

# Policy Brief

Joint publication of CSBA and Summer Matters

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## Summer learning survey examines district practices, plans and perceptions

Summer learning programs demonstrate great potential to reduce “summer learning loss” (the tendency for students to lose some of their academic skills over the extended break of summer). Because disadvantaged students tend to fall even further behind during summer, they may particularly benefit from the availability of high-quality summer programs.

As part of an ongoing effort to inform and support districts in the provision of summer learning programs, CSBA conducted a survey in fall 2013 to determine the extent to which summer learning programs are available in California, the types of programs being offered, challenges to implementation and opportunities to assist districts in providing such programs. This research brief summarizes the study results and their implications for district governance teams.

The results of this study are encouraging. Respondents perceive many benefits of summer learning programs. Two-thirds of the districts represented in the survey offered summer programs in 2013, and the same number of districts plan to offer them in 2014. Still, given the potential of such programs to impact student achievement, especially among at-risk students, it would be beneficial to expand such programs to more districts and more students and to ensure that the programs are engaging and relevant for students.

### Background

In November 2013, CSBA sent an online survey to its members. A total of 215 respondents completed one or more parts of the survey (71 percent board members, 27 percent superintendents, 1 percent district staff and 1 percent other).

The following month, two focus groups consisting of board members were held during CSBA’s Annual Edu-

cation Conference. The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain more in-depth information about district practices as well as suggestions regarding the types of information or assistance that would be useful to districts in planning and implementing summer learning programs.

This study followed up on an earlier survey conducted in 2012 by CSBA and the Partnership for Children and Youth. For a summary of that study, see CSBA’s policy brief *School’s Out, Now What?: How Summer Programs Are Improving Student Learning and Wellness* at [www.csba.org/summerlearning](http://www.csba.org/summerlearning).

### Results

#### Familiarity with the problem

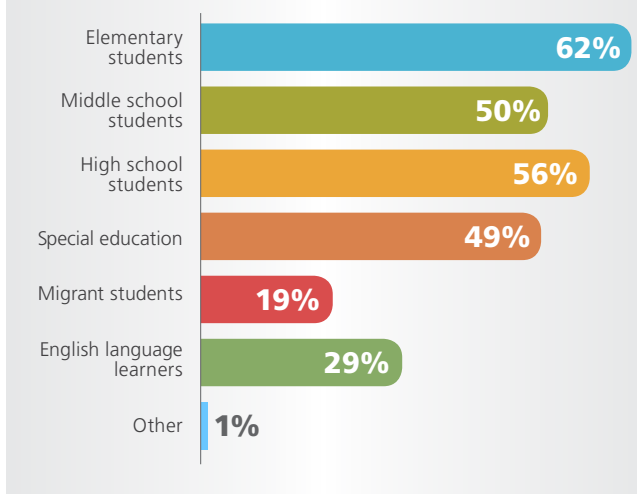
Most respondents (88 percent) are familiar with the term “summer learning loss” or “summer slide.” In a majority of the districts (61 percent), the board had a discussion or report from staff about summer learning or summer programming within the past two years. Over a quarter (28 percent) feel that summer learning loss is a “large concern and a key issue” facing their district, while 67 percent feel it is somewhat of a concern.

#### Provision of summer programs in recent years

Among the responding districts, 66 percent offered summer learning programs in 2013 and 78 percent had offered a summer program in the last five years.

The programs that were offered in 2013 reached students at all grade levels, with the most being offered at elementary schools (see Figure 1). Some also targeted specific groups of students, such as special education students (49 percent), English learners (29 percent) and migrant students (19 percent).

**Figure 1.** Target population of 2013 summer programs



The programs sometimes had more than one curricular concentration, including remediation (78 percent), literacy (56 percent), Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) (34 percent) and health/wellness (12 percent). Most programs ran four to six weeks (75 percent), with 27 percent running less than four weeks and 5 percent running longer than six weeks.

Districts provided these programs by blending together a variety of funding sources (see Figure 2), including general funds (67 percent), Title I grants (33 percent), migrant education funds (24 percent), after-school funds (22 percent), private grants (11 percent) and other sources such as participant fees, special education funding or education foundation grants.

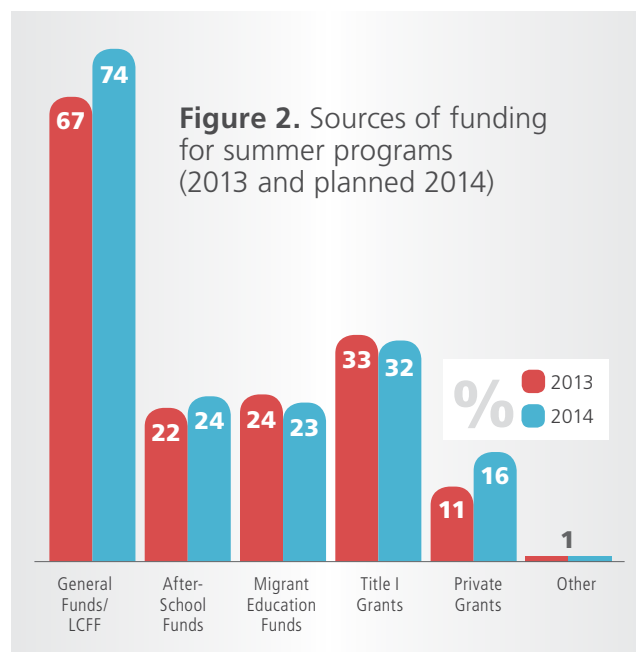
Among districts that did *not* offer summer programs in 2013, the major reason cited was lack of funding or uncertainty about which funding to use (86 percent), followed by lack of transportation (21 percent). Smaller numbers of participants cited lack of support from board members (3 percent) or administration (6 percent), lack of community partners (6 percent), too many competing summer programs in their area (6 percent), lack of board policies addressing summer programs (3 percent), the need for more evidence that summer programs make a difference (7 percent) or uncertainty if the programs are needed (6 percent).

### Plans for 2014 summer programs

The percentage of districts indicating that they plan to offer summer programs in 2014 (66 percent) is the same as the percentage who reported offering summer programs the previous year.

Districts planning to offer summer programs are intending to use the same sources of funding as they did in 2013 (see Figure 2), with the expected use of general funds or Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) allocations rising to 74 percent and private grants rising from 11 to 16 percent. Community partners that may be included in planning and/or delivery of the programs include community-based organizations (28 percent), city agencies (20 percent), foundations/corporations (20 percent), universities (18 percent) and others, although half of the respondents (52 percent) didn't know yet which, if any, community partners would be involved.

**Figure 2.** Sources of funding for summer programs (2013 and planned 2014)



When respondents indicated that their district did not plan to offer a summer program in 2014, they were asked explain their reason(s). Funding was a concern by the overwhelming majority. Other reasons included lack of student or parent interest, lack of transportation, staffing issues and the fact that the district has a shortened summer break due to a year-round schedule.

### Perceptions regarding the impacts of summer programs

Survey respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements related to potential impacts of summer programs. Results generally indicate wide recognition of the benefits of summer programs (see Figure 3), even among those districts that did not offer such programs in recent years or are not planning to offer them in 2014. Respondents especially agreed or strongly agreed that it is important for districts to offer summer programming (84 percent) and that high-quality summer programs can help reduce summer

learning loss (86 percent) and decrease the achievement gap (84 percent). About a third of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their district is ready to begin offering or to expand summer programs (35 percent) or that their district is more likely to offer summer programs in the coming years as a result of LCFF and its requirements (30 percent), while a large percentage were neutral.

The most important goals for summer programming are considered to be improvement or maintenance of core academic skills (49 percent); habits or practices that are consistent with the Common Core State Standards, such as inquiry, group work, presentation and perseverance (38 percent); and social/emotional skills such as positive relationships or sense of belonging (9 percent).

**Figure 3.** Perceptions regarding impacts of summer programs

● Strongly disagree  
 ● Disagree  
 ● Neutral  
● Agree  
 ● Strongly Agree

It is important for districts to offer summer programs.



Programs help decrease achievement gap.



Programs help reduce summer learning loss.



Programs have positive effect on student wellness.



Programs are a good investment of scarce dollars.



Offering programs is a priority for my district.



Programs are an opportunity to offer enrichment and wellness.



My district is ready to offer or expand programs.



LCFF makes our district more likely to offer programs in the future.



### Perceptions regarding support for summer programs

About half of the respondents feel that the level of support for publicly funded summer learning programs has stayed the same in the last three years among board members, district administrators, K-12 educators (such as principals and teachers) and parents and community members. The other respondents were more likely to perceive an increase in support rather than a decrease in support among those groups.

However, respondents were unsure about the level of support by other local governments, and were more likely to say that support by the state government has decreased.

### Focus group findings

The discussion among focus group participants was consistent with the survey results: All the experienced board members have heard of summer learning loss, although awareness varies as to how much summer learning loss occurs and whom it affects.

Participants believe that their district can use LCFF funding for summer programs, provided that they can show how the money is being spent on target student groups. One participant noted that summer programs would be a good use of the funds since they are a “proven, research-based” strategy, while others wondered how they could demonstrate that the program made a difference for students in their district.

Furthermore, participants recognize that health and wellness can be addressed in summer programming. In this and other areas, they stressed the importance of community partners in developing and implementing summer programs.

### Discussion and recommendations

Results of this study show that board members, superintendents and district staff recognize the value of summer learning programs. They respond in a positive manner when asked about the perceived impact of summer programs on summer learning loss, the achievement gap and student wellness. Two-thirds of the districts in the survey already offer and plan to continue to offer summer learning programs. A planned increase in use of general/LCFF funds for such programs suggests an increasing momentum toward investment in summer programming as a strategy to enhance student learning. Furthermore, about a third of districts may create or expand programs in the coming years.

The study clearly indicates that more summer programs could be offered if districts are able to resolve questions about where to find funding and/or partners to implement such programs. They also need assistance understanding how summer programs fit into district goals and plans and state accountability systems.

The findings in this study suggest the following action steps for district governance teams:

1. Review research and engage in discussions about the link between summer learning programs and student achievement, the short-term and cumulative effects of summer learning loss (especially for disadvantaged students), and the positive impacts that high-quality summer programs have on reducing summer learning loss.
2. Review research and best practices from other districts to gain knowledge regarding the characteristics of effective programs. Any investment that districts make in summer programming should be designed to optimize results.
3. When developing the district's local control and accountability plan as required under the LCFF, consider how summer learning programs can be used to meet the goals outlined in the plan. Use the district's plan to prioritize the goals of summer programming and the desired student outcomes. Summer programs should be aligned with and support the district's vision and goals and the educational program offered during the school year. In this way, summer programs become an integral component of the district's efforts to promote student learning, not an add-on program.
4. Explore a variety of funding sources for summer programs. In addition to using LCFF funds, districts may blend together Title I Part A funds, Title I Part C migrant education funds, After School Education and Safety Program supplemental funds, 21st Century Community Learning Center supplemental funds, and grants from private and educational foundations.
5. Identify and collaborate with community partners. Other community organizations and public agencies may already be providing summer programs and/or may be interested in partnering with the district to plan and implement programs. Collaboration allows all partners to leverage existing resources and expertise.

The findings from the survey and focus groups also suggest a number of actions that organizations and agencies could take to support districts in developing or expanding summer programs, including the provision of model programs and best practices, virtual site visits, in-district support and training, data demonstrating a return on investment, information about any state or other guidance on LCFF that is specific to summer programs, and a timeline/calendar for summer program planning that is aligned with the development of the local control and accountability plan.

The resources listed below provide much information that will assist districts in implementing all these recommendations. Resources will continue to be updated and added to the websites of CSBA and Summer Matters.

## For further information

### CSBA

[www.csba.org/summerlearning](http://www.csba.org/summerlearning)

CSBA provides related sample board policies and administrative regulations, including BP 6177 - Summer Learning Programs and BP/AR 3552 - Summer Meal Program, as well as policy briefs, fact sheets and articles. These materials are combined into the *Summer Learning and Wellness Resource Guide*.

### Summer Matters

[www.summermatters2you.net](http://www.summermatters2you.net) and  
<http://partnerforchildren.org>

This statewide campaign seeks to increase access to summer learning and enrichment programs for low-income children and youth. Through a network of partners, the Summer Matters campaign provides technical assistance and advocacy support for summer learning programs. The Partnership for Children and Youth oversees the Summer Matters campaign. Publications include *Leveraging Summer for Student Success: A Guide to Help School Leaders Understand Why and How Summer Learning is an Essential Strategy in the Local Control Funding Formula*; *Putting Summer to Work: The Development of High-Quality Summer Learning Programs in California* and *Funding to Support Summer Programs: Lessons from the Field*.

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