

How States Can Expand Quality Summer Learning Opportunities

FACT SHEET

What is summer learning, and what are the benefits?

Summer learning programs offered by school districts to students of all ages can vary in focus—from academic acceleration to enrichment to career exploration—and can support students’ academic learning, social development, and physical and mental wellness during the summer months. These programs also support working families by providing safe, caring environments for students during the workday. Well-implemented and well-attended summer learning programs have shown positive outcomes for participants in reading and math achievement, social development, mental health, school engagement, and decreased risk-taking behaviors.

What role do states typically play in summer learning?

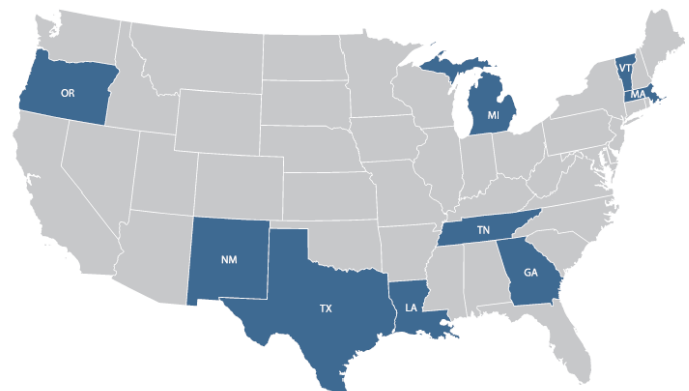
States have always played a role in supporting summer learning, most commonly through their administration of federal funding streams that can be utilized for summer programs (e.g., [Title I](#) and [21st Century Community Learning Center](#) funds). In some cases, states have increased their support by allocating additional state funding for academic or enrichment programs. However, in many states, the full potential of the summer months remains untapped. By investing in summer learning, states can better support the developmental and academic needs of students over the full year—not just during the months when school is in session.

Why is summer learning a current state policy priority?

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government required states to set aside 1% of their total American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds for evidence-based summer learning programs. In response, many states rapidly built new or expanded existing infrastructures to disseminate funds to providers—the local education agencies and community-based organizations that host summer programs—and guide their program implementation. In many states, this has sparked a renewed consideration of how summer learning could fit in with or reinforce other policy priorities. Now that all ARPA ESSER funds have been spent or committed, states face decisions about how to continue supporting students’ access to quality summer learning opportunities.

LPI conducted case studies of nine geographically and politically diverse states to understand the variety of ways in which state-level policies and practices can help to expand summer learning opportunities for students. These states adopted different approaches to state-level summer learning investment and, in most cases, had plans to sustain these investments beyond the expiration of federal recovery dollars by drawing on state funding sources.

State Support for Summer Learning Case Study States



Source: Learning Policy Institute, (2024).

What actions can states take to support summer learning?

[LPI's report](#) shares key areas for states to consider. Highlights include the following.

Generate Support for Summer Learning Investments

- Set statewide goals that articulate how investments in summer learning will reinforce other state goals and priorities (e.g., promoting student learning and wellness or providing support to working families).
- Build coalitions of stakeholders interested in supporting summer learning—e.g., state agencies, legislators, philanthropists, local government, and/or nonprofits involved in out-of-school learning— and who can provide valuable policy and operational support.
- Identify sustainable funding streams for summer learning programs. Options include establishing a line item in the state budget, bundling summer learning funds with other education-focused legislative packages, or claiming emergent funding streams (e.g., cannabis or sports betting tax revenue) for summer learning.

Implement Accessible Grant Programs

- State education agencies often have limited capacity and can leverage partnerships (e.g., with a state afterschool network) to administer or support the administration of summer learning grant programs.
- Reduce administrative burdens to make it easier for small and/or less experienced programs to access state grant funds. Examples include simplifying application procedures and reporting requirements.
- Balance grant program requirements with flexibility to enable providers with varying organizational capacities and unique regional contexts to access state grant funds.

Create Access for Priority Groups

- Use legislation or grant requests for proposals to prioritize investments toward students who stand to benefit most (e.g., students performing below grade level, from low-income families, etc.) and to minimize participation barriers, including affordability, transportation, and program availability.
- Collect and analyze participation data to understand who participates in programming and evaluate the extent to which state investments benefit priority student groups.

Promote High-Quality Programming

- Establish a plan to support and promote the quality of providers' programming. States can communicate priorities around staff qualifications or program instructional materials through grant requirements.
- Issue guidance on summer learning best practices and support providers' continuous improvement by providing access to technical assistance within the state grant program.

Collect and Use Data

- Use data to evaluate provider quality, identify strengths and challenges of state grant programs, and inform the continuous improvement.
- Leverage grant program outcomes data to advocate for ongoing funding, either by highlighting positive outcomes from funded programs or by illustrating the ongoing need for quality summer opportunities.

Learn more

Access the [How States Are Expanding Student Access to Quality Summer Learning](#) report or brief for further details on the policies and practices that expand access to quality summer learning programs.

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