



2022 Maryland Summer Learning Report

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Leaders in Youth Development



INTRODUCTION

2021 was a pivotal year for summer learning. As the pandemic entered its second year, school officials were under significant pressure to address the toll that covid-19 had taken on student performance and well-being. In an effort to reduce learning loss, many looked for opportunities to engage students outside of the traditional school day. Out-of-School Time initiatives soon received unprecedented levels of public interest and investment as officials recognized the critical role they could play in facilitating student recovery. Maryland was no exception to these trends. Between June and September of 2021, over 120,000 of the state's public school students received summer learning services, reflecting the high demand for these programs across the state.

This report reviews Maryland's performance in offering high-quality expanded learning programs in the summer of 2021. Our conclusions are based on a series of reports provided by each Maryland public school district detailing how they executed their summer learning strategy during that period. After reviewing the data included in these reports, we offer a series of best practices and recommendations to improve the quantity and quality of summer learning programs offered in Maryland.

On Learning Loss

Since the pandemic began, relief funds have often been allocated to afterschool and summer programs with the express purpose of mitigating “learning loss.” Sometimes called “interrupted” or “unfinished” learning, learning loss refers to the academic setbacks that students experience when their traditional learning environment is disrupted or closed. In this sense, the pandemic created countless obstacles for effective student learning. Attendance floundered amid recurring school closures, and remote learning models often proved to be a poor substitute for in-person instruction. Now, as covid-related policies are lifting, there is a palpable sentiment among parents and educators that students need to make up for lost time.

It is important to note, however, that any strategy meant to address learning loss must not be limited to remedial learning strategies, nor should it subject students to endless testing and skill-tracking. Summer programs succeed at improving student outcomes because they give young people the ability to connect with others and pursue their own interests. As [one report](#) noted, “the presence and quality of our relationships may have more impact on learning and development than any other factor.”



The Impact of Government Relief Funds

A series of ambitious state and federal spending plans played a significant role in facilitating summer learning programs in Maryland during 2021. At the federal level, The American Rescue Plan allocated over \$30 billion to expanded learning programs across the country, issuing non-competitive grants and direct payments to state and local education agencies to support student learning. Maryland school districts received nearly [\\$2 billion](#) dollars in expanded learning support as a result of this historic legislation. In Annapolis, lawmakers passed the Blueprint for Maryland’s future, a long-awaited piece of legislation designed to overhaul and expand Maryland’s public education system over the next decade.

The exceptional nature of these two pieces of legislation should inform our interpretation of Maryland’s summer learning strategy in two ways. First, it should be noted that funding from these initiatives ultimately did not reach program providers until late spring of 2021, providing little time to plan and implement these funds. With more time and predictable funding streams, summer learning providers can allocate resources more efficiently in the future. Second, federal relief programs within the American Rescue plan are designed to address acute problems brought about by the pandemic. In many cases, these sources of funding will disappear over the next few years. School districts and program providers should therefore seek alternative sources of funding as needed to ensure program sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection & Analysis

Section 4 of The Blueprint for Maryland's Future requires each of Maryland's 24 school districts to publish an annual report detailing their summer program implementation strategy. By law, these documents must include the following information:

- how many students the county board served through the program;
- the structure of the program, including the number of hours of instruction provided each day, how instruction was delivered to students, and the partnerships established to enhance the summer school program;
- the method the county board used to identify students with the greatest learning loss;
- the budget and expenditures for the program; and
- the outcomes of the program for students, including academic progress and other outcomes.

Our team reviewed each report and identified key metrics that reflected program size and effectiveness. All the relevant information from each report was then compiled into a single, comprehensive dataset. Once completed, this dataset was used to draw comparisons among the school districts' summer learning strategies and evaluate variables that impacted program effectiveness. Those interested can read each county's summer learning report [here](#).

Data Limitations

Due to the lack of consistency across reporting, our conclusions regarding Maryland's summer programs in 2021 are general in nature. Few districts provided substantial information on their summer learning strategies beyond the legal reporting guidelines. Actionable data on important topics like program content, transportation services, communication strategies, and attendee populations were notably absent in the majority of these documents. As such, there are many unanswered about the impact of the increased investment in summer:

- What were the demographics of the students served? Were the students who would otherwise not have been able to access a summer opportunity? Were they the students most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How much additional learning time was gained on average for each student?
- How well attended were the programs offered?
- What was the actual cost per youth across the state?
- How do aspects like transportation and the type of programming offered impact recruitment, attendance, retention, and student outcomes?
- What impact did summer programming have on unfinished learning and social emotion learning?

In the following section, we identify ways in which state and local officials can address these concerns by providing more comprehensive reporting guidelines to school districts. The information outlined here can pave the way for more sophisticated data analysis and policy recommendations in the future.

FINDINGS

Enrollment

With over **120,000 Maryland students** taking part in summer learning programs in 2021, nearly **1 out of every 6** public school students received some kind of summer learning instruction. **Student Enrollment varied greatly** by county, with some school districts serving **over 30%** of their student populations, and **others serving less than 5%**. Districts used many different metrics to target students with the greatest levels of learning loss, including absenteeism, access to technology, and English language proficiency.

123,584
Students Served

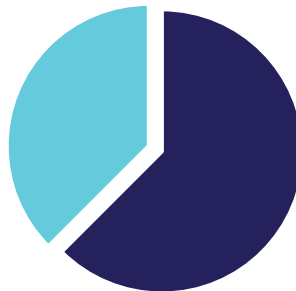


14%
of all MD public
school students

Community Partnerships

15 Districts utilized community partnerships when operating their summer learning programs in 2021. **School districts that utilized these partnerships had higher enrollment** on average, **servicing 16%** of their respective student populations **compared to 10%** for those without community partnerships. Community partners often included local libraries and universities, the YMCA, arts organizations, museums, Boys & Girls clubs, and STEM organizations.

15 of 24
Districts Utilized
Community Partners



62%
of MD Counties

Budget Items

Maryland school districts spent **\$879** per student to operate their summer learning programs based on figures provided by the 15 school districts with clear expense reports. Within these reports, Transportation costs accounted for **12.8%** of budget expenditures on average. Districts that identified funding sources acknowledged contributions from the American Rescue Plan, ESSER Grants, local funding, and other sources.

\$879
Per Student

12.8%
Average Transportation
Expenditure

BEST PRACTICES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Our best practices and recommendations focus on 5 key areas: Reporting, Community Partnerships, Personnel Management, Transportation and Planning. By addressing the ways that these factors influenced program success, we seek to outline a set of guiding principles with which to inform the summer learning strategies of summer 2022. With thoughtful preparation and a more sophisticated understanding of student needs, these conclusions can help educators improve student outcomes and return on investment.

In general, the data demonstrates that **the most effective programs made use of community partnerships and attracted high-quality personnel by offering staff higher wages and by recruiting professional teachers.** Most agencies were successful in improving students' literacy and mathematics proficiency, while Social-Emotional Learning outcomes were mixed. Finally, we argue that **the state could benefit from outlining standardized data collection requirements,** as the inconsistency between counties on reporting limits our ability to draw conclusions about best practices statewide.

“The presence and quality of our relationships may have more impact on learning and development than any other factor.”

– The Science of Learning and Development Alliance

Reporting

The level of detail provided in each summer learning report varied significantly by school district. Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Frederick County, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County provided the most comprehensive descriptions of their summer learning strategies, each including their program goals, partners, and expenses in detail. Some districts provided additional data points that included attendance, number of hours per student or program, and program outcomes. In particular, [Anne Arundel County Public Schools](#) provided an extensive reporting on their 2021 summer programs, including demographic information on students served by each program.

Providing detailed information gives program providers and policymakers a more complete story of the important role summer learning programs are playing in the lives of Maryland's students. It also allows for more robust comparative analysis, offering greater insight into the factors that promote program success. We want all young people to look back fondly on their summer experiences and take the skills and knowledge they build forward into their futures.

To measure these outcomes, school districts need more tools and guidelines to measure impact of investment. With summer programming serving as an increasingly important tool to offset unfinished learning from the pandemic, we recommend collecting uniform data on the following metrics:

- Budget: Create a uniform template of expenses and sources of funding
- Staffing: Provide the number and types of program staff with descriptions of training and professional development
- Community Partners and the roles they played in program implementation
- Enrollment demographics
- Attendance data
- Common metrics to evaluate student learning outcomes, developed in consultation with school districts and expanded learning experts. [Boston & Beyond Data Dashboard](#) serves as an effective example of best practices and collaboration.



Foster & Encourage Community Partnerships

Our findings suggest that student attendance and program content improve when school districts integrate community-based partners into their expanded learning strategies. **School districts that leveraged community partnerships provided a greater diversity of programming and served more than 1.5 times as many students compared with districts that did not.** In addition, three out of the four school districts that served more than 20% of their student populations (Montgomery, Somerset, Talbot and Washington County) worked with community-based partners to manage their program. These findings suggest that by effectively leveraging these relationships, school districts can benefit from the vast knowledge, personnel, and experience these civic organizations can provide.

Forming lasting partnerships like these can be difficult, however. Community organizations often find difficulty connecting with school districts, and school districts have trouble identifying reputable partners. To improve coordination between these two groups, school districts should provide clear, easily accessible information on their websites about the process and qualifications needed for becoming an approved vendor. Clarifying policies around partnership and space use help strengthen collaboration among stakeholders. Districts should also consider implementing a system for schools to connect with diverse partnership opportunities, such as [Baltimore City's Partnership in Education Portal](#), when possible.

Staff Management & Compensation

Like so many other industries, expanded learning providers experienced staffing shortages in the summer of 2021. Some districts addressed this challenge by raising teacher and aide wages substantially to recruit and retain personnel (examples include Allegany County Public Schools, Worcester and Carroll County Public Schools). When budgeting for program staff, summer learning providers should consider ongoing inflationary pressures and wage increases within adjacent sectors in the labor market. Some school districts, like Worcester County, also prioritized professional teachers when recruiting summer learning staff, ensuring that program personnel were experienced and had a personal connection to the youth they were serving. Well-trained staff that can make personal relationships with young people are a necessity for any summer learning program.

Transportation

Given the widespread nature of virtual programming and the limited reporting on transportation data among school districts, it is difficult to determine the extent to which transportation availability impacted student attendance in the state's 2021 summer learning programs. [National data](#) suggests that transportation availability is a key component of expanded learning program equity, however. Given the socio-economic dimensions learning loss, it is apparent that students without reliable transportation are correlated with those experiencing the greatest levels of learning loss. Providing transportation is a supportive strategy for families for populations for which transportation may be a barrier to participation.

“Planning for Summer Starts in September”

A tried-and-true adage. Thorough planning done well in advance of a program's launch date is an effective way to improve quality and impact. The summer of 2021 was filled with success stories despite the need for rapid design and implementation of programs. With additional time to prepare, school districts will have more opportunities to develop partnerships, hire and prepare staff, design unique programming, and share information with students and parents for recruitment. If successfully implemented, these factors can help program providers serve even more students and create lasting memories for young people.

[The National Summer Learning Association](#) has a wealth of information to help program providers and school districts plan their summer learning programs. The Wallace Foundation's [Summer Learning Toolkit](#) also provides a comprehensive approach to planning along with case studies and templates. Finally, the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment has also published a useful [System Summer Learning Planning Guide](#) to assist program providers as they prepare for the summer of 2022.

Acknowledgements

MOST Network would like to thank the contributions made by [Beanblossom Consulting](#) for their rigorous data collection and analysis during this study.