



Funding Summer Learning Programs: A Scan of Public Investments in Maryland

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

While a few schools and districts are experimenting with new academic calendars, for most American children, summertime means time away from the rigors of school. Yet research underscores the importance of summer learning for school-age children. Differences in children's long-term academic success can be explained largely by their summer experiences. Little is known, however, about the kinds of programs that are available to lower-income children during the summer months.

We partnered with Cross & Jofus, LLC, to collect and analyze data in four local jurisdictions in Maryland to provide critical information to state and local policymakers on public investments in summer programs and to test a data collection methodology that could be replicated in other locales. The four jurisdictions analyzed are the city of Baltimore, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, and St. Mary's County. Five key funding agencies were surveyed for each jurisdiction: the public schools, the local parks and recreation department, the local management board, the local workforce investment board, and the state child care agency.

KEY FINDINGS

- The public schools served the largest number of children in publicly funded summer programs, with parks and recreation departments and local workforce investment boards coming in a distant second. Child care vouchers supported the fewest number of children in summer programs and, with one small exception, local management boards did not fund summer programs.
- Among school districts, the number of students served in summer programs ranged from just 6 percent of district enrollment up to nearly 30 percent of district enrollment. Except for public schools, programs offered by the other funding agencies are serving a fraction of the total student population.

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KEY FINDINGS CONT.

- Some parks and recreation departments offered a comprehensive set of free or low-cost summer programs. Most of these programs, however, were fully supported by parent fees and received no public funding.
- Most publicly funded programs were geared toward elementary-age children; high school-age children were served primarily in youth employment and summer school programs. Very few programs for middle school students existed.
- Public spending per program participant varied considerably across both jurisdictions and across the various funding agencies, from a low of \$93 per participant in a parks and recreation program to a high of \$2,043 in a summer youth employment program. This variation can be explained by differences in staffing costs, program length, and/or the degree to which programs relied on parent fees or other private funding in addition to public sources. (Parent fees or other private funding are not included in the spending figures.)
- Public funding for summer programs comes mainly from local and federal sources (about 50 percent each), with a very small share from state sources.

LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

The following points summarize the main lessons learned from this research and provide a brief discussion of the implications for future policy development and analysis.

Summer coverage is far from complete. Most programs operate only four to six weeks out of the full 10-week summer. And very few programs operated at all in the month of August.

The supply of low-cost summer programs is limited, but questions about demand remain. There is a sizable deficit in the number of free and low-cost programs as compared to the number of low-income school-age children; however, many low-cost programs did not have waiting lists and reported difficulties with consistent attendance.

The majority of summer programs, even those funded with public dollars, charge fees. In some cases these fees are quite high (up to \$700 for six weeks of summer school). However, in other cases program leaders chose to set a low fee, because they have found that free programs are not as well attended.

The term “summer learning” is not well understood. Some programs clearly considered their programs as places where learning occurred. Others were confused by this terminology. It will be important for advocates and the education community to find a common language for policymakers and providers to rally around.

Summer programming is not well coordinated at the local level. In most jurisdictions there was no single agency or organization that took account of or coordinated summer programming. Even within some of the larger agencies, information did not reside in a specific office nor was there any one person who had a good understanding of the full range of offerings. This has important implications for planning, coordination, and targeting of resources at the local level.

For more details on the research methods and findings and further discussion of the lessons learned and their implications, see *Funding Summer Learning Programs: A Scan of Public Investments in Maryland*. The full report is available from the National Summer Learning Association by visiting www.summerlearning.org.