

# Summer Learning in Rhode Island: An Overview

## Why Is Summer Learning Critical?

For many Rhode Islanders, summer evokes images of time spent at the beach, trips to Block Island, or evenings at PawSox games. Many children in the state do not have these opportunities and instead spend summers bored, inactive, and disengaged from learning. Research spanning over 100 years demonstrates that *all* young people experience learning losses when they do not engage in educational activities during the summer.<sup>1</sup> The summer months represent a critical time period for learning and development, and too often, summer becomes a missed opportunity.

Part of the problem is that summer learning is associated with an outdated concept of summer school. Often a punitive measure, this version of summer school is mandatory for students who have fallen behind in their classes and need extra help recovering credits or progressing to the next stage in their coursework.<sup>2</sup> Regarded with trepidation by students, parents, and teachers alike, remedial summer school programs often face low participation levels and achieve limited results. Summer programs, while an integral part of the education system, are often the first to be cut during difficult budget times.<sup>3</sup>

All students can benefit from

engaging in hands-on, applied summer learning in which academics and enrichment are indistinguishable. Summer represents a key time for educators to innovate and create programming that pairs the fun and idyllic activities of the season with opportunities to learn concrete facts and skills. In implementing pioneering summer learning programs, educators and policymakers can work to close the achievement gap, reduce summer learning loss, and foster a love of learning and creativity in Rhode Island's children and youth.

*"The problem of summer vacation, first documented in 1906, compounds year after year. What starts as a hiccup in a six-year-old's education can become a crisis by the time the child reaches high school."*

— David Von Drehle, "The Case Against Summer Vacation", TIME Magazine

## What Is Summer Learning Loss?

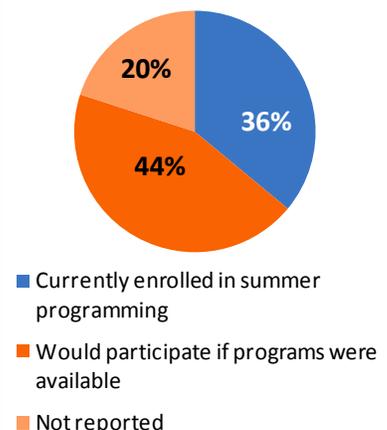
Most students, regardless of socio-economic status, lose about two months of grade-level equivalency in math when they spend their summers understimulated. Low-income students also experience a loss in reading achievement.<sup>4</sup> When school starts in September, teachers must reinstruct students in material from the previous year, rather than starting with the new

curriculum for their grade. These learning losses, when compounded year after year, account for a large portion of the achievement gap between lower-income and higher-income students.

## The Achievement Gap in Rhode Island

The Rhode Island Campaign for Achievement Now's report on the state of Rhode Island education states that for the 44% of Rhode Island students who come from low-income families, access to high-quality summer learning opportunities is crucial. Rhode Island has a bigger achievement gap in math between low-income students and middle- or upper-income students than 45 other

**PARTICIPATION OF RHODE ISLAND CHILDREN IN SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS<sup>6</sup>**



RIASPA gratefully acknowledges United Way of Rhode Island for underwriting this policy brief.

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states. In reading skills, Rhode Island lags behind 42 states.<sup>5</sup>

Helping students to strengthen their skills in reading is especially vital, as those students who have not reached proficiency by the end of third grade are most likely to drop out of high school.<sup>7</sup> The long-term consequences of widespread low achievement in reading are serious—not only in terms of individual earning potential, but also in terms of how the United States will fare in a global economy.<sup>8</sup>

A study at Johns Hopkins University found that differences in summer learning options and experiences substantially account for the achievement gap between lower-income and higher-income students by the time they reach

high school. Academic setbacks build up over time, and matters worsen when students are unable to access good summer learning options. Summer learning can influence whether a student will be placed in college preparatory courses, graduate from high school, or attend college.<sup>9</sup>

### Highlights of Summer Learning in Rhode Island

In addition to traditional summer school and summer camps, several organizations in Rhode Island offer summer programming that integrates hands-on learning experiences with recreation, fitness, and other activities. A recent survey of Rhode Island parents found that just 36% of Rhode Island children currently attend

summer learning programs. According to *the America After 3PM: Special Report on Summer*, 44% of Rhode Island children—nearly 50,000 students in all—would likely participate in summer learning programs if they were more readily available. Additionally, more than four out of five Rhode Island parents (81%) support public funding for summer learning programs.<sup>10</sup>

### Trends in Summer Learning

#### National Trends

Summer learning loss received national focus in August 2010 when TIME Magazine included a cover article titled “The Case Against Summer Vacation.”

Additionally, a review of 11 experimentally evaluated programs across the United States identified several promising practices that may be implemented to improve program effectiveness:<sup>11</sup>

- Include academic content that complements curricular standards.
- Teach concepts via engaging, hands-on activities.
- Limit class enrollment to 15 students at varied skill levels with at least 2 educators per classroom.
- Offer real-world context to ensure the concepts being taught are more meaningful.

The National Summer Learning Association launched the New Vision for Summer School Initiative in 2010 to help school districts move away from the traditional model of summer school and move toward comprehensive programming that engages both students and teachers. This programming

### Exemplary Summer Learning Programs in Rhode Island

PROVIDENCE BAILEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	CENTRAL FALLS COMMUNITY OF OUTSTANDING LEARNERS (COOL) PROGRAM	PROVIDENCE HOPE HIGH SCHOOL H2O PROGRAM
POPULATION SERVED		
165 elementary school students	145 at-risk middle school students	30-40 incoming ninth grade students
KEY COMPONENTS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six-week program</li> <li>• Combines academic enrichment, intensive literacy programs, and healthy-living skills</li> <li>• 1:5 teacher-to-student ratio</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six-week program</li> <li>• Career exploration via project-based learning and community service</li> <li>• Friday field trips related to curriculum</li> <li>• 12:1 student-to-staff ratio</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four-week program</li> <li>• Centers on topics key to student transition to high school</li> <li>• Program design changes each year based on participant feedback</li> </ul>
SIGNS OF SUCCESS		
In 2008-09, 49% of students who attended six months or more of out-of-school time programs moved from “reading below grade level” to “reading on or above grade level.”	An evaluation by the Education Alliance at Brown University found the COOL Program to be operational and a replicable model for other middle school programs.	Since 2006, the program has served 120 students, all of whom have graduated or remained in school. The program maintains a zero percent drop-out rate.



4 out of 5 Rhode Island parents (81%) support public funding for summer learning programs.

blends accelerated and engaged instruction, skill-building enrichment activities, and project-based learning that engages the body as well as the mind. This new vision is already being implemented in school districts across the country, including Baltimore Public Schools, Detroit Public Schools, and Philadelphia Public Schools.<sup>12</sup>

### State Trends

#### *Joint Legislative Taskforce on Summer Learning.*

During the 2009 legislative session, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed H5967, creating a Joint Legislative Taskforce on Summer Learning. The Taskforce included representatives from state government, summer learning programs, and key education constituencies. The stakeholders convened to make a comprehensive study and give recommendations to the General Assembly regarding summer learning in the state. Specific issues addressed by this group included increasing linkages between schools and summer learning programs; increasing

coordination between school-based summer learning programs and those based out of community organizations; and identifying the key elements of summer learning to be addressed at the public-policy level.<sup>13</sup>

### Local Trends

#### *Summer Learning Demonstration Project.*

Since 2008, Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance (RIASPA) has partnered with the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and a group of Rhode Island policymakers to implement the Rhode Island Summer Learning Demonstration Project. This project, operating at seven sites in four local communities, works to implement innovative hands-on, experiential learning opportunities for children and youth in the summer months. Rather than take a one-size-fits-all approach to summer learning, each site addresses the needs of their specific student demographic. The main component of this work has been to link community partners with school personnel to co-create and co-deliver high-quality, student-centered summer learning opportunities.

The project has received national recognition and has developed successful models that can be replicated across the state.<sup>14</sup>

*21<sup>st</sup> Century CLC Programs.* The Rhode Island Department of Education currently provides funding to support afterschool and summer programs in 65 elementary, middle, and high schools. These programs, known as 21st Century Community Learning Center Programs, serve over 11,000 students every year. The funded programs work with low-income populations in underperforming schools and must demonstrate a partnership between a school and a community- or faith-based organization. Each of these centers runs summer programming to improve students' access to academic supports, physical activity, and arts programming; and teach them the foundational skills they will need to succeed in college, careers, and in life.

## References

### Endnotes

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## Acknowledgements

Mike Burk, Frank Donahue, RIASPA Public Policy Committee; Allan Stein, Paola Fernandez, Chris Medici, United Way of Rhode Island; Matthew Boulay, Jeff Smink, National Summer Learning Association; Jackie Ascrizzi, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; Dana Borrelli, Highlander Charter School; Samantha Brinz, Newport Public Schools; Sherry Brown, RI State Council on the Arts; Elaine Budish; Terese Curtin, Connecting for Children and Families; Patrick Duhon, Providence Public Schools; Robert Gerardi, Woonsocket Public Schools; Alex Molina, Providence After School Alliance; Edwin Pacheco, Education in Action; Cheryl Space, RI Office of Library Information Services; Rick Goff, Joseph Morra, Leslie Patron, and the RIASPA Summer Learning Working Group

## Recommendations

Based on this research, RIASPA makes the following recommendations for change at the federal, state, and local levels.

### **Federal-Level Recommendations**

- Mandate that all schools provide summer programming to students as a part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, formerly known as No Child Left Behind).
- Devote more leadership and resources to summer and expanded learning in order to make it a vital component of education reform efforts by increasing 21st Century Community Learning Center funding, enhancing supplemental education services to make summer a preferred time for delivery of services, and authorizing demonstration projects that test innovative models of summer learning.

### **State-Level Recommendations**

- Pass legislation to create a fund to support summer learning programs in the state that create hands-on, innovative summer learning experiences for children and youth.
- Encourage districts to adopt the New Vision for Summer School outlined by the National Summer Learning Association.
- Conduct a scan of all available summer learning programs in the state, and create and share a database with families to make them aware of available summer learning opportunities for children and youth.

### **Local-Level Recommendations**

- Develop more proactive and collaborative approaches to summer school policies that focus on enrichment in addition to remediation.
- Encourage schools, parks and recreation departments, libraries, and other government and private

agencies to work together to facilitate collaborations on programming, share resources, and expand access to high-quality summer programs for children and youth in the community.

- Convene representatives from schools and summer learning programs to collaborate and share information about students' needs and strengths; align curriculum and content; and use the complementary expertise of school staff and community partners to deliver high-quality enrichment activities and instruction to children and youth.

## Resources

### **State Resources**

Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance—

[www.afterschoolri.org](http://www.afterschoolri.org)

Rhode Island Department of Education—[www.ride.ri.gov](http://www.ride.ri.gov)

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT—[www.rikidscount.org](http://www.rikidscount.org)

Providence After School Alliance—[www.mypasa.org](http://www.mypasa.org)

### **National Resources**

National Summer Learning Association—

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

Afterschool Alliance—[www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)

American Camp Association—[www.acacamps.org](http://www.acacamps.org)

National AfterSchool Association—[www.naaweb.org](http://www.naaweb.org)



*Production of the policy brief series is made possible through the generous support of United Way of Rhode Island.*

## The Spectrum of Summer Learning

**SCHOOLS**—Typically lasting four to six weeks and paid for with government funds, these programs often focus on academic development and credit recovery for low-performing students.

**COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS**—Funded by private philanthropy, these programs tend to focus on the social and emotional development of local children and youth. These programs may be one to twelve weeks in length.

**LIBRARIES**—Library programs offer children and youth in the surrounding community opportunities to develop their literacy skills. Such programs often last all summer and are funded by private philanthropy.

**CAMPS**—Paid for by participants' parents, camps target children and youth from a broad range of populations. These programs last one to twelve weeks and give participants outdoor education and an opportunity to develop socially.

**PARKS & RECREATION CENTERS**—At these centers, local children and youth take part in athletics and the arts. They also grow their social skills. Parent fees are the primary funding source.

**CHILD CARE CENTERS**—At child care centers, children develop new skills in an academic and social setting. Funded by parent fees, child care centers are open all summer long.

### **HYBRID APPROACH**

Two or more of the above models combine forces to deliver a high-quality, hands-on program.