



National Summer Learning Association
Statement on Expanded Learning, Federal Policy, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers

As the national leader on summer learning and its role in education reform, our Association is deeply interested in current discussions around the issues of expanded learning time (ELT), federal policy, and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program (21st CCLC). The following statement expresses our position on the role of summer learning in this important discussion.

Extensive research confirms that all students, particularly those in high-poverty communities, lose skills in math and reading over the summer months. In fact, research from Johns Hopkins University attributes two-thirds of the 9th grade achievement gap in reading to unequal summer learning opportunities during the elementary school years. At the same time, the flexibility inherent in the summer months presents an opportunity to implement innovative learning solutions that look and feel different than the traditional school day and year. We believe summer is not only an ideal time to expand learning opportunities for students, but that summer learning programs must be an essential component of any comprehensive strategies to close the achievement gap and promote healthy development.

The Association believes that summer learning programs, including those funded by 21st CCLC, can be implemented through a variety of approaches, such as school-based and community-based strategies, including those implemented by partnerships between schools and community-based organizations, as well as extension of the school year to provide additional learning time, but only if the additional time is focused on innovative teaching and learning that better engages students and teachers.

This focus on engagement and innovation is critical to the success and promise of expanded learning time and summer. With the dropout rate about 50 percent at many urban schools, simply asking schools to do more of the same over the summer months is unlikely to improve student engagement or achievement and could further reinforce the punitive stigma associated with many current summer school programs. Rather, students need access to a variety of accelerated learning opportunities over the summer that increase motivation to learn through relevant, hands-on programming provided by schools, non-profit organizations, and other community partners.

While we support a variety of approaches to summer learning, the Association believes all high-quality summer programs should contain the following elements:

- **Adequate duration and scope.** To be successful, summer learning programs should address the comprehensive needs of students, including academics, enrichment, and other programming for healthy development. They should provide students with a minimum of 150 hours of programming for sustained, multi-year academic benefits.

- **Strong partnerships.** Successful summer learning programs typically include robust partnerships between schools, community organizations, and other public agencies in order to align and leverage resources, improve program quality, and develop shared outcomes for success.
- **Innovative programming that engages both students *and* teachers.** Quality summer learning programs look and feel different than traditional school year programs by providing a blended approach of academic learning and enrichment activities that include transition programs (e.g., for rising kindergarteners and ninth graders), proficiency-based learning opportunities, college and career awareness, experiential learning (e.g., workplace internships or service-learning), STEM education, arts, physical education, and innovative professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators.

The work of our Association and many of the members of our network of summer learning providers embodies these principles and variety of approaches. We currently work with districts and community stakeholders through our [New Vision for Summer School](#) and [Community Initiative strategies](#) . We believe that local communities should have the flexibility to use federal funds, including 21st CCLC funding, in a variety of ways to address local conditions, while being accountable for providing high-quality programming in a cost-effective manner.

Finally, while the 21st CCLC program provides significant support for summer programming, our Association believes strongly that other federal funds, particularly Title I and Title I school-turnaround, should be more widely utilized to support the types of summer programs described above. We are currently working with school districts and their community partners to encourage such use and are pleased that many urban districts, such as Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Rochester, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati have utilized Title I funds to support innovative summer programming. [Learn more about innovative district programming.](#)

While we're appreciative of the recent \$100 million increase for 21st CCLC, the Association also believes the federal government needs to make summer and expanded learning a more vital component of education reform through increased leadership and resources. With a recent poll from the Afterschool Alliance showing that 75 percent of American students are not participating in summer learning programs, more support is necessary for these critical programs, particularly in difficult economic times.

The Association looks forward to working with Congress, the Administration, and all expanded learning stakeholders to ensure a diverse array of high-quality summer learning opportunities are accessible to students throughout the nation. For more information, please contact Bob Seidel at bseidel@summerlearning.org.

