



Summer Learning Programs

Evaluation Report for Summers 2021 and 2022

Office of Research, Planning, and Program Evaluation
January 2024

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Executive Summary

From cupcake wars to robotics, there were more than 150 distinct summer learning programs implemented across 24 local educational agencies (LEAs) in Maryland during the summer of 2021. A combination of local, state, and federal funds was used to serve over 120,000 students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, states including Maryland received a substantial increase in revenue through the allocation of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds. As part of a broader initiative to transform education, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) committed the use of these federal funds to support summer learning programs as required under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Blueprint).

According to the *Implementation of the Summer School Program* reports required under the Blueprint, LEAs collectively spent more than \$69 million, an average of \$876.31 per student, to implement summer learning programs in 2021. The largest proportion of budgets was spent on salaries and wages for certified teachers. Program implementation included expanding new and existing summer learning programs by opening registration to all students, designing a variety of programs, hiring additional staff, offering multiple modes of instruction, and providing free meals and transportation to student participants for the first time. The majority of programs offered in-person instruction and primarily focused on academic acceleration, enrichment, or credit recovery.

With the expansion of program offerings and to determine which components of program design should be sustained beyond the federal funding grant period, this report serves to evaluate how programs were implemented and to examine the student outcomes of programs. The evaluation used a mixed-methods design that included an in-depth descriptive data analysis of summer programming across the LEAs, an examination of the differences in cost across summer program designs, comparison of program level assessment data gathered prior to and at the end of summer programs to determine their impact on learning, aggregation of school-year assessments to determine how performance outcomes differed between participants and non-participants, and responses from open-ended interviews with LEA staff that coordinated summer programs. Analyses contain various subsets of available data for 113 programs serving 116,388 student participants across 24 LEAs in Maryland.

Based on the aggregated data reported by LEAs in the 2022 *Implementation of the Summer School Program* reports and through supplemental data requests, this report includes the following findings:

- **Many summer learning program designs aligned with most of the requirements in the Blueprint legislation; however, nearly all LEAs reported not implementing these requirements in programs across all school levels.** Of the seven requirements relevant to program design, the daily academic instruction in reading or math requirement was met by the highest number of LEAs (23), and the requirement to establish partnerships with local government to provide non-academic experiences was met by the fewest number of LEAs (12).
- **At least 18 LEAs implemented one program, at minimum, that met each of the goals and objectives — focus on equity, ensure mental health and well-being, and offer free resources.** A minimal focus on equity across programs was demonstrated through the lack of disaggregation by student subgroups and prioritization of disadvantaged students in selection criteria. Through approaches such as the addition of social emotional learning to curricula and access to school counselors, the majority of programs (81) within 21 LEAs ensured student mental health and well-being was addressed. Despite the Blueprint requirement, only 18 LEAs

reported implementing a program that provided both free meals and transportation to student participants.

- **Per student costs varied greatly within and across LEAs due to differing modes of instruction, resource offerings, and various class sizes.** Across eight LEAs with available data, the cost per enrolled student for programs ranged from \$154 to \$4,227, with a median of \$1,222. Overall, programs with above average per student costs offered more hours of instruction, smaller class sizes, and opportunities to support mental health.
- **Many summer learning programs reported gains in learning despite low attendance rates.** The average daily attendance rate across 60 programs within 18 LEAs was 77%. Only four programs across two LEAs reported an average attendance rate greater than the respective LEA's 2020-2021 school-year attendance rate. Nineteen LEAs with 43 programs reported that students made growth on an assessment administered at the beginning of the program to the one taken at the end. Of 16 programs within seven LEAs that used school-year assessments, only four programs reported having summer participants that outperformed non-participants.

During the development of this report, LEAs submitted *Implementation of the Summer School Program* reports for 2022 summer programs. Data from these reports have been aggregated and analyzed to ensure the relevance of the concluding report recommendations. A year-over-year trend analysis of this data determined that while summer 2022 programs had an overall increase in reported expenditures, the total number of student participants decreased, most likely due to an increase in in-person instruction. Moreover, compared to summer 2021 programs, LEAs reported meeting less of the Blueprint program design requirements for summer 2022.

As the planning for the summer of 2024 begins, this report concludes with six recommendations for future summer programming:

- The State should allocate funds for summer learning programs to ensure every program has adequate hours of instruction, small classes, free resources, and partnerships that provide non-academic experiences.
- LEAs should establish partnerships with local government and community-based organizations to provide non-academic experiences, create social capital, and decrease per-student costs.
- LEAs should incorporate a systemic social emotional learning approach that fosters youth voice to increase attendance and engagement.
- LEAs should prioritize equity in the criteria to select students for summer programs to ensure students with the greatest learning loss receive an opportunity for more individualized instruction.
- LEAs should offer more than credit recovery programs to provide a variety of learning opportunities to all high school students.
- MSDE and LEAs should standardize data collection requirements and provide precise report templates to concurrently ensure programs meet all legislative requirements and support a more robust evaluation of programs.

Introduction

During a school year disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, federal funds were allocated across the nation to support state and local educational agency (LEA) investment in interventions such as summer programs to address unfinished learning.¹ As part of a broader initiative to transform education, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) committed the use of these funds to support summer learning programs as required under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Blueprint).² Under this law, each county board of education was required to use federal funding, which includes Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, to establish and implement a 2021 summer program for students ranging from kindergarten through 12th grade. Moreover, each program was required to include each of the following:³ Provide daily academic instruction in reading or math

- Limit the number of students assigned to each teacher in the program
- Establish partnerships with local government
- Provide free meals
- Offer transportation to students who need transportation to participate in the program
- Prioritize enrollment for students with the greatest learning loss from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education
- Administer an educational assessment to each student prior to beginning the program and on completion of the program
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the summer school program at the conclusion of each year
- Use State and federal funding provided for COVID-19 relief to expand existing summer school programs in 2021 and 2022 at no additional cost to public schools for the programs

Through the enactment of this legislation and the influx of revenue directed toward summer learning in 2021, LEAs were required to expand existing summer school programs across school levels and provide free meals and transportation to students for the first time. With the expansion of program offerings and to determine which components of program design should be sustained beyond the end of the ESSER grant period on September 30, 2024, this evaluation serves to examine the implementation of new and existing summer program designs, resources, and student outcomes.

Following this introduction and the intervention overview, this report is sectioned into five evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.⁴ Through the application of these criteria, this report discusses the inclusion of Blueprint requirements in program designs, goals and

¹ This report uses the term “unfinished learning” in lieu of “learning loss” which is used when directly referencing the Blueprint legislation.

² [House Bill 1372: Blueprint for Maryland's Future – Revisions](#)

³ Requirements are defined as any part of the Blueprint legislation that include the word “shall.” Parts of the legislation that include the word “may” instead of “shall” were not evaluated in this report. A complete list of program components that were included in legislation but not required can be found in **Appendix A**.

⁴ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2021), *Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/543e84ed-en>.

objectives, time and costs, student outcomes, and the potential sustainability of new and existing summer learning programs across the state of Maryland. This report concludes with a summary table and recommendations for future summer programs and evaluations. Additionally, paraphrased quotes from interviews with LEAs are included throughout the report.

Evaluation Questions

The following questions were used to guide this evaluation and are aligned to the guidance provided in the MSDE *Summer Learning Programs: Guidance to Maryland Local School Systems*⁵:

1. To what extent did summer programs include Blueprint requirements?
2. Were summer program goals and objectives achieved?
3. What were the comparative costs of summer program designs?
4. What were the student outcomes of summer programs?
5. How does 2022 summer program data compare to 2021?

Evaluation Scope and Size

In the *2022 Implementation of the Summer School Program* reports, all 24 LEAs reported implementing at least one summer learning program in 2021.⁶ Fourteen percent of students enrolled statewide during the 2020-2021 school year were reported as having participated in the more than 150 distinct summer programs across the state, with programs that included various grade levels, content areas, and purposes.⁷

Due to the quantity and variety of programs, this evaluation examines programs that satisfied both of the following criteria:

- Fall under one or more of the eight program types listed in the *MSDE Summer Learning Programs: Guidance to Maryland Local School Systems*, plus enrichment and remediation.
- Used educational assessments to determine academic progress. Based on these inclusion criteria, analyses contain subsets of available data for 113 programs with 116,388 student participants. LEAs had between 1 and 29 summer programs, with an average of four. (For a list of program types and descriptions of each, see **Appendix B**.)

⁵ In order to assist LEAs in designing evidence-based summer learning programs, a [summer learning resource guide](#) was developed and distributed by MSDE in 2021.

⁶ [Reports](#) were required by the Blueprint.

⁷ A distinct program is a program that includes one school level and one program type.

Methodology

DATA COLLECTION

Under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, each county board and Baltimore City, was required to submit a report to the Legislative Policy Committee of the General Assembly for summer learning programs in 2021 that included the following:

- how many students were served through the program
- the structure of the program, including hours of instruction, modes of instruction, and established partnerships
- the method used to identify students with the greatest learning loss
- the budget and expenditures for the program
- the outcomes of the program for students, including academic progress and other outcomes

To reduce the amount of burden on LEAs, the data required in these reports were entered and disaggregated by program and school levels into a spreadsheet and shared with each LEA for review. In addition to confirming the data included in the spreadsheet, LEAs were requested to add additional data such as average daily attendance rate, program type, teacher certification status, class size, and any opportunities provided to support student mental health and/or well-being.

To construct learning stories that demonstrated the implementation successes and challenges of summer learning programs, staff that coordinated summer programs in five LEAs with outlier student outcome data were selected to participate in a 45-minute open-ended confidential interview. Interview questions were sent prior to the scheduled interview, and the meeting was recorded for note-taking purposes.

ANALYSIS

In order to answer the evaluation questions, the evaluation design includes comparative case studies, cost-effectiveness analyses, one-group pretests posttests, matched comparison groups, and year-over-year analysis (**Table 1**). This mixed-methods design involved

- an in-depth descriptive data analysis of summer programming occurring across the LEAs
- an examination of the differences in cost across summer program designs
- a comparison of program level assessment data gathered prior to and at the end of summer programs to determine their impact on learning of student participants
- an aggregation of school-year assessments to determine how performance outcomes differed between students who participated in the program and students who did not
- responses from the open-ended interviews were analyzed to determine common themes and paraphrased to include in this evaluation.

Table 1. Analytic Description of the Report's Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Question	Analytic Description
To what extent did summer programs include Blueprint requirements?	Comparative Case Study
Were summer program goals and objectives achieved?	Comparative Case Study
What were the comparative costs of summer program designs?	Cost-Effectiveness
What were the student outcomes of summer programs?	One-Group Pretest Posttest & Matched Group Comparisons
How does 2022 summer program data compare to 2021?	Year-over-Year

LIMITATIONS

Due to varying availability of LEA data, numerous types of educational assessments, and a limited quantity of disaggregation at program and school levels, analyses within each section of this report includes different numbers of LEAs and programs. Although the additional data collection conducted filled in a significant number of gaps found within the reports, many LEAs did not collect or evaluate summer learning programs beyond mandated requirements. For several LEAs, data such as total costs could not be disaggregated at the program level. While it was not required in the *Implementation of the Summer School Program* reports, data disaggregated by program type and school level for each program design component are ideal in producing an evaluation such as this, which is aggregated to the State level.

Overview of Intervention

After an unprecedented school year, the summer of 2021 became an opportune time to implement programs to address unfinished learning and student well-being. Across Maryland, LEAs implemented summer programs that served diverse student populations and grade levels in a variety of settings, including schools, camps, community-based organizations, workplaces, and homes. With the additional revenue allocated from ESSER, many LEAs reported expanding new and existing summer learning programs by opening registration to all students, designing an array of programs, hiring additional staff, offering multiple modes of instruction, and increasing spending to improve access. This section provides an overview of each of these areas.

Enrollment

Summer enrollment across LEAs ranged from 2% to 31% of the total LEA regular school year enrollment (**Figure 1**).⁸ Most LEAs developed selection criteria in order to determine and prioritize enrollment of students with the greatest learning loss as required by the Blueprint. However, many summer learning programs did not serve the number of students originally intended, while several programs had waiting lists. For programs that did not reach the intended capacity, LEAs reported that parents declined students' participation in the program for a variety of reasons. Reasons included concerns about accelerating right after a virtual school year and a lack of willing student participants. Programs with waiting lists reported difficulty with securing additional educators. Elementary programs had the greatest number of enrolled student participants while middle school programs had the least. (For additional enrollment data by LEA, see **Appendix C.**)

Promising Practice:

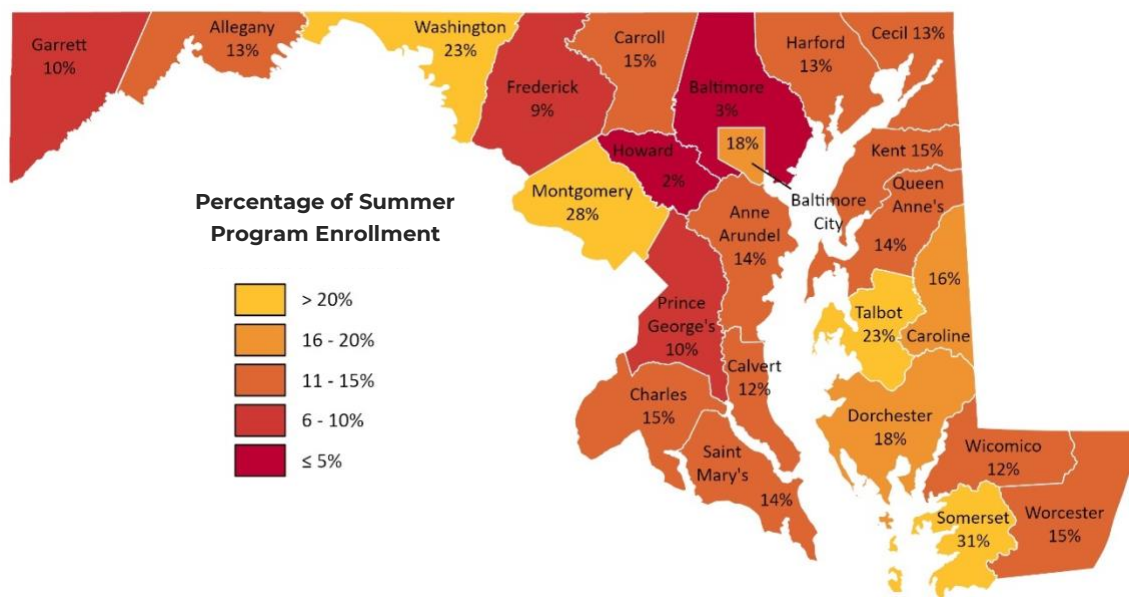
Increasing Enrollment with Student, Parent, & Teacher Input

"We sent surveys to parents, students, and our teaching staff. The purpose of the teacher survey was to find out what passions teachers had and to determine if they would run a camp. For instance, we had some teachers who were really passionate about cupcakes and wanted to run multiple summer sessions infusing mathematics with baking cupcakes. This led to a vast variety of summer programs and a huge demand for camps. When students registered for camp through our website, they were encouraged to pick their first choice, second choice, and third choice. The website slotted them into a camp of one of their three choices, if available. If the camp was already at capacity, then a student was put on a waiting list – one camp in particular had a waiting list with more than 1,000 students."

— LEA Director

⁸ Enrollment data includes all student participants in this evaluation and those reported in the 2022 *Implementation of the Summer School Program* reports.

Figure 1. Percentage of 2020-2021 School Year Students Enrolled in 2021 Summer Programs by LEA



Program Types

Based on the descriptions included in the *2022 Implementation of the Summer School Program* reports, programs were categorized into eleven types. Of 113 programs, acceleration, enrichment, and credit recovery programs were the most prevalent. As shown in **Table 2**, these program types also had the highest number of student participants. Acceleration and enrichment programs mostly covered mathematics and literacy. Both career and technical education and mental health and well-being programs had the fewest number of programs and student participants. Moreover, despite substantial evidence of the effectiveness of high-quality tutoring, only one LEA offered tutoring as a distinct program to students.⁹

⁹ Robinson, C. D., Kraft, M. A., Loeb, S., & Schueler, B. E. (2021). Accelerating Student Learning with High-Dosage Tutoring. EdResearch for Recovery Design Principles Series. *EdResearch for Recovery Project*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED613847.pdf>

Table 2. Number of LEAs and Students by Program Type

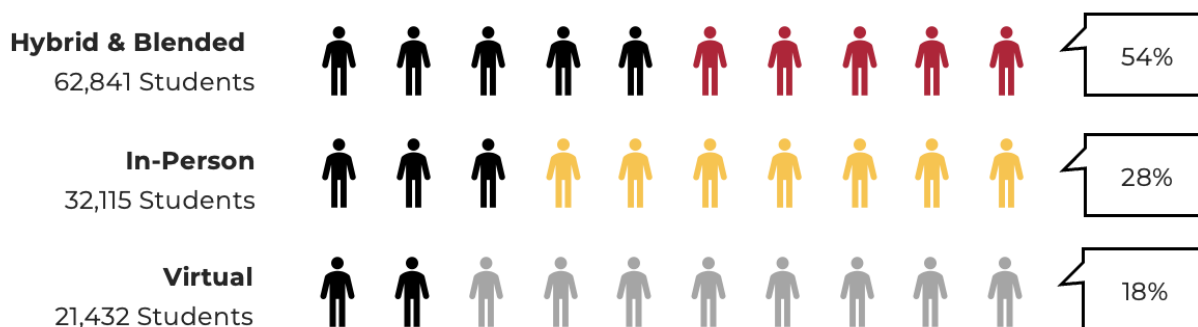
Program Type	Number of LEAs	Number of Students
Acceleration	11	53,686
Career and Technical Education (CTE)	1	41
Credit Recovery	16	16,515
English Learners (ELs)	1	389
Enrichment	10	16,946
Mental Health & Well-Being	1	292
Other	6	15,177
Remediation	8	6,483
Special Education	4	2,795
Transition	1	2,263

Note: Numbers based on 113 summer programs.

Modes of Instruction

In order to accommodate students and families that were not yet comfortable with a return to in-person instruction, several LEAs reported offering a combination of virtual, in-person, hybrid, and blended instruction. As shown in **Figure 2** below, the greatest number of students participated in programs with a hybrid or blended mode of instruction, while the least number of students participated in programs with virtual instruction. However, the majority of programs (69%) offered only in-person instruction. Virtual programs included both asynchronous and synchronous delivery, with 13 programs being synchronous and the remaining seven being asynchronous or a combination of the two.

Figure 2. Number and Percentage of Students by Modes of Instruction



Note: Numbers based on 113 summer programs.

Staffing

Staffing for summer programs across LEAs included, but was not limited to, a combination of the following:

- Certified Teachers
- College Students
- English Language Learner Teachers
- Instructional Aides
- Paraprofessionals
- School Counselors
- School Nurses
- Site Coordinators
- Social Workers
- Special Education Teachers
- Teacher Candidates
- Bus Contractors

Of the 80 programs with available data, all 80 reported that at least 50% of program instructors were certified teachers. For programs unable to place a certified teacher in each classroom, LEAs reported hiring and training professionals without certification but with bachelor's degrees.

Expenditures

Total reported expenditures by LEA ranged from under \$100,000 to more than \$16 million. Across LEAs, the largest proportion of budgets was spent on salaries and wages for instruction. Many LEAs reported raising hourly wages for certified teachers to more than \$50 per hour to incentivize the transition to fully in-person instruction. For 19 LEAs, transportation expenditures ranged from less than \$30,000 to more than half a million dollars, with transportation costs accounting for 12% of budgets, on average.

Inclusion of Blueprint Requirements in Program Designs

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Blueprint) legislation included nine requirements for each local board of education to establish and implement summer learning programs in calendar year 2021. Although each requirement was included to improve and expand existing programs, only seven of the nine are relevant to summer program design.¹⁰ This section examines how LEAs and programs met each of these seven Blueprint requirements.

Seventy-two distinct programs that reported serving more than 107,000 students across all LEAs were included in this analysis.¹¹ Although many summer learning program designs aligned with the requirements in the Blueprint legislation, several LEAs reported not implementing these requirements across all school levels. If an LEA did not implement or report a requirement across all school levels, they were marked as not meeting the requirement.

As shown in **Table 3** below, at least twelve LEAs met one of the listed Blueprint requirements across all school levels. Only 14 programs across nine LEAs and one LEA across all three school levels reported meeting all the listed requirements. The daily academic instruction in reading or math requirement was met by the highest number of LEAs and the requirement to establish partnerships to provide students with non-academic experiences was met by the fewest number of LEAs. Each listed requirement is briefly summarized in the text that follows Table 3.

Table 3. Number of LEAs and Percentage of Programs Meeting Blueprint Requirements

Blueprint Requirement	Number of LEAs	Percentage of Programs
Provide Daily Academic Instruction in Reading or Math	23	99%
Limit Number of Students Assigned to Each Teacher	14	72%
Establish Partnerships that Provide Students with Non-Academic Experiences	12	59%
Provide Free Meals	15	69%
Provide Free Transportation	19	85%

¹⁰ The two remaining requirements include evaluating the effectiveness of the summer school program at the conclusion of each year and using State and federal funding provided for COVID-19 relief to expand existing summer school programs in 2021 and 2022 at no additional cost to public schools.

¹¹ For each LEA, only programs with the highest number of student participants at each school level with a program type that did not target a particular student subgroup were included in this analysis. LEAs may have met requirements in programs not included in this analysis.

Blueprint Requirement	Number of LEAs	Percentage of Programs
Prioritize Enrollment for Students with the Greatest Learning Loss	18	85%
Administer an Assessment at the Beginning and End of the Program	21	90%
All Requirements	1	19%

Note: Numbers based on 72 summer programs.

Provide Daily Academic Instruction in Reading or Math

Across 23 LEAs, daily academic instruction in reading or math was provided to students at every school level during the 2021 summer learning programs. Only one LEA did not report subject areas for one program at the high school level. Although math and reading were the only subjects mandated by the Blueprint, many LEAs offered programs that taught a variety of content. Of 72 programs, 67% reported offering subjects in addition to reading and math. Programs included content areas such as social studies, science, fine arts, physical education, social emotional learning, technology, health, and personal finance.

Limit Number of Students Assigned to Each Teacher

The class size limit requirement was met at every school level across 14 LEAs. If an LEA did not have an average class size of 15 or fewer for at least one program across each school level, they were marked as not meeting this requirement. Since no limit was specified in the Blueprint, this threshold was based on research that found that summer programs are more effective when classes had no more than 15 students.¹² Of 72 programs, 72% reported an average class size of 15 or fewer.

Establish Partnerships that Provide Students with Non-Academic Experiences

The requirement of partnerships that provided non-academic experiences to students was met by the lowest number of LEAs (12). Partnerships included entities such as health departments, environmental centers, libraries, parks and recreation departments, colleges, and museums. The most common partnership, across eight LEAs, was with the local public library. Of the 29 programs reporting no partnerships, 45% provided virtual, hybrid, or blended instruction.

¹² EdResearch for Recovery (2023). Summer Learning Program Profiles - Advancing Student Learning and Opportunity through Voluntary Academic Summer Learning Programs. *Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University*. Retrieved from Summer Learning Series: <https://annenberg.brown.edu/recovery/summer-learning-program-profiles-advancing-student-learning-and-opportunity-through>

Provide Free Meals

For 69% of in-person, 50% of hybrid/blended, and 80% of virtual programs, free meals were reported being provided to students across 18 LEAs. Only 15 LEAs reported providing free meals across all school levels. Free meals were offered most frequently at the elementary level and least often at the high school level. One LEA reported using the United States Department of Agriculture federal meal reimbursement program to supplement meal costs.¹³

Provide Free Transportation

Free transportation was provided across the 19 LEAs that provided in-person instruction at each school level. Four LEAs, or 10% of programs, provided only virtual instruction that did not require transportation. The one remaining LEA did not report if transportation was provided.

Prioritize Enrollment for Students with the Greatest Learning Loss

As determined by the selection criteria included in the 2022 Implementation of the Summer School Program reports, 18 LEAs prioritized enrollment for students with the greatest learning loss from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. If an LEA used an educational assessment such as a standardized assessment or course grade to select students, they were marked as meeting this requirement. In addition to assessments and course grades, LEAs used attendance, teacher and counselor recommendations, and parent input to select students to participate in summer programs. The five LEAs that had a program that was open and able to accommodate any interested student were not considered as meeting this requirement.

Administer an Assessment at the Beginning and End of the Program

Across 21 LEAs, an educational assessment was administered at the beginning and end of the program at each school level. The number of students who took an assessment was not available for many programs. Therefore, if an LEA reported results of any students that took an assessment, they were considered as meeting this requirement. For the three LEAs not meeting this requirement, the use of an educational assessment was reported, but not enough details were provided to determine if programs across all school levels met this requirement. Reported assessments ranged from diagnostic pretest to summative assessments that determined course credit.

¹³ Maryland State Department of Education. (2023). *Summer Food Service Program*. Retrieved from Office of School and Community Nutrition Programs:

<https://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/SchoolandCommunityNutrition/Pages/Programs/SFSP.aspx>

Program Goals and Objectives

In order to determine the extent to which summer learning programs were effective, this section incorporates goals from the MSDE *Summer Learning Programs: Guidance to Maryland Local School Systems* document to evaluate program designs. The goals included are a focus on equity and ensuring student mental health and well-being. Free meals and transportation offered to students, as required in the Blueprint legislation, are also analyzed to determine if they were associated with program effectiveness.

Through follow-up data requests, at least 22 LEAs indicated whether they met the following goals and objectives. **Table 4** below shows the number of LEAs and the percentage of programs that reported meeting each of the goals and objectives. At least 18 LEAs implemented one program, at minimum, that met each of the goals and objectives.

Table 4. Number of LEAs and Percentage of Programs Meeting Goals and Objectives

Goals & Objectives	Number of LEAs	Percentage of Programs
Focus on Equity	18	75%
Ensure Mental Health and Well-Being	21	72%
Offer Free Meals & Transportation	18	58%

Note: Percentages are based on 113 summer programs.

Focus on Equity

The 2021 summer learning programs provided a supplemental educational opportunity to respond to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on historically marginalized communities.¹⁴ However, across 28 programs, 11 LEAs reported that they did not incorporate equity into program selection criteria nor disaggregate academic outcomes progress or participants by student subgroups.

While it was not required by the Blueprint, selection of students based on criteria beyond learning loss may have reduced the opportunity and achievement gaps that increased due to the

Equity Learning Story

“Educators who ran traditional summer school models pre-COVID were a little resistant to the expansion and vast variety of summer learning programs. Specifically, there was resistance about not charging a fee for participation. There is a belief that if a student is paying that there is some ownership in showing up and working hard. Educators also struggled with beliefs around the type of clientele of students attending programs. It was difficult to think through the growing pains of the diversity of students showing up due to improving access to the programs. There also were learning curves around providing accommodations for all students, in the summertime, particularly about who to include in the promotion of a program and if we do the intervention for a child that has an IEP with accommodations. We had to learn how to support all those accommodations throughout the summer.”

— LEA Director

¹⁴ Thakur, N., Lovinsky-Desir, S., Bime, C., Wisnivesky, J. P., & Celedón, J. C. (2020). The structural and social determinants of the racial/ethnic disparities in the US COVID-19 pandemic. What’s our role?. *American journal of respiratory and critical care medicine*, 202(7), 943-949. <https://doi.org/10.1164/rccm.202005-1523PPP>

pandemic.¹⁵ Twenty-six programs within six LEAs reported using an equity lens to select and prioritize students. This included reserving seats for economically disadvantaged students, students with free and reduced meal status, students with disabilities, and English Learners.

Data disaggregation by student subgroups plays an important role in ensuring that all students have the same access to evidenced-based programs and experienced educators. Of 113 programs, 67 programs within 12 LEAs reported disaggregating academic outcomes from assessments administered during the program and/or participants by student subgroups. Due to varying degrees of disaggregation, these data could not be summarized.

Ensure Mental Health and Well-Being

For many students, the 2020-2021 school year was a year of considerable trauma, stress, and uncertainty.¹⁶ Through interventions such as summer learning, students could learn skills to help manage distress exacerbated by the pandemic.¹⁷ These skills could better prepare them for academic instruction in the fall. Of 113 programs, 81 programs across 21 LEAs reported providing activities or opportunities to support student mental health and well-being (**Table 4**). Opportunities included student access to school counselors and social workers, vendors trained in restorative practices, the addition of social emotional learning lessons to curriculum and creating affirmative environments.

Program Spotlight: Social Emotional Learning

“We had a bunch of different social emotional learning lessons that educators were able to access. One of the programs that we put into the elementary summer curriculum included video clips with questions. For example, the video would present an age-appropriate scenario where two little kids might be playing on the playground or two kids arguing, then the clip would ask: ‘What does it feel like when you are a good friend?’ or ‘What does it feel like when you have a fight with a friend?’ This allowed kids to engage in discussions and practice role-playing for those types of situations. With this addition to the curriculum, every day of the summer program included a 20-to-25-minute block with a video clip. During the block, kids were encouraged to role-play, participate in discussions, and share with their peers. Educators sometimes made a poster to supplement the video.”

— LEA Math Specialist

¹⁵ Lynch, K., An, L., & Mancenido, Z. (2023). The Impact of Summer Programs on Student Mathematics Achievement: A Meta-Analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 93(2), 275–315. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED616669.pdf>

¹⁶ Elharake, J. A., Akbar, F., Malik, A. A., Gilliam, W., & Omer, S. B. (2022). Mental Health Impact of COVID-19 among Children and College Students: A Systematic Review. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10578-021-01297-1>

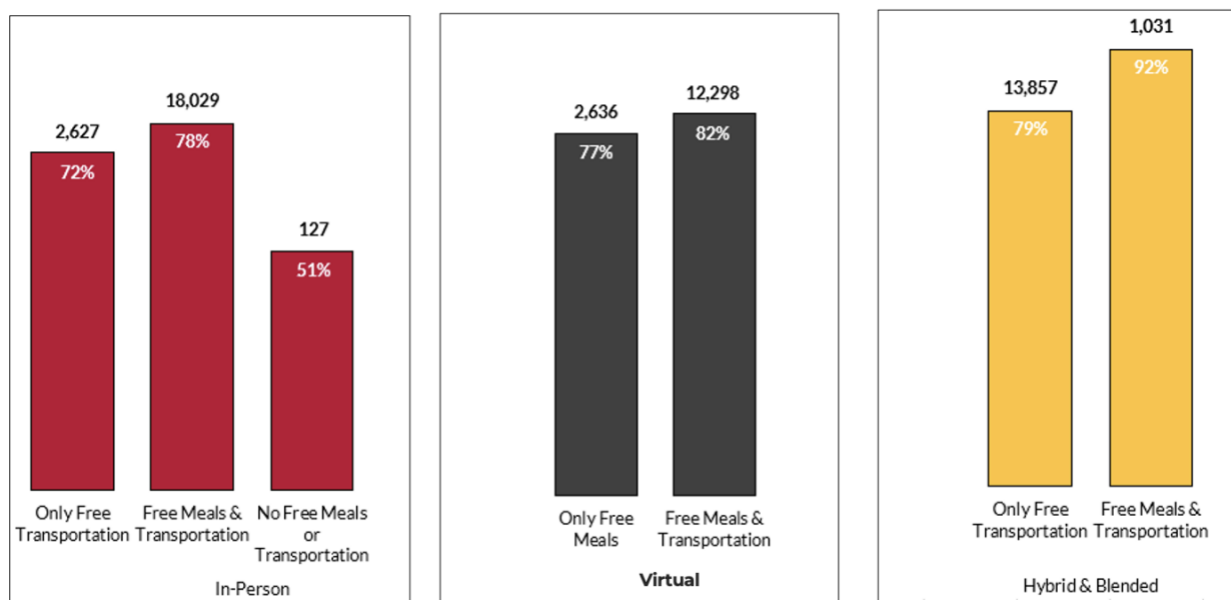
¹⁷ Oregon State Department of Education (2021). Summer Learning Best Practice Guide: Supporting Mental Health, Addressing Unfinished Learning and Providing Enrichment Opportunities. Retrieved from National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment Resource Library: <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Documents/Summer%20Learning%20Best%20Practice%20Guide%202021.pdf>

Offer Free Meals & Transportation

While the disruption caused by COVID-19 significantly increased the number of people experiencing financial hardships, many students and their families were struggling with food insecurity and transportation vulnerability prior to the pandemic. Specifically, in the school year prior to the summer of 2021, 43% of students across the state of Maryland were eligible for free or reduced meals and 28% were considered economically disadvantaged.¹⁸ In order to address these inequities, the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future included a requirement for 2021 summer programs to provide both free meals and transportation.

Despite this requirement, only 18 LEAs reported implementing a program that provided both free meals and transportation to student participants (Table 4). Research findings suggest that providing free transportation or meals has the potential to improve school attendance over time for youth.¹⁹ As shown in Figure 3 below, there is a modest, but not statistically significant difference in attendance for programs that offered both free meals and transportation. Figure 3 also shows that an in-person program that offered no free resources had the lowest attendance rate, while a hybrid program that provided both free meals and transportation had the highest attendance rate. Due to the varying number of students included within each category, caution is warranted in interpreting these findings further.

Figure 3. Average Attendance Rate by Resource and Modes of Instruction



Note: The numbers at the top of the bars are numbers of students in that category; percentages are the average attendance rate in that category. This figure includes 54 programs across 16 LEAs that reported attendance and resource data that could be aggregated. If a bar is not present, then no LEAs from this subset reported programs with that particular mode of instruction and resource category.

¹⁸ Maryland State Department of Education (2023). *Demographics*. Retrieved from Student Group Populations Data (2021): <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Demographics/StudentPopulation/1/1/99/XXX/2021>

¹⁹ Patel, H.H., Messiah, S.E., Hansen, E. (2021). The Relationship Between Transportation Vulnerability, School Attendance, and Free Transportation to an Afterschool Program for Youth. *Transportation*, 48, 2315–2333. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11116-020-10131-x>; Bartfeld, J.S., Berger L., Men, F. (2020). Universal Access to Free School Meals through the Community Eligibility Provision Is Associated with Better Attendance for Low-Income Elementary School Students in Wisconsin. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 120(2), 210-218. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2019.07.022>

Time and Costs of Program Designs

While the cost of interventions such as summer learning is typically a primary concern for districts, the revenue provided by ESSER and the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Grant Program enabled costs to be one less worry when attempting to address an overwhelming increase in unfinished learning among many students due to COVID-19.²⁰ However, the degree to which funds are used efficiently plays a key role in not only determining cost effectiveness, but also program sustainability. To demonstrate the extent to which programs were implemented efficiently, this section examines hours of participation and per-student cost metrics for all programs with available data.²¹

For the hour of participation efficiency metric, a corresponding goal was determined based on research that has found positive effects when summer learning programs combine small class sizes with at least 70 hours of participation²². The per-student costs goal was selected to provide a relevant comparison to program costs. **Table 5** below shows the number of LEAs and the number of programs meeting each of the goals based on reported hours of participation and program per-student costs.

Table 5. Number of LEAs and Programs Meeting Efficiency Goal

Efficiency Metric	Goal	Number of LEAs	Number of Programs
Hours of Participation	Minimum of 70 hours of participation	15	42
Per-Student Costs	Greater than average LEA school-year costs per hour	5	6

Note: If an LEA did not provide hours of participation, program costs, and attendance, they were not included in the analysis for per student costs. Due to data availability, three LEAs were not included in the hours of participation metric and 16 LEAs were not included in the per-student costs metric.

²⁰ Augustine, C. H., McCombs, J. S., Pane, J. F., Schwartz, H. L., Schweig, J., McEachin, A., & Siler-Evans, K. (2016). Learning from Summer: Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Urban Youth. *Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation*. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1557>

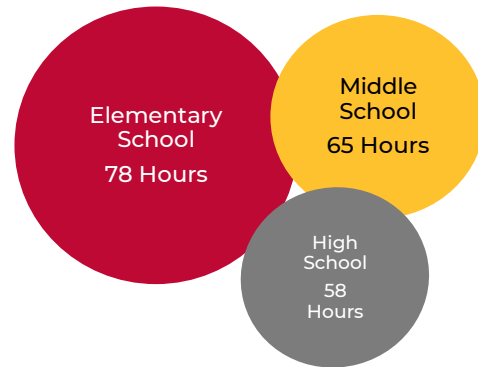
²¹ Hours of participation is the total number of hours of instruction and activities offered to each student during the entire program.

²² McEachin, A.J., Augustine, C.H., & McCombs, J.S. (2018). Effective Summer Programming: What Educators and Policymakers Should Know. *The American Educator*, 42, 10. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1173313.pdf>

Hours of Participation

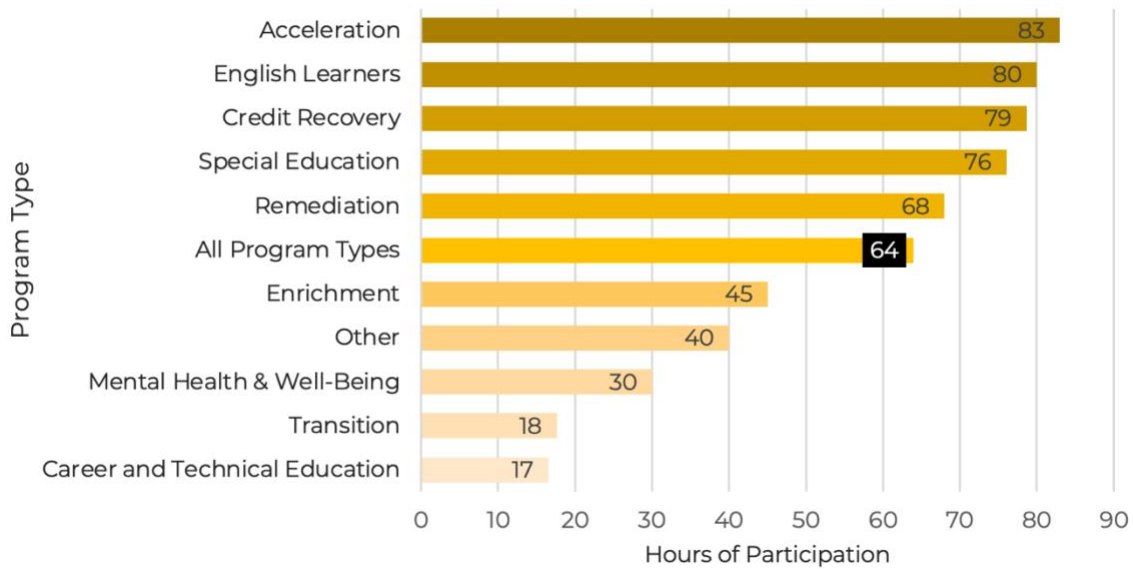
Within 91 programs across 21 LEAs, students were offered a minimum of one, a maximum of 145, and an average of 64 hours of instruction. Due to data limitations, all but three LEAs are included in this analysis. Elementary school level programs offered the greatest average number of hours while high school programs offered the least (Figure 4).²³ As shown in Figure 5 below, Acceleration programs offered the greatest number of hours and Career and Technical Education programs offered the least.

Figure 4. Average Hours of Participation by School Level



Note: Averages based on 73 programs.

Figure 5. Average Hours of Participation by Program Type



Note: Numbers based on 91 summer programs.

²³ Due to programs with overlapping school levels, this subset only includes 73 programs with available hours of participation.

Per Student Costs

For 20 programs with 22,001 participants across eight LEAs with available data, the cost per enrolled student for the 2021 summer learning programs ranged from \$154 to \$4,227 with a median of \$1,222 (**Table 6**). However, not all students attended every day. The average daily attendance rate was 77% for 20 programs, which substantially increases the cost per filled seat. The cost per filled seat includes the total costs divided by the average number of students present per day. The cost per filled seat ranged from \$201 to \$5,446, with a median of \$1,689. This translates to a median hourly cost of \$11.34 per student and \$14.71 per filled seat. As a point of reference, school-year costs for these LEAs ranged from \$13.23 to \$22.10 per hour, and the 2021 national average school-year cost was 13.30 per hour.²⁴

Per student costs varied greatly within and across LEAs due to differing modes of instruction, resource offerings, and various class sizes. The minimum and maximum per student costs listed in **Table 6** comprise two programs within the same LEA. The program with the minimum per student costs of \$154 included a program design with an asynchronous and synchronous virtual learning environment, a majority of certified teachers, no activities, and free meals. This program included nearly 10,000 high school student participants with an average daily attendance rate of 48%, with 67.3% and 74.2% of students achieving performance gains on reading and mathematics posttest, respectively. The program with the maximum per student cost of \$4,227 included a program design with in-person instruction, a majority of certified teachers, free meals, free transportation, and partnerships that provided tutoring and family translation and interpretation services. This acceleration program included 1,374 elementary student participants with an average daily attendance rate of 78%, with 64.1% and 57.3% of students achieving performance gains on reading and mathematics posttest, respectively.

Table 6. Per Student Costs by Average Attendance Rate and Hours of Participation

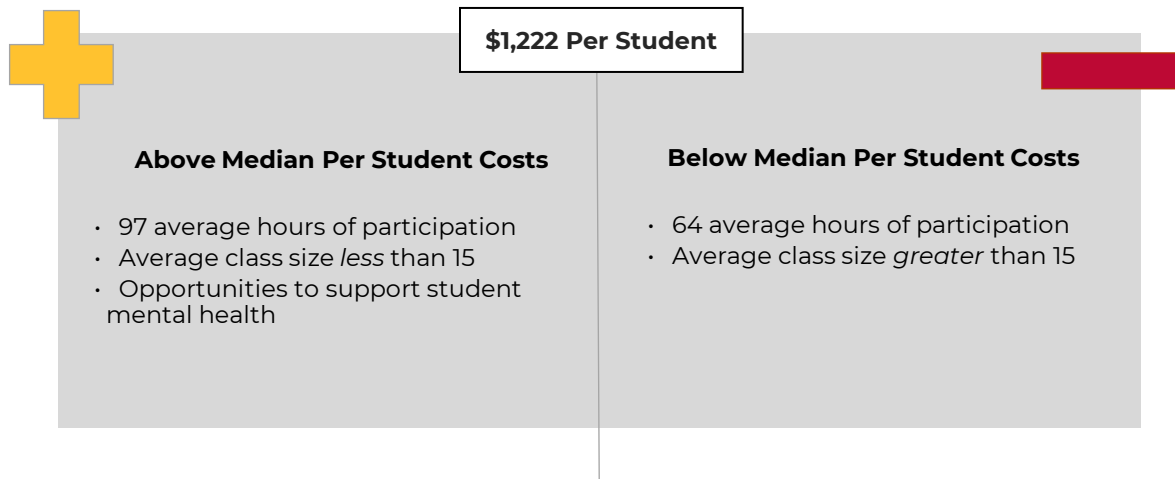
Costs	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Per Student	\$1,222	\$154	\$4,227
Per Filled Seat	\$1,689	\$201	\$5,446
Per Student Per Hour	\$11.34	\$3.86	\$71.48
Per Student Per Hour (School Year)	\$16.12	\$13.23	\$22.10
Per Filled Seat Per Hour	\$14.71	\$4.20	\$92.23

Note: Costs based on 20 programs.

²⁴ Maryland State Department of Education (2021) *Per-Pupil Expenditures*. Retrieved from Data Downloads: <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/DataDownloads/datadownload/3/17/6/99/XXXX/2022>; Maryland State Department of Education (2023). *Public School Openings and Closings Dates*. Retrieved from About Us: <https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/School-Systems/Open-Closing-Dates.aspx>; NEA Research (2022). *Rankings of the States 2021 and Estimates of School Statistics 2022*. National Education Association. <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/2022%20Rankings%20and%20Estimates%20Report.pdf>

Figure 6 displays a comparison of program designs and student outcomes of programs with per student costs above and below the median program cost per student of \$1,222. Opportunities to support student mental health and well-being, average class size, and average hours of participation were the design components included in this analysis. Programs with above average per student costs on average offered higher quality programs.

Figure 6. Comparison of Program Designs of Programs with Below and Above Median Per Student Costs



Note: Numbers based on 20 programs.

Examining Student Outcomes

Despite a historic infusion of funding to address unfinished learning, Maryland followed the national declining trend in student scores on the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress.²⁵ Unfortunately, the student outcomes included in this section broadly mirrored these trends and many programs yielded no substantial evidence of impact. In order to show the extent to which 2021 summer programs improved student outcomes, this section examines attendance, legislated pretest and posttest, and matched score comparisons of school-year assessments.

For each outcome, a corresponding goal was determined. The goals were:

1. summer program attendance greater than school year attendance,
2. any amount of growth from pretest to posttest, and
3. summer participants outperform non-participants on assessments.

Table 7 below shows the number of LEAs and the number of programs meeting each of these goals based on reported outcomes.

Table 7. Number of LEAs and Programs Meeting Outcome Goal

Outcome	Goal	Number of LEAs	Number of Programs
Attendance	Greater than school year attendance	2	4
Pretest vs. Posttest	Any amount of growth	19	43
School-Year Assessment	Outperforming non-participants	3	4

Note: Due to data availability, the number of LEAs and programs that could be evaluated on these goals varied for each outcome.

Attendance

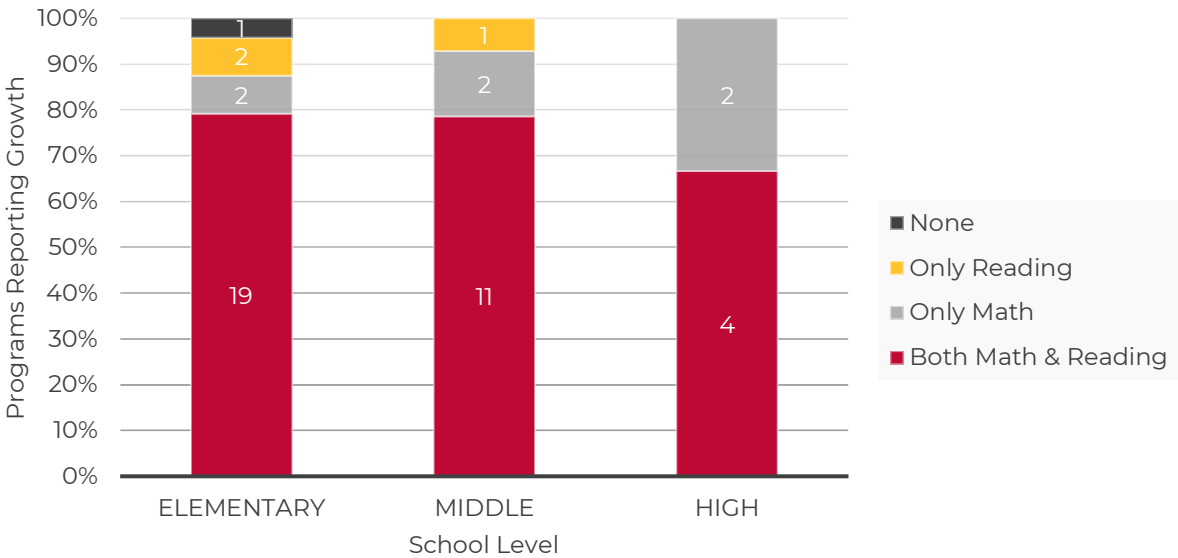
The average daily attendance rate across 60 programs within 18 LEAs was 77%. Only four programs within two LEAs had programs with an average attendance rate greater than the respective LEA 2020-2021 school year attendance rate (**Table 7**). The six LEAs not included in the analysis either did not report attendance data or did not have data that could be aggregated due to differences in calculations. Average daily attendance ranged from a low of 34% to a high of 100%. A statistically significant difference in attendance could not be determined between the following categories: 1) programs with growth from pretest to posttest, 2) programs with participants outperforming non-participants, and 3) programs that did not report any achievement in the previous two categories.

²⁵ Maryland State Department of Education (2022). Maryland's Scores Reflect Nationwide Learning Loss Trends in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Retrieved from Press Releases: <https://news.maryland.gov/msde/marylands-scores-reflect-nationwide-learning-loss-trends-in-national-assessment-of-educational-progress-naep/>

Pretest vs. Posttest

As shown in **Table 7**, 19 LEAs with 43 programs reported that students made growth from an assessment administered at the beginning of the program to one taken at the end. Across pretest and posttest, average percentage scores ranged from 9% to 91% with reports of statistically significant gains. However, several LEAs reported that these assessments were developed by the district or educators at the program level. Therefore, since many of these assessments were not comparable, no further analysis was conducted. **Figure 7** shows the number of programs across school levels that reported growth on math and reading assessments. Elementary programs were most likely to report student growth from pretest to posttest, while high school programs were least likely, mostly due to a focus on credit recovery.

Figure 7. Number of Programs Reporting Growth at each School Level for Reading and Mathematics



School-Year Assessments

To determine the extent to which summer learning programs addressed unfinished learning, several LEAs used school-year assessments to compare summer program participants with matched samples of non-participants. Of the 16 programs within seven LEAs included in this analysis, only four programs reported to have summer participants that outperformed non-participants (**Table 7**). These enrichment programs included students in kindergarten to 8th grade. Assessments used to make these comparisons included Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), i-Ready, and NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). Across both mathematics and reading scores, participating students either outperformed non-participants in both subjects or in neither. One overall limitation with these comparisons is it is not known how non-participants spent the summer.

Factors That Influenced Outcomes

Numerous factors influenced student outcomes more than usual due to the pandemic. Based on the data reported by LEAs, this included which type of instruction was offered, hiring certified teachers, and choosing a facility for the programs. Hybrid, blended, or virtual instruction was offered in 31% of programs across 12 LEAs. Programs with at least 50% of certified teachers were available in 71% of programs across 22 LEAs. Additionally, several LEAs reported during the interviews that when programs were not hosted at a student's local school, it impacted student attendance and participation.

Sustaining Summer Learning Programs

With ongoing challenges such as summer slide and inequitable student access to high-quality education, prioritization and investment in summer learning programs predates the pandemic.²⁶ The infusion of ESSER funds to support summer programs during the COVID-19 pandemic led to higher enrollment rates in existing programs, the creation of new programs, and gains in learning across the country.²⁷

However, the millions of dollars allocated for summer learning from ESSER funds are set to expire in 2024. When viewed only by the amount of federal funds that will no longer be allocated for summer programs, mandating schools to provide summer learning opportunities without also increasing annual state appropriations presents an enormous financial burden on local district budgets. Conversely, when compared to the price tag for providing an added year of schooling due

Sustainability: Supporting Educators

"With the support of federal funds, we were able to increase our salary for summer school staff in a time when staff are incredibly tired and burned out. Our negotiated agreement says \$30 an hour, but educators in our district were refusing to instruct during the summer at that rate. So, we took the opportunity to increase the hourly rate using ESSER funds. This increase allowed us to hire educators who teach the subject that the student is learning and, in result, teachers were able to genuinely support them. Prior to these funds, we often did not have a teacher who taught the same content during the school year that a student was struggling in during the summer. Therefore, we worry when these funds expire; our local budget cannot currently sustain this."

— LEA Director

²⁶ National Summer Learning Association (2020). *Summer Learning: A Bridge to Student Success and America's Recovery, a COVID-19 PLAYBOOK*. Retrieved from Knowledge Center: <https://www.summerlearning.org/knowledge-center/summer-learning-a-bridge-to-student-success-and-americas-recovery-a-covid-19-playbook/>

²⁷ National Summer Learning Association (2022). *State of Summer Learning: 2022 State Policy Overview*. Retrieved from: <https://www.summerlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/2022-State-Policy-Overview-interactive-vs2-pdf.jpg>

to grade retention, every dollar invested in summer learning for students who complete the program could save the state up to hundreds of millions of dollars each year.²⁸

While the expiring ESSER funds provided a significant amount of funding without restrictions for summer learning programs, the federal government will continue to offer grants that support summer programs through Title I, Part A, Title I, Part C, and Title II, Part A. Funding can also be acquired from the Corporation for National and Community Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.²⁹ With one more summer left before the end of ESSER funds, LEAs still have time to ensure sustainability of expanded programs by setting up access to, applying for, and combining money from various grants.

When discussing sustainability with the five LEAs selected for interviews, all five shared plans to add summer learning as a line item in their local budgets. This included providing a two-page budget summary to funders like the county government to request local dollars to continue these programs after the grant expires. Particular interest was expressed in continuing to provide programs at each school level, free transportation, an increased hourly rate for educators and support staff, and maintaining partnerships. One LEA expressed an interest in using Title I and Blueprint funds to support the continuation of their programs.

Since no substantial evidence of impact could be determined at the state level, it is difficult to identify which program designs should be sustained beyond the end of the ESSER grant period. However, any year-to-year comparisons that can be concluded with the *2023 Implementation of the Summer School Program* reports may be able to provide insight on program specific impact and sustainability.

²⁸ Reed, D. K., Cook, K. M., & Aloe, A. M. (2020). A Cost–Benefit Analysis of Summer Reading Programs Implemented Under State Guidelines. *Educational Policy*, 34(4), 594–618. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1253262>

²⁹ Augustine, C. H., & Thompson, L. E. (2020). Supporting Summer Programs: Navigating Federal, State, and Local Program Support Opportunities. Research Brief. RB-10108. *RAND Corporation*. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10108.html



Year-to-Year Comparison

During the development of this report, local education agencies (LEAs) submitted *Implementation of the Summer School Program* reports for 2022 summer programs.³⁰ Although the interpretation of this data has not been verified by LEAs, 2022 summer program data has been aggregated and analyzed to ensure the relevance of the concluding report recommendations.³¹ Using a year-over-year analysis, this section compares summer 2022 to summer 2021 programs to examine changes and improvements across different legislative and reporting requirements.

More than 200 distinct programs were implemented across 24 LEAs, with reported total expenditures over \$77 million. Similar to *Implementation of the Summer School Program* reports for 2021, data quality and completeness of 2022 reports varied significantly across LEAs. Unfortunately, many LEAs did not consistently provide data within and across programs, particularly for legislative requirements such as class size, non-academic partnerships, and free meals (**Table 8B**). While summer 2022 programs had an overall increase in reported expenditures, the total number of student participants decreased, likely due to an increase in in-person instruction.

Compared to summer 2021 programs, LEAs reported meeting less of the Blueprint program design requirements for summer 2022. This included a decrease in the number of programs offering reading or math, providing free transportation, and administering assessments at the beginning and end of the program (**Table 8B**). LEAs reported a slight decrease in summer 2022 programs with student participants making growth from pretest to posttest, however, there was a reported increase in the percentage of programs with participants outperforming non-participants on school-year assessments.

Year-to-Year (YoY) Trend Key

Icon	Meaning
	Increase
	Decrease
	Data Not Available

³⁰ Reports are available [here](#).

³¹ Unlike summer 2021, summer 2022 program data has not been verified by the LEAs. Therefore, the data included in Table 8 should be analyzed with a great deal of caution due to differing interpretations across the different reporting and legislative requirements.

Table 8A. Year-to-Year Comparison of Summers 2021 and 2022

Summary Data	Summer 2021	Summer 2022	YoY Trend
Total Number of Student Participants	124,583	105,076	↓
Percentage of Previous School Year Students Enrolled in Summer Programs	14%	12%	↓
Percentage of Programs Offering In-Person Instruction	80%	96%	↑
Total Reported Expenditures	\$69,893,108.29	\$77,336,153.37	↑
Median Total Costs Per-Student	\$721.18	\$1,021.16	↑

Table 8B. Year-to-Year Comparison of Summers 2021 and 2022

* Indicates that more than 50% of LEAs did not report this data in the legislative reports.

Blueprint Program Design Requirement	Summer 2021	Summer 2022	YoY Trend
Provide Daily Academic Instruction in Reading	99%	72%	↓
Limit Number of Students Assigned to Each Teacher	72%	*	⊘
Establish Partnerships That Provide Students with Non-Academic Experiences	59%	*	⊘
Provide Free Meals	69%	*	⊘
Provide Free Transportation	85%	80%	↓
Prioritize Enrollment for Students with The Greatest Learning Loss	85%	90%	↑
Administer An Assessment at The Beginning and End of The Program	90%	86%	↓

Note: Baltimore City is excluded from the Blueprint Program Design Requirement section because it could not be determined through the legislative report whether each requirement was met for at least 1 program at each school level.

Table 8C. Year-to-Year Comparison of Summers 2021 and 2022

Student Outcomes	Summer 2021	Summer 2022	YoY Trend
Programs with Any Amount of Growth from Pretest to Posttest	43 of 44	34 of 37	↓
Programs with Participants Outperforming Non-Participants on School-Year Assessment	4 of 16	5 of 10	↑

Conclusion

After a year with extraordinary challenges, a considerable amount of funding was directed toward creating new and expanding existing summer learning programs across the state of Maryland. This evaluation examined implementation of various designs, resource offerings, and student outcomes reported from these programs. With the inclusion of 113 distinct programs across 24 LEAs, a comprehensive overview of implementation fidelity, logistics, and expenditures of Maryland summer learning programs was provided for the first time. This section summarizes the evaluation's findings and provides a set of actionable recommendations.

Designing a summer program is a creative problem-solving process for complex school-year challenges.³² Clear values and goals are necessary to implement programs that will create measurable positive change for participants. Often positive or negative outcomes are incorrectly attributed to a program when other factors impacting design implementation are present.³³ With the program design elements required through the Blueprint legislation, implementation fidelity could be determined to understand how program design influenced instructional practices and how the intervention worked.

In the Blueprint legislation, the MSDE *Summer Learning Programs: Guidance to Maryland Local School Systems*, and research included throughout this report, an overwhelming emphasis is placed on evidence-based programs; however, it is worth noting that targeted programming may produce a greater benefit for student participants. Although LEAs should strive to use research and evidence in designing programs, it should not be the sole consideration. While some program designs and types have more evidence of impact than others, many types of summer programs have been found to be effective.³⁴ Moreover, strength of evidence does not necessarily correlate to the value families or educators may assign to a program.

As a microcosm of the traditional school year, programs during the summer offer educators opportunities to experiment with learning outside of the classroom and to create the paradigm shifts needed to transform education.³⁵ Through partnerships with environmental centers, historical sites, art councils, and recreation departments, many students in Maryland were offered learning opportunities throughout their communities during the summer of 2021. However, many summer learning programs resembled formal schooling. Although LEAs had limited time and capacity to design and implement creative and contemporary approaches to summer programs due to the pandemic, students transitioning back to in-person instruction needed more than a return to normal.³⁶ As shown in **Table 9A** below, nearly all LEAs reported offering one or more programs that provided instruction in reading

³² Main, K. (2011). Program Design: A Literature Review of Best Practices. *United Way of Calgary and Area*. https://calgaryunitedway.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/program_design_a_literature_review_of_best_practices.pdf

³³ Stains, M., & Vickrey, T. (2017). Fidelity of implementation: An Overlooked Yet Critical Construct to Establish Effectiveness of Evidence-Based Instructional Practices. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 16(1), rm1. <https://www.lifescied.org/doi/10.1187/cbe.16-03-0113>

³⁴ McCombs, J. S., Augustine, C. H., Unlu, F., Ziol-Guest, K. M., Naftel, S., Gomez, C. J., & Todd, I. (2019). Investing in Successful Summer Programs. *RAND Corporation*. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2836>

³⁵ Boggs, G. L., & Kurashige, S. (2012). *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century*. University of California Press. <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520272590/the-next-american-revolution>

³⁶ National Summer Learning Association (2020). *Summer Learning: A Bridge to Student Success and America's Recovery, a COVID-19 PLAYBOOK*. Retrieved from Knowledge Center: <https://www.summerlearning.org/knowledge-center/summer-learning-a-bridge-to-student-success-and-americas-recovery-a-covid-19-playbook/>

or math or administered an assessment, while less than two-thirds reported implementing programs with evidence-based components such as free meals, small class sizes, or non-academic partnerships.

Table 9A. Summary Table of Findings

Elements of Program Design	Number of LEAs Reporting At Least One or More Programs	Number of LEAs with Available Data
Provide Daily Academic Instruction in Reading or Math	23	23
Limit Number of Students Assigned to Each Teacher	14	22
Establish Partnerships That Provide Students with Non-Academic Experiences	12	21
Provide Free Meals	15	22
Provide Free Transportation	19	23
Prioritize Enrollment for Students with The Greatest Learning Loss	18	24
Administer An Assessment at The Beginning and End of The Program	21	24
Focus on Equity	18	24
Ensure Mental Health and Well-Being	21	24
Offer Free Meals & Transportation	18	22
Minimum of 70 Hours of Participation	15	21
Per-Student Costs Greater than LEA Average School-Year Costs	5	8

Table 9B. Summary Table of Findings

Student Outcomes	Number of LEAs Reporting At Least One or More Programs	Number of LEAs with Available Data
Average Daily Attendance Rate Greater than School-Year Attendance	2	18
Any Amount of Growth from Pretest to Posttest	19	21
Participants Outperforming Non-Participants on School-Year Assessment	3	7

Recommendations

From an ongoing pandemic to staffing shortages, implementing summer programs in 2021 presented challenges that required not only increases in funding, but also strategic implementation. Many LEAs sought input from students, teachers, and parents to determine program designs and selection of student participants. Summer program coordinators developed innovative approaches to recruit both teachers and students and to measure gains in learning. LEAs ensured that students were provided free meals and transportation, even for students receiving virtual instruction. Although there was minimal evidence of impact, LEAs reported successfully implementing programs that withstood the disruptions caused by COVID-19. The following six recommendations provide suggestions based on the data included in this evaluation and research.

Promising Practice:

The Hundred Day Committee

“We put together a committee of parents, teachers, and administrators. It was called the Hundred Day Committee and we looked at a lot of things that were ESSER and Blueprint related; however, one subcommittee focused on summer learning. The whole idea of summer camps came from community members, teachers, and leaders in that particular subcommittee. With this subcommittee, it was easy to make sense of how summer programs would work and run.”

—LEA Associate Superintendent

Recommendation #1: The State of Maryland should allocate funds toward summer learning programs.

Since the allocation of ESSER funds, program sustainability has been in the forefront of discussions of summer program implementation.³⁷ The infusion of federal funds was only intended to address the acute problems caused by the pandemic, not historical underfunding and disinvestment in public education. The 11.6% of public funding typically allocated toward education in the United States is well below the international standard of 15%. In Maryland specifically, K-12 schools rank 16th in spending and

³⁷ Modan, N. (2023). *6 Budget Considerations for Districts as ESSER Fiscal Cliff Looms*. Retrieved from K-12 Dive News: https://www.k12dive.com/news/6-budget-considerations-districts-esser-fiscal-cliff/647024/?utm_source=The+74+Million+Newsletter&utm_campaign=920ce053a2-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2023_04_13_05_04&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-920ce053a2-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D

12th in funding. Although Maryland schools spend more per pupil than the nationwide average, education costs state taxpayers a smaller proportion of their relative income.³⁸ Through the recently passed Blueprint legislation, \$3.8 billion annually over the next 10 years will be directed toward education, but not summer learning explicitly. LEAs will continue to be responsible for advocating for funds for summer programs from their local budgets.

With take-home COVID-19 tests, vaccines, treatments, and declining positivity rates, COVID-19 is not currently as disruptive as it was prior to the summer of 2021. However, the disruption caused by the pandemic has led to long-term implications on student academic progress, well-being, and transitions.³⁹ Addressing unfinished learning beyond the expiration of ESSER funds will require an intensive effort that should include summer learning. Summer presents an opportune time to implement and tweak innovative designs, despite costs. However, a permanent source of revenue is necessary to implement programs focused less on student deficits and more on systemic change. Increases in consistent funding could remove the limits placed on developing and implementing innovative summer learning programs.

This includes extending the current Blueprint requirements to future summers and allocating administrative funds to provide technical assistance to LEAs and supplementing local budgets to ensure every program has adequate hours of instruction, small classes, free resources, and partnerships that provide non-academic experiences.

Recommendation #2: LEAs should dedicate staff to establishing partnerships with local government and community-based organizations.

Despite Blueprint requirements, only 12 of 21 LEAs reported establishing partnerships with local government to provide students with non-academic experiences (**Table 8**). In addition to challenges LEAs may have encountered due to COVID-19, successful partnering requires overcoming hurdles such as potential loss of authority by program administrators, conflicts over programmatic goals, and lack of sufficient time for or commitment to the partnership.⁴⁰ However, for LEAs that pursue outside partnerships with local government or community-based organizations, program offerings to students could be expanded to not only reduce the opportunity gap between students from low- and higher-income families during the summer by creating social capital, but also reduce overall costs of the summer program.⁴¹ Entering into these partnerships is one way to lower the cost on a per-student basis as outside funding may be more accessible to support enrichment costs. Integrating partnerships into summer programs requires first changing preexisting institutional barriers such as

³⁸ Hanson, M. (2022). U.S. Public Education Spending Statistics. *EducationData.org*, Retrieved from Public Education Spending Statistics: <https://educationdata.org/public-education-spending-statistics>

³⁹ UNICEF (2020). *Averting a Lost COVID Generation: A Six-Point Plan to Respond, Recover and Reimagine a Post-Pandemic World for Every Child*. UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/media/86881/file/Averting-a-lost-covid-generation-world-childrens-day-data-and-advocacy-brief-2020.pdf>

⁴⁰ Edens, R., & Gilsinan, J. F. (2005). Rethinking School Partnerships. *Education and Urban Society*, 37(2), 123–138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124504270654>

⁴¹ Schwartz, H., McCombs, J., Augustine, C., & Leschitz, J. (2018). Getting to Work on Summer Learning: Recommended Practices for Success, 2nd Ed. *Rand Corporation*. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR366-1.html

internal rules, regulations, and work cultures that make partnering difficult.⁴² This may include using intermediaries to manage and pair up provider organizations with programs.⁴³

Recommendation #3: LEAs should focus on improving attendance.

The average daily attendance rate across 60 programs within 18 LEAs was 77%, which is much lower than the State's 2020-2021 school year attendance rate of 92.5%. Although high quality programs make more of a lasting impact on youth than program attendance alone, research shows that maximizing attendance increases academic success.⁴⁴ A transition back to in-person instruction presented unique challenges for students, and, based on survey results from multiple LEAs, many students reported that programs did not support them in feeling more connected to other students.⁴⁵ One strategy to address this shortcoming includes using a systemic social emotional learning (SEL) approach. Instead of using isolated SEL lessons and activities, SEL would be integrated into policies, resources, and the implementation of every program.⁴⁶ This enables fostering youth voice and agency by incorporating their input into program designs and allowing them to participate in the evaluation process using frameworks such as participatory action research.⁴⁷

Recommendation #4: LEAs should ensure equitable selection criteria.

Each county board was required by the Blueprint to implement programs that prioritized students with the greatest learning loss. Several LEAs fulfilled this requirement by using educational assessment scores, level of engagement during virtual instruction, and teacher recommendations to select student participants, while others ensured that any interested student could attend. Although opening programs to all students may ensure equality across student subgroups, due to the reported average class sizes of greater than 15, prioritization may have been more equitable and beneficial to students with the greatest learning loss if limiting enrollment was able to reduce class size for lower achieving students.⁴⁸

Recommendation #5: LEAs should offer more than credit recovery programs at the high school level.

Despite evidence that credit recovery courses do little to help students learn content they missed, more than 16,000 students, or at least one in seven students included in this evaluation, participated in a

⁴² Edens, R., & Gilsinan, J. F. (2005).

⁴³ Schwartz, H., McCombs, J., Augustine, C., & Leschitz, J. (2018).

⁴⁴ National Summer Learning Association (2020). *Summer Learning: A Bridge to Student Success and America's Recovery, a COVID-19 PLAYBOOK*. Retrieved from Knowledge Center: <https://www.summerlearning.org/knowledge-center/summer-learning-a-bridge-to-student-success-and-americas-recovery-a-covid-19-playbook/>

⁴⁵ Survey results were included in the *Implementation of the Summer School Program* reports.

⁴⁶ Mahoney, J. L., Weissberg, R. P., Greenberg, M. T., Dusenbury, L., Jagers, R. J., Niemi, K., Schlinger, M., Schlund, J., Shriver, T. P., VanAusdal, K., & Yoder, N. (2021). Systemic social and emotional learning: Promoting educational success for all preschool to high school students. *American Psychologist*, 76(7), 1128–1142. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000701>

⁴⁷ Halliday, A. J., Kern, M. L., Garrett, D. K., & Turnbull, D. A. (2019). The student voice in well-being: A case study of participatory action research in positive education. *Educational Action Research*, 27(2), 173-196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2018.1436079>

⁴⁸ Callen, I., Carbonari, M.V., DeArmond, M., Dewey, D., Dizon-Ross, E., Goldhaber, D., Isaacs, J., Kane, T.J., Kuhfeld, M., McDonald, A. & McEachin, A. (2023). Summer School as a Learning Loss Recovery Strategy After COVID-19: Evidence From Summer. <https://caldercenter.org/publications/summer-school-learning-loss-recovery-strategy-after-covid-19-evidence-summer-2022>

credit recovery program.⁴⁹ Although these programs helped more students earn diplomas, thousands of students failed to earn credit during the program. Rather than a focus on required coursework, a shift to support students via individualized learning pathways may not only be more equitable and effective, but also encourage more students to seek postsecondary education.⁵⁰

Moreover, when compared to other program types, credit recovery programs were the most common (53%) at the high school level. Many students who did not fail courses during the school year were compelled to seek summer opportunities offered elsewhere despite the pervasiveness of unfinished learning due to COVID-19. Furthermore, offering a variety of programs, particularly career and technical education programs, could reduce the prevalence of youth crime and unemployment by addressing opportunity and achievement gaps.⁵¹

Recommendation #6: MSDE and LEAs should enhance data collection and reporting of summer programs.

Data standardization and precise report templates allow for robust comparative analysis, offering greater insight into the impact of summer learning programs.⁵² The temporary requirements included in the Blueprint legislation mandated LEAs to collect summer learning implementation data and report student participant outcomes and expenditures publicly for the first time on record. The details gathered through the *Implementation of the Summer School Program* reports provided a starting point to conduct this evaluation, but due to vague requirements, a high-level report template, and lack of a data quality review process, the level of detail varied significantly across LEAs, with reports ranging from four to 70 pages. Many LEAs, likely due to staff capacity, only provided details requested through the report template. When further data was requested, these same LEAs were unable to report on the data beyond the requirements.

Furthermore, key elements from the reporting requirements were missing to ensure that all programs were implemented equitably and efficiently. Many reports did not include programs with participants or outcomes disaggregated by student subgroup. Not including this as a requirement failed to allow any subgroup comparisons across or within programs. Comparisons could demonstrate inequities in recruitment, instruction, and engagement. Reported program spending also varied greatly within and across LEAs. Due to a lack of required detail, expenditures were difficult to determine and analyze. Moreover, for 82% of programs included in this evaluation, costs could not be determined.

Reporting requirements with clearly defined components could greatly improve future evaluations, particularly requirements that include data disaggregated by program type and school level, statistically significant findings, comparisons between invited non-participants and enrolled

⁴⁹ Heinrich, C. J., & Darling-Aduana, J. (2021). Does Online Course-taking Increase High School Completion and Open Pathways to Postsecondary Education Opportunities?. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 43(3), 367-390. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1304772>

⁵⁰ Gross, B. (2021). Analysis: Schools Are Facing a Surge of Failing Grades During the Pandemic — and Traditional Approaches Like Credit Recovery Will Not Be Enough to Manage It. *The 74*. Retrieved from Pandemic: <https://www.the74million.org/article/analysis-schools-are-facing-a-surge-of-failing-grades-during-the-pandemic-and-traditional-approaches-like-credit-recovery-will-not-be-enough-to-manage-it/>

⁵¹ Modestino, A. S., & Paulsen, R. (2023). School's Out: How Summer Youth Employment Programs Impact Academic Outcomes. *Education Finance and Policy*, 18(1), 97-126. https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00371

⁵² MOST Network (2022). *2022 Maryland Summer Learning Report*. Retrieved from Summer Learning: <https://www.mostnetwork.org/summer-learning/>

participants, rationale for not meeting requirements, and a uniform template for expenses.⁵³ Reports with longitudinal analysis of student and program level data could offer greater evidence of impact and qualitative data from interviews or focus groups could add depth through the incorporation of specific feedback. Providing structured and user-friendly report templates, could allow LEAs to easily glean strategies from each other and better understand the impact of summer learning programs. (For a sample report, see **Appendix D.**)⁵⁴

Reporting components could include, but are not limited to the following:

- Duration in Hours, Days, and Weeks
- Evidence Tier
- Grade Levels
- Measures Used
- Number of Participants
- Participants Disaggregated by Subgroups
- Ratio of Participants to Adult Staff
- Recruitment Process
- Setting
- Staffing
- Targeted Participants
- Total Program Expenditure

Community of Practice

“We are looking for different ideas and creative ways to implement summer learning programs. After some research into some of the other school systems, it is not clear if every district runs summer programs the same way or even runs summer programs at all. It has been hard to really connect with other school systems. From previous experience, it would be helpful to have a community of practice for all the different school systems, even if it is just once a quarter, to discuss summer learning programs and share ideas. Collaborative discussions about summer program logistics would be particularly useful for our school district.”

— LEA Program Supervisor

⁵³ Callen, I., Carbonari, M.V., DeArmond, M., Dewey, D., Dizon-Ross, E., Goldhaber, D., Isaacs, J., Kane, T.J., Kuhfeld, M., McDonald, A. & McEachin, A. (2023). Summer School as a Learning Loss Recovery Strategy After COVID-19: Evidence from Summer. <https://caldercenter.org/publications/summer-school-learning-loss-recovery-strategy-after-covid-19-evidence-summer-2022>

⁵⁴ McCombs, J. S., Augustine, C. H., Unlu, F., Ziolo-Guest, K. M., Naftel, S., Gomez, C. J., & Todd, I. (2019). Investing in Successful Summer Programs. *RAND Corporation*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2836>

In order to allow this data to be publicly accessible, the reporting requirement in the Blueprint legislation should be extended into future school years. Moreover, evaluation reports, communities of practice, or conferences presented by the State should be timely to support the continuous process of planning, delivering, and improving of summer learning programs. In order to allow LEAs enough time to build out plans that include holistic youth development, well-being, and academic growth, reports, resources, and allocated funds for summer are suggested to be available by September.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ National Summer Learning Association (2020). *Summer Learning: A Bridge to Student Success and America's Recovery, a COVID-19 PLAYBOOK*. Retrieved from Knowledge Center: <https://www.summerlearning.org/knowledge-center/summer-learning-a-bridge-to-student-success-and-americas-recovery-a-covid-19-playbook/>

Appendices

Appendix A: Summer Program Elements Not Legislatively Mandated

Encouraged Summer Program Elements

- Offer incentive pay for teachers and other school employees
- Offer incentive pay for students participating in the program
- Include project-based learning, hands-on learning, individualized instruction, and group or leadership activities
- Free to students enrolled in the program to recover credits
- Provide in-person instruction to the extent feasible if the public health metrics and guidance allows

Appendix B: Program Types

1. **Acceleration (Vacation) Academies:** Designed to address academic learning loss and may include credit recovery. Acceleration Academies, as part of summer learning programs should reflect the research on the delivery of summer learning, such as project-based learning and a summer camp-type atmosphere. Effective practices include small groups of no more than 10 students, taught or monitored by a certified teacher, and evidence-based practices and materials.
2. **Career and Technical Education (CTE):** Opportunities must be provided for students in CTE to engage in work-based learning experiences, prepare for industry credential exams, earn hours required for industry credentials, or provide opportunities for students to develop technical skills and explore career programs. CTE summer programs must be facilitated in-person to provide students opportunities to work with tools of their trade with clients and in small groups with their peers.
3. **Credit Recovery:** Provides an opportunity for students to recover course credit.
4. **English Learners (ELs):** Summer programs should be designed so that ELs are utilizing the four domains of language: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.
5. **Enrichment:** Teaching of skills or content that are not part of the required content, advanced beyond a student's grade-level, or considered an elective.
6. **Mental Health and Well-Being:** These programs should include opportunities for music, visual arts, movement/ dance, nature programs, journaling, and project-based learning.
7. **Remediation:** Reteaching of missed or missing grade-level content for students who are identified as behind on grade-level content.
8. **Special Education:** Local school systems and public agencies are required to provide students with disabilities a free appropriate public education (FAPE). Summer programming that addresses a student's FAPE needs may include Extended School Year (ESY) services and/or compensatory education/recovery services. ESY services are the individualized extension of specific special education and/or related services that are provided beyond the normal school year, in accordance with the IEP. Compensatory education/recovery services are designed to address the loss of a FAPE stemming from the extended school closures. ESY and compensatory education/recovery services may include tutoring, skill-focused summer school programs, etc.
9. **Transition:** Students who are transitioning between schools can benefit from a program to assist with that transition (Prekindergarten/Kindergarten, Fifth/ Sixth, Eighth/ Ninth). This can include opportunities to familiarize students to the new environment, focus on academic and behavioral skills, and study habits.
10. **Tutoring:** Delivery in high doses at least three or more times a week with group sizes up to three students. Tutors may include volunteers and college students who receive training and support. Ongoing informal assessments for individualizing support to students. Evidence-based materials that support classroom instruction. Support those students who most need personalized instruction, but not create a negative stigma where tutoring is perceived as a stigma.
11. **Other:** Includes two or more of the above program types.

Appendix C: Enrollment Data

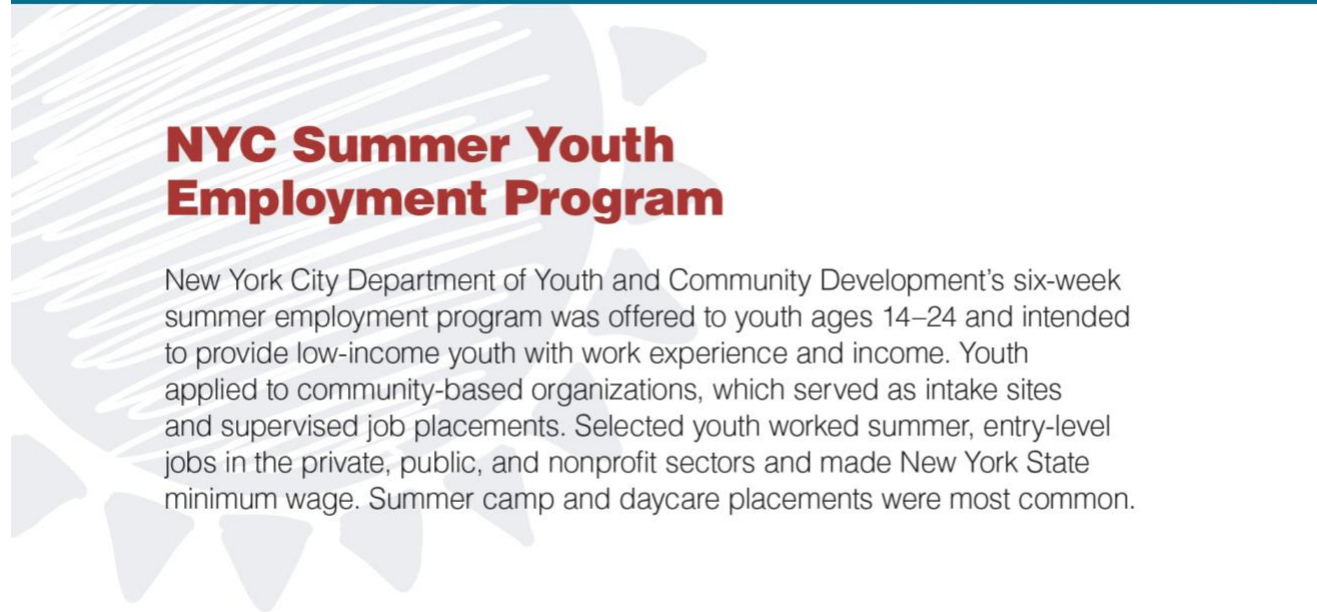
Local Educational Agency	School Year (SY) 2020-2021 Enrolled Count	2021 Summer Enrolled Count	Percent of SY Enrolled in Summer
Allegany	8,075	1,075	13%
Anne Arundel	83,044	11,550	14%
Baltimore City	77,856	14,384	18%
Baltimore County	111,084	3,626	3%
Calvert	15,292	1,878	12%
Caroline	5,553	876	16%
Carroll	24,568	3,650	15%
Cecil	14,718	1,914	13%
Charles	26,768	4,032	15%
Dorchester	4,662	833	18%
Frederick	43,221	3,704	9%
Garrett	3,648	367	10%
Harford	37,333	4,693	13%
Howard	57,293	1,239	2%
Kent	1,812	267	15%
Montgomery	160,564	44,552	28%
Prince George's	131,657	12,657	10%
Queen Anne's	7,395	1,059	14%
Saint Mary's	17,246	2,447	14%
Somerset	2,818	864	31%

Local Educational Agency	School Year (SY) 2020-2021 Enrolled Count	2021 Summer Enrolled Count	Percent of SY Enrolled in Summer
Talbot	4,524	1,057	23%
Washington	21,939	4,955	23%
Wicomico	14,354	1,660	12%
Worcester	6,711	1,018	15%
Total	882,135	124,357	14%

Note: Enrollment data includes all student participants in this evaluation and those reported in the 2022 Implementation of the Summer School Program reports. The 2021 summer enrolled count may not include student participants in programs that only expended local funds.

Appendix D: Sample Report

EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER **C3**



NYC Summer Youth Employment Program

New York City Department of Youth and Community Development's six-week summer employment program was offered to youth ages 14–24 and intended to provide low-income youth with work experience and income. Youth applied to community-based organizations, which served as intake sites and supervised job placements. Selected youth worked summer, entry-level jobs in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors and made New York State minimum wage. Summer camp and daycare placements were most common.

EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

Positive, statistically significant findings on school attendance (study 1) and participation in and performance on Regents exams (study 2). Study 1 tested but found no significant effect on passing the math or English Regents exams.

- ✓ ACADEMIC AND CAREER ATTAINMENT
- ✓ SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

KEY	
✓	strong evidence
✓	moderate evidence
✓	promising evidence
○	program evaluated for this outcome but no evidence found

PROGRAM FEATURES

- Main Components**
Summer youth employment
- Duration**
6–7 weeks, up to 25 hours per week
- Staffing**
Community-based organizations helped youth apply for the Summer Youth Employment Program, then participating youth interacted with staff at their job placement sites.
- Youth-Staff Ratio for Instructional Periods**
N/A
- Targeted Youth**
Low-income youth
- Attendance Rates of Youth**
N/A
- Support and Training for Staff**
N/A
- Setting**
Workplace

STUDY DESCRIPTION

This program randomly assigned youth in New York City to treatment through a lottery system, enabling causal estimates of the impact of a summer job program on educational outcomes. Participant information was matched to school records for those participating in summer 2007 (Study 1) as well as a combination of youth participating in summers 2005 through 2009 (Study 2). Youth were in grades 8–11 prior to the intervention. The control group youth applied to the program, but were randomly not selected.

STUDY YOUTH AND LOCATION

Locale
Urban

Number of Youth and Sites
36,630 youth (Study 1) and 195,289 youth (Study 2)

Rising Grade Level
Grades 9–12

Race and Ethnicity
85% African-American or Hispanic

Household Income Level
90% eligible for free or reduced-price lunch

Special Populations Served
N/A

Statistically Significant and Positive Effects

Domain	Measure	Effect Size	Timing of Measurement	Impact	ESSA Tier
School engagement (from Study 1)	Attendance	N/A (1.3%)	School year following summer program	Treatment youth had greater school attendance in the school year following the summer job than control youth.	I
Academic and career attainment (from Study 2)	Any Regents exam participation	N/A (0.8%)	School year following summer program	Relative to control group youth, treatment youth were more likely to attempt a core Regents exam.	I
	Core Regents exam participation	0.02		attempt more core Regents exams.	I
	Regents exam score at least 65	N/A (1%)		pass a core Regents exam with a score that qualifies for a high school diploma.	I
	Regents exam score at least 65	0.02		pass more core Regents exams with a 65 score or above, qualifying for an Advanced Regents diploma.	I
	Regents exam score at least 55	0.03		pass more core Regents exams with a 55 score or above, qualifying for a local diploma.	I

SOURCES: (Study 1) Jacob Leos-Urbel, Amy Ellen Schwartz, Meryle Weinstein, and Beth C. Weitzman, *More Than a Paycheck? The Impact of Summer Youth Employment on Students' Educational Engagement and Success*, New York: New York University, Institute for Education and Social Policy, Brief No. 02-12, June 2012.

(Study 2) Amy Ellen Schwartz, Jacob Leos-Urbel, Megan Silander, and Matt Wiswall, *Making Summer Matter: The Impact of Youth Employment on Academic Performance*, working paper 03-14, New York: New York University, Institute for Education and Social Policy, November 2014.

NOTE: Per ESSA, evidence-based interventions demonstrate "a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes" based on strong (Tier I), moderate (Tier II), or promising (Tier III) evidence.