that it turns down its workforce development funds because it does not receive enough funding to justify the administrative burden of operating a program.

Local Management Boards. In Maryland, local management boards (LMBs) are responsible for coordinating children and family services and supporting interagency collaboration at the local level. Among respondents, LMBs provided surprisingly little funding for summer programs. The lone LMB funding summer activities provided support for a very small number of at-risk students to attend a university-sponsored leadership camp. One jurisdiction indicated it focused its youth funding on after-school programs because annual funding allocations are finalized too late in the year (spring) to allow for proper planning for summer programs. Other anecdotal information suggests that at least one other LMB not included in the study sample funds a substantial number of summer programs. ■

IV

LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

Summer “coverage” is far from complete.

Except for voucher-purchased child care, the longest-running programs operated for only six out of the average 10 weeks of the summer break. Most programs were only four weeks in duration, and few programs operated during August. Under this scenario, low-income working families may have to choose between taking off time from work, which is costly and may jeopardize their employment, and leaving their school-age children unsupervised for a portion of the summer.



The supply of low-cost summer programs is limited, but questions about demand remain. Clearly, a sizable deficit is apparent in the number of free and low-cost summer programs relative to the number of low-income school-age children. Interestingly, very few of the programs included in this study had waiting lists. Many possible explanations for this exist. Families of children who could most benefit from summer programs may not have been aware that these programs were available and, therefore, did not try to enroll. Alternatively, families may not enroll their children in summer programs for various reasons, including concerns about program cost, content, quality, location, cultural differences, or other family needs (e.g., child care for younger siblings). Families may also believe that summer is a time for unstructured pursuits. Another possible explanation is that programs may not be keeping accurate track of families that are turned away. Additional study is needed to understand desires and preferences for participation in summer programming, especially among low-income families.

Summer programming is not well coordinated at the local level. None of the jurisdictions in the study had an agency or organization that attempted to synthesize information on summer programming. Even within some of the larger agencies, such as the schools or the parks and recreation departments, information on summer programs did not reside in a specific office, nor did any one person have a good understanding of the full range of summer offerings. Information had to be gathered from multiple offices to gain a complete picture of investments in summer programming. This finding has implications for policymaking and for other efforts to collect this type of information. The lack of coordination at the local level also points to an opportunity for state policymakers to provide some structure for collecting information on summer programming. For example, if a state education agency were to require school districts to provide information on summer programming—even very basic information—these data would be more readily available. Once the data were available, states and localities could use the information to enhance planning and decision making.

Many free and low-cost programs have lower attendance rates. Surprisingly, summer programs, particularly free and low-cost programs, often have difficulties with attendance. Many free programs geared toward at-risk children find they must consistently overenroll to ensure they fill their slots for the summer; even then, many often have trouble with consistent attendance. This situation makes it difficult for agencies to staff programs appropriately and raises the question of the best use of resources. Low participation could be related to several factors, including preferences, vacations, competing summer activities, transportation issues, and program quality concerns. More information is needed to understand this finding and ensure that new funding for summer programs is put to good use. Anecdotal evidence and focus group data suggest that families may place more importance on youth attendance if personal contributions—even small financial contributions—are required.¹⁰

Public funding for summer programs comes largely from local and federal sources and varies widely across jurisdictions. Most public funding used for summer programs comes from local and federal sources; state funding is minimal. Clearly, local communities are making different choices when it comes to expending public funds for summer programs. Some localities are deploying significant resources to support such programming, while others are not doing so. Most summer programs also received funding from private sources to augment public investments. Understanding the relationship between public and private investment can help communities leverage additional funding.

Most summer programs, even those funded with public dollars, charge fees. Of the programs that charge fees, many offer fee reductions or waivers to help offset costs. Some program leaders argue that having a small fee makes the program more “valuable” to program participants; others believed that even a small fee may discourage some families from participating. Additional research is needed to help policymakers understand the pros and cons of charging fees for programs for lower-income students.

¹⁰ Data collected by the Center for Summer Learning, 2007.

The term “summer learning” is not well understood.

In this brief, the term “summer programs” is used to encompass a wide range of summer options. The study team began this work by asking participants about their “summer learning” programs. The data collection effort in just four counties indicated that some respondents considered their programs to be places where learning occurred. Other respondents were confused about the terminology of summer learning; their programs were places where children came to play and have fun. For this second group of programs—in which children and youth are clearly learning but in a more experiential way—additional work on the part of advocates and the education community could enhance understanding about the many ways children learn. As states and communities move forward to expand summer programs, an important step will be educating all partners on the different types of summer learning and finding a common language for policymakers and advocates to rally around.

Collecting data on public support for summer programs is challenging.

Without a clear mandate or request from a government agency, collecting data from local organizations on the use of public funding for summer programming is challenging and time consuming. This work involves locating the people with the relevant information and then gaining their cooperation. Oftentimes, requests for information have to be approved by a supervisor, or some “analysis” is needed before the relevant information can be provided. Both of these situations require additional time and usually repeated follow-up. If states or localities are interested in collecting and analyzing information on summer programs from different agencies and organizations, it is strongly advised that a request for data come from an individual or agency with authority to make this happen, such as a mayor or an agency head. More information and tips for collecting data on summer programming can be found in the appendix. ■

V CONCLUSION

This study has provided a systematic assessment of public investments in summer programming in four jurisdictions in Maryland. Across the counties, public investments are providing summer learning opportunities to only a fraction of low-income children and youth. Moreover, very little planning and coordination of summer programming is occurring at the local level.

To respond to a growing body of information on the benefits of summer learning, more communities will likely be seeking ways to expand their summer learning options, especially for children deemed most at risk for educational failure. Moving forward will require more than just additional resources. States and communities will have to improve the coordination of programming if they are to use their resources strategically. This will likely involve designating an agency or organization to act as a central repository of information on the types of programming available and the activities undertaken within each program. Data on program costs, locations, and other elements will also be critical. With this information, states and communities can then target scarce resources to populations and locales most in need of summer programming.

Finally, most children and youth will want a say in the types of summer programs in which they participate. This is especially true for older youth who can “vote with their feet.” Although policymakers may be tempted to fund programs that focus on traditional educational approaches, children and youth clearly benefit from being exposed to enriching environments in a variety of forms. A program that is both fun and educational is likely to entice the largest group of participants. ■

APPENDIX

TIPS TO GET STARTED COLLECTING INFORMATION ON PUBLIC FUNDING FOR SUMMER LEARNING

States and localities can use the following tips to plan for and implement a resource scan of summer programs. The scan can be limited to public sources or can be expanded to include privately funded programs.

1. Consider local governing structures when selecting the jurisdictions where data will be collected. Invariably you will want to collect data from school districts, so consider how school district boundaries overlap with those of other jurisdictions.

- ✓ How well do the city/county structures align with school district boundaries?
- ✓ If there are multiple school districts to be considered, is there a regional structure or an intermediate or unified school district that can provide data for several districts?
- ✓ Will the mayor or county government be able to gain cooperation from school district administrators who can provide the needed data? What is the relationship between the mayor or county superintendent and the school board?

2. Figure out who the largest providers are in the jurisdiction and begin by asking about their programs.

In the first round of interviews, be sure to ask about other programs that are receiving public funding.

- ✓ Be sure to include school districts, parks and recreation departments, and workforce investment offices. You may also want to include private providers, such as YMCAs or Boys and Girls Clubs that often run large programs with public funding, county extension programs, and local health departments.
- ✓ Determine whether the jurisdictions in which you are interested have already put together a compendium of summer programs that can be helpful in identifying agencies and organizations providing summer programs. Many of the programs included in these documents may be private fee-based programs, but some publicly funded programs may be included.

3. Send an introductory letter or e-mail to agency personnel indicating that you will be contacting them for data and explaining the purpose of your data gathering. Hopefully, this letter or e-mail will come from a public official with enough clout to encourage participation.

- ✓ Clearly identify what the data will be used for and whether the information will allow for identification of individual programs or districts.
- ✓ Indicate the name of the person or organization that will be following up to collect the data.
- ✓ Consider a kick-off meeting to solicit buy-in, explain the purposes of the data gathering, and explain what the final product will look like. This will give participants an opportunity to ask questions and gain a better understanding of what you are trying to accomplish.

APPENDIX

4. Decide which programs will be included in this resource scan. This process can be tricky.

- ✓ Do you want to include all programs from particular agencies?
- ✓ Do you want to include only programs that operate for a minimum specified number of hours (e.g., X hours per day, Y days per week, or Z weeks per year) or that serve a minimum number of students?
- ✓ Do you want to focus on a particular age group?
- ✓ Do you want to focus on a particular set of activities?

5. Determine how you want to account for fees and fee waivers.

- ✓ Keep in mind that some programs offered by public agencies may be largely fee-supported, and sometimes staff may not be fully aware that programs do not have any net public investment.
- ✓ Many agencies can easily provide budget information but may have to research the amount of total fees collected. Sometimes the calculation to determine total fees is as simple as multiplying the number of participants by the program fee amount, but other times it is more complex when fee schedules vary based on income.

6. Think clearly about the information you want to collect. You may want to collect information on:

- ✓ sources of the public funding
- ✓ total funding and total public funding
- ✓ total fees collected
- ✓ number of youth served
- ✓ ages and grades of youth served
- ✓ where programs took place
- ✓ primary program activities (academic, enrichment, sports, etc.)
- ✓ program schedules (hours, days, and weeks of operation)
- ✓ whether or not the program is a continuation of a school-year program
- ✓ the percentage of students in the program who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches
- ✓ the presence of a waiting list
- ✓ whether or not transportation is provided
- ✓ information on summer programs run by other organizations on behalf of the agency (i.e., subcontracts)

This list should be considered a roadmap rather than a blueprint. Each locale will want to customize this list to collect the data it needs to enhance summer programming.

7. Ask respondents about any challenges they face in administering summer programs.

Anecdotal information can be helpful in understanding some of the findings from the data and in framing the analysis and planning subsequent steps.

In 2007, the National Center for Summer Learning redesigned its website to serve as a powerful resource for the latest news, policy developments, research, and professional development opportunities in the field of summer learning.

To access these resources and more information on summer learning, visit us at: www.summerlearning.org



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