EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public Libraries and Effective Summer Learning: Opportunities for Assessment

Public Libraries Are Evolving Their Summer Programming and Providing Needed, Expanded Opportunities for Learning

Libraries today are using innovative new learning environments and programming to keep school-aged youth reading, problem-solving, and developing skills during the summer when learning loss is a critical concern. By partnering with city/county governments, schools, museums, recreation centers, and other community organizations, libraries are multiplying summer learning opportunities for their community's children, youth, and families.

> " *Libraries are uniquely positioned to OWN summer learning and to do so in a way that is community appropriate and assures equity.* "
>
> — Steven V. Potter,
> Mid-Continent Public Library

As Libraries Evolve Their Summer Learning Programs, They Need Resources to Demonstrate Program Effectiveness

As libraries continue to implement programs specifically designed to address the summer slide and become summer learning leaders in their communities, librarians and library staff are increasingly looking for ways to measure the effectiveness of their programming in achieving learning goals.

Emerging and Replicable Practices for Assessing Library Summer Learning Are Available

Many libraries are exploring and implementing assessment practices and measurement tools that could be replicated in other libraries. In addition, there is much to be learned from the out-of-school-time sector, formal summer learning programs, and school-based assessment practices. Together, these practices, tools, and resources will help more libraries address their unique (yet resolvable) challenges in setting and measuring learning goals.

There Is an Actionable Path Forward for Libraries to Build Their Capacity to Assess Their Summer Learning Program Effectiveness

Demonstrating that their summer learning programs are addressing the summer slide and achieving learning outcomes for school-aged youth is essential for aligning the resources and cultivating the partnerships that libraries need to sustain and grow their programs. While they explore and implement assessment practices, there are initial steps libraries can take to identify learning outcomes for their summer programming that are aligned with community-wide educational goals.

Public Libraries and Effective Summer Learning: Opportunities for Assessment is the result of a national forum that explored the issue of effective summer learning in libraries, led by the Urban Libraries Council in partnership with Metropolitan Group, with funding provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

The paper frames the issue of summer learning loss and describes the ways in which libraries are evolving their summer programming to provide multiple and diverse learning opportunities that keep kids learning during this critical time.

Common summer learning goals and emerging assessment practices among libraries are explored, and applicable lessons from the out-of-school-time field are examined. Examples of library-school partnerships that include alignment of learning outcomes and data-sharing agreements are also discussed. The paper provides recommendations to advance the capacity of libraries in strengthening and demonstrating the effectiveness of their summer learning programs.

For more information or to download the paper, please visit www.urbanlibraries.org/effectivesummerlearning.

A Call to Action: 7 Steps to Initiate Assessment of Public Library Summer Learning Effectiveness

1. **Engage Library Staff in A Cultural Shift.**

   By helping library staff understand that they already possess the knowledge and resources to address community educational needs such as improved reading proficiency, access to technology, STEM learning, etc., they can better appreciate their potential to create positive change and the need to measure their effectiveness in making that change a reality.

   > *We need to prepare staff to deliver high quality programs and understand the extent to which they achieved the learning objectives they've targeted.*
   >
   > — Andrea Sáenz, Chicago Public Library

2. **Develop, Cultivate, and Sustain Local Partnerships.**

   Working together with other organizations that are invested in youth achievement (e.g., schools, museums, local governments, etc.) allows libraries to share information and responsibilities, while aligning strategies for improved outcomes.

3. **Design Summer Learning Programs with Intentional Learning Goals in Mind.**

   Designing programs and activities to develop academic and/or 21st-century skills can allow libraries to know that participants gained these skills upon completion of the program.

4. **Investigate the Availability of Key Data to Demonstrate Outcomes.**

   Through data-sharing partnerships with schools and other youth-serving organizations, libraries can demonstrate that students who participate in summer learning programs score better on standardized assessments than those who do not, and that their participants maintain or make gains in their reading and math achievement and other measures between the spring and the fall.

5. **Explore Multiple and Varied Ways to Demonstrate Program Effectiveness.**

   Process measures (i.e., those focused on program quality and participation levels) and results measures (i.e., those focused on learning outcomes) can be used separately or together to assess library summer programs and demonstrate their effectiveness.

6. **Link with, and Learn from Regional and National Education Research Organizations.**

   Partnering with local universities and research entities, and exploring the work of regional and national research organizations, sector leaders, and philanthropic foundations invested in youth outcomes, can help inform library summer learning goals and assessment practices. Engaging with these partners and participating in their webinars and conferences can help increase recognition of libraries as key contributors to reducing the summer slide.

7. **Pilot Existing Measurement Tools and Practices (i.e., Don't Reinvent the Wheel).**

   Many libraries, out-of-school-time programs, and educational institutions are already measuring programs designed to promote academic and 21st-century skill development. Test-driving some of their measurement and assessment tools will help identify those that can be used in or adapted for the library setting.

> *It's about concrete outcomes that no longer make library summer learning a 'nicety,' but show how you can demonstrate learning gains.*
>
> — Lester Strong, AARP Foundation Experience Corps