



Leadership Brief: Libraries Expanding Summer Opportunities

ABOUT THIS LEADERSHIP BRIEF

This Leadership Brief highlights the growing role of libraries as summer learning leaders. It builds on the findings of the *Accelerate Summer* strategic partnership between the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) and the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) with support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

OVERVIEW: All school-aged children need opportunities during the summer to continue thinking and learning, develop new skills, and build their confidence so that they return to school ready to succeed. The need is particularly acute for children from lower-income families who have fewer opportunities for summer learning and are more likely to lose academic ground over the summer.

Public libraries are emerging as key leaders in closing the summer opportunity gap by moving beyond traditional summer reading to more integrated, intentional summer learning programs that focus on a variety of academic and developmental areas. Libraries bring significant assets to summer learning, such as:

- ▶ A trusted, inclusive atmosphere with safe and flexible opportunities to read, create, discover, and explore
- ▶ Experience delivering summer reading programs
- ▶ Access to and experience using diverse learning resources and approaches
- ▶ Deep community connections to support summer learning inside the library, at schools, and other accessible places
- ▶ Rapport with parents and families to encourage engagement in their children's summer learning

“In almost every community or neighborhood, the public library is a bedrock institution that plays a critical role in keeping kids of all ages safe and productively engaged during the summer.”

- Sarah Pitcock, Former CEO, National Summer Learning Association



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THE NEED FOR SUMMER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

“Can you imagine cellist Yo-Yo Ma or basketball star LeBron James going for three months without practicing their craft?,” asked Dr. Kevin Maxwell, Chief Executive Officer of the Prince George’s County Public Schools as he joined other county leaders to launch *Summer @ Your Library*, a collaboration of Prince George’s County Memorial Library and the school system. “Kids can’t put their books down for three months and expect to keep up.”¹

Without meaningful learning opportunities, summer becomes a time of risk for students, particularly those from lower-income households. Research has shown that:

- ▶ Unequal access to summer learning during elementary school accounts for up to two-thirds of the achievement gap between ninth-grade students from lower- and higher-income households²
- ▶ Children in lower-income homes who don’t regularly participate in summer learning programs may be at least two years behind their peers by the time they reach fifth grade³
- ▶ Summer learning programs with high-quality instructors and parental involvement can mitigate summer learning loss and even produce learning gains⁴

Public libraries are addressing these issues by working closely with schools and other partners to reach and engage students most in need of summer learning opportunities.

LIBRARY SUMMER LEARNING MODELS THAT EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES

ULC and NSLA’s *Accelerate Summer* research identified models for library summer learning programs that are making a difference.

- ▶ **Summer reading PLUS.** Incentive-based summer reading programs are enhanced by awarding credits and prizes for participation in STEM, connected learning, and other inquiry-based learning activities. These programs allow participants to engage in activities at the library

or at home and link these experiences with reading material. Activities could include visiting a museum, cooking a meal at home, writing a letter, or working in a library maker space.

- ▶ **Skill-based, drop-in learning activities.** These programs emphasize flexible opportunities for learning on a time-available basis rather than requiring enrollment in a full-time, multi-week camp. Libraries are particularly experienced at offering productive and enjoyable drop-in and self-directed summer learning experiences.
- ▶ **Enrollment programs.** Libraries are also offering enrollment-based programs that address specific learning outcomes (early literacy, grade-level reading, STEM learning) and are targeted for youth and families who don’t have access to other educational support.

NSLA’S HIGH-QUALITY PRACTICES EMBODIED BY LIBRARY SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS ⁵

- ▶ Inquiry-based learning
- ▶ Program spirit
- ▶ Collaboration and leadership
- ▶ Skill-building and encouragement
- ▶ Belonging
- ▶ Displaying youth work

To support summer learning approaches, libraries are creating partnerships with key community resources including:

- ▶ **Museums, zoos, aquariums and national parks** to draw on subject-matter expertise, organize group trips, and get tickets as incentives for summer learning participants
- ▶ **Schools and school districts** to identify student participants, promote summer learning programs, align programming, and share data to demonstrate learning gains

- ▶ *City and county government* to align programming with education networks and departments, share data, and increase awareness of the library's education role
- ▶ *Local businesses* to recruit professional volunteers and mentors and provide funding and incentives for participation
- ▶ *Nonprofits and community organizations* to leverage expertise and community connections and maximize program offerings

“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, Library Director and CEO, Mid-Continent Public Library

LIBRARY SUMMER LEARNING IN ACTION

Summer Reading PLUS

Saint Paul Public Library's *Summer Spark!* invites participants to “have fun, stay active and keep learning all summer long.” Participants earn points for reading and completing learning activities such as following a recipe, making a collage, and attending a library event.

Broward County Library sets summer learning goals for four age groups — preschool, children, teens, and adults — and encourages participants to use an online program to track progress. Participants earn points for completing challenges such as attending events, downloading learning resources, engaging in family-reading sessions, accessing databases, and completing back-to-school activities.

Ottawa Public Library aims to nurture children's imagination, inspire a sense of adventure, and celebrate accomplishments through its *TD Summer Reading Club*, a Canadian national program supported by TD Bank. Youth have the opportunity to “go wild” through a range of programs including arts and crafts, dance, science, sports, and more.

Skill-Based Drop-In Programs

Chicago Public Library's *Rahm's Readers Summer Learning Challenge* designs its activities around the Framework for 21st Century Learning Skills⁶ and incorporates three STEM/STEAM learning tracks—read, discover, create—through a partnership with the Museum of Science and Industry. The Library earned a 2015 NSLA Excellence in Summer Learning Award for its learning programs for low-income children and youth.

Fort Worth Library's *Worth Reading* is a community-wide program to get children, youth, and adults engaged in year-round reading and learning. The summer program uses activity templates that are aligned with state curriculum standards in English language arts, reading, and science.

Focused Enrollment Programs

New Haven Free Public Library works with neighborhood schools to identify struggling kindergarten through third-grade readers to enroll in their *READY for the Grade* summer learning program. With support from the New Alliance Foundation, the library provides twice-a-week group tutoring sessions and once-a-week family nights with dinner and individual tutoring over seven weeks.

District of Columbia Public Library offers *Science in the Summer*, a four-day, one-hour-per-day STEM course taught in the library by certified teachers. The free program is designed for elementary school students who follow a curriculum developed by funder, Glaxo Smith Kline in partnership with the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

New York Public Library's *Literacy Leaders* program trains high-school students to be literacy tutors and then employs them to work with struggling first- and second-grade readers during a seven-week summer session.

The Free Library of Philadelphia initiated *Back-to-School Jumpstart Camps* as a component of the library-convened citywide *Read! By 4th* program. The library offers the camps during the last three weeks of August to bolster kids' enthusiasm for school while building literacy skills.

FIVE STRATEGIES FOR ADOPTING A SUMMER LEARNING APPROACH

1. **Engage team members across the library.** Transitioning from a summer reading program to summer learning requires a cultural shift in how the library designs and delivers educational programming. Involving both library leaders and branch staff in planning and implementing summer learning programs can bring new perspectives while communicating the value and expectations of the library's summer learning approach.
2. **Connect summer reading and other library services.** A summer learning approach can be built around activities that the library already does well, such as offering family reading, opening maker spaces, hosting special events, and creating opportunities for older youth to work as program leaders to gain job skills. Libraries are also hubs for services students might not receive when schools are closed, such as free meals.
3. **Start planning in September.** As soon as students head back to school, start planning for the next summer when information, feedback, and ideas for strengthening the program are fresh. An early start allows staff members to try out new ideas and gives families time to get ready for summer learning.
4. **Initiate and cultivate partnerships.** Connecting with schools, museums, and other organizations that provide learning opportunities can help reach more students, provide expertise in new content areas, and support expanded programming. Partnership agreements help to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.
5. **Establish clear learning goals.** To ensure that students are not losing ground during the summer, programs that reinforce content knowledge, build skills, and link to academic standards will have the greatest impact. Strong partnerships with educators and school districts ensure that summer learning programs support academic standards. Programs can also be designed to help students acquire 21st-century skills, such as problem solving, leadership, digital literacy, and teamwork.

LIBRARIES OWNING SUMMER LEARNING

Now is the time for library leaders to drive the transition from traditional, transactional summer reading to more integrated and intentional library summer learning programs. Libraries are owning summer learning in their communities by serving as transformative leaders, drawing on their information, technology, and relationship platforms to ensure access to essential summer learning programs that help close achievement gaps.

The **Accelerate Summer** partnership between the Urban Libraries Council and the National Summer Learning Association, funded in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, involved a scan of library summer learning programs, site visits with eight libraries, and interviews with additional libraries. For more information visit:
www.urbanlibraries.org/summer-learning-pages-309.php.

The **Urban Libraries Council (ULC)**, founded in 1971, is the voice for public libraries and the force that inspires them to evolve. ULC creates the tools, techniques, and ideas to make ongoing improvements and upgrades in services and technology. For more information, visit www.urbanlibraries.org.

The **National Summer Learning Association** is the leading authority on summer learning and the only national nonprofit focused on closing the achievement gap through high-quality summer learning programs. For more information, visit www.summerlearning.org.



¹Maxwell, Kevin. Remarks at an event launching Summer @ Your Library, Largo-Kettering Branch, Prince George's County Memorial Library System, June 8, 2016.

²Alexander, Karl L., Doris R. Entwisle, and Linda Steffel Olson. "Lasting consequences of the summer learning gap." *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 2 (2007): 167-180. doi:10.1177/000312240707200202.

³McCombs, Jennifer S., Catherine H. Augustine, Heather L. Schwartz, Susan J. Bodilly, Brian McInnis, Dahlia S. Lichter, and Amanda B. Cross. *Making Summer Count: How Summer Programs Can Boost Children's Learning* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011).

⁴Ibid.

⁵P21 Partnership for 21st Century Learning, Framework for 21st Century Learning, accessed at <http://www.p21.org/our-work/p21-framework>.

⁶David P. Weikart Center and National Summer Learning Association, Summer Learning Program Quality Intervention, accessed as <http://cypq.org/summerlearningpqj>.