

The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) promotes and advocates for sound public policy at the federal, state, and local levels to improve conditions for summer learning. Meaningful change comes from these five key policy strategies.

1. Incentivize partnerships and improve partner alignment

Partnerships between summer providers serving similar groups of students ensure complete access to a broader range of services and less duplication of efforts. These partners may include summer meals sites and sponsors, schools, community-based and faith-based organizations, libraries, museums, parks and recreation centers, youth employment sponsors, and other agencies, service providers, and organizations that touch the lives of youth during the summer. The result: a community-wide network for anywhere, anytime learning.

What does this look like in action?

- Engage intermediary organizations to lead and drive partnerships at the local level.
- Promote coordination and use of shared data systems to drive service and measure common outcomes.
- Compare and align guidelines and cut-offs for serving specific groups of students. Ensure that poverty cut-offs and demographic targets promote service to students most in need of opportunity and are aligned across programs.
- Expand small-scale programs and policies to engage a wider group of students or extend school-year activities in to the summer months.

2. Promote sustainability

Funding for summer learning doesn't always require a new grant program. Many existing funding streams are able to support summer learning either as they currently stand or with more explicit expansion into the summer months. Smart use of existing pools of funding and greater collaboration between youth-serving sectors can greatly increase impact during the summer.

What does this look like in action?

- Engage service sectors beyond education to incentivize their investments in summer activities for youth.
- Focus efforts on research- and evidence-based strategies with proven outcomes.
- Create dedicated budget investments and assign specific revenues to fund summer programs.
- Promote summer as an allowable use of flexible funds.
- Connect summer efforts and opportunities to other community initiatives.

3. Improve and promote flexibility of resources

Summer service providers have access to many public funding streams already targeted to youth, especially those who are struggling academically or are considered at-risk. Policymakers should clearly define allowable use of these funds for summer activities.

What does this look like in action?

- Promote alignment and braiding of existing education funding streams to support summer learning activities that are directed by districts and schools.
- Improve guidance to states and districts about the allowable use of funds for summer learning.

4. Invest in structural supports and systems

Community-wide systems promote coordination of summer services with each other and with school-year programs that serve the same students, leading to greater efficiency and better outcomes for youth. These structures also create mechanisms for monitoring and maintaining quality of programs through evaluation and professional development.

What does this look like in action?

- Implement guidelines or standards for quality summer programming and promote common tools for measuring and monitoring quality over time. Invest in professional development aligned with quality standards.
- Align school districts and agency budget cycles to incorporate summer into year-round planning.
- Allow a single administrative process for certifying providers who serve the same youth year-round through multiple funding programs.
- Promote shared use of facilities that would otherwise be under-utilized in the summer, such as school buildings and buses.
- Invest in transportation solutions that bring youth to places where many services can be provided.
- Bring learning opportunities to non-traditional learning settings, including health care centers, faith-based centers, and food banks.
- Connect and expand data systems to link summer experiences to school success.

5. Expand the knowledge base

The research community continues to explore effective strategies and best practices for many aspects of summer learning opportunities, including summer school, youth employment, nutrition programs, enrichment programs, and more. The field continues to explore significant questions around program quality, access to programs, and program outcomes, determining “best fit” approaches for different kinds of students and communities. Better data on how youth spend their summer will help inform equity implications of summer investments. This expanding knowledge base is critical to ensuring smart investments in activities that make a real difference in the lives of youth.

What does this look like in action?

- Focus research efforts on specific kinds of programs, such as STEM, library, career exploration, and college preparation.
- Promote evaluation of social/emotional outcomes in addition to academic outcomes.
- Identify “service deserts” where students lack access to specific types of summer programs and services.
- Invest in common evaluation tools and outcomes that can be applied to many programs in one overarching service area, grant program, or community initiative.
- Include summer activities in data collection efforts that focus on youth programs and services, both academic and non-academic.