

URBAN LIBRARIES COUNCIL

Public Libraries
and Effective
Summer Learning:
Opportunities
for Assessment



About

The Urban Libraries Council (ULC) is the premier membership organization of North America's leading public library systems. ULC is deeply invested in identifying and advancing the ways in which public libraries contribute to improving education outcomes for all learners. With the help of its members, ULC publishes briefs and reports, presents webinars and workshops, convenes key local and national leaders, and initiates projects that advance libraries' work in education and lifelong learning, among other critical issue areas. Visit www.urbanlibraries.org to learn more.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 123,000 libraries and 35,000 museums. Our mission is to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. Our grant making, policy development, and research help libraries and museums deliver valuable services that make it possible for communities and individuals to thrive. Visit www.ims.gov to learn more.

Metropolitan Group (MG) crafts strategic and creative services to help social purpose organizations build a just and sustainable world. Since its founding in 1989, MG has worked extensively to promote libraries and library systems, as well as summer reading and summer learning initiatives. MG has also developed and employed an approach to measuring the impact of social change. Visit www.metgroup.com to learn more.

The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) is the leading authority on summer learning and is the only national nonprofit exclusively focused on closing the achievement gap through high-quality summer learning for all children and youth. Visit www.summerlearning.org to learn more.

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I. Introduction

With the education landscape changing, public libraries are evolving the ways in which they are meeting the diverse education needs in the communities they serve. Leveraging their position as trusted community anchors, libraries are establishing themselves as essential education institutions. With their resources and expertise, libraries are responding to community needs and developing programs and partnerships focused on early learning and family learning, grade-level reading proficiency, STEM and digital literacy, college and career readiness for teens, and much more.

During the summer months, when schools are closed, school-aged youth need opportunities to engage in activities that keep them thinking and learning while developing new skills. With their multitude of resources, knowledge of diverse education formats, and community connections, public libraries are uniquely positioned to provide such opportunities. Via the library, children and youth have the chance to discover, create, and initiate their own learning on subjects that interest them. More libraries every day are leveraging partnerships to evolve and adapt programming that incorporates traditional summer reading into more robust summer learning programs.

These opportunities for youth to develop and practice essential skills build confidence in their ability to learn while also helping to prevent them from falling behind on measures of academic achievement during the summer months. This is of particular value for youth from lower-income communities who have fewer opportunities for summer learning and for whom the consequences of an idle summer are more acute.

As libraries diversify their summer opportunities, they are increasingly establishing intentional learning goals and developing and implementing programs that aim to achieve their goals. With this deepening focus by libraries to be summer learning leaders in their communities, librarians and library staff would benefit from manageable practices that can be used to assess the effectiveness of their programming in advancing critical learning goals. Increased attention toward identifying and sharing practices for setting learning goals, developing programs to achieve learning goals, and assessing whether goals were achieved will allow libraries to demonstrate that their programs are effectively achieving a wide range of learning outcomes for young participants, including addressing the “summer slide.”

Fortunately, there are strategic concepts, emerging models, measurements, and tools that are already being used by the out-of-school-time sector, formal summer learning programs, and some libraries, and there is much that can be learned from these models.

Demonstrating that their summer learning programs are successful in achieving learning outcomes for school-aged youth is essential to libraries in aligning the resources and cultivating the partnerships needed to sustain and grow these programs over time.

Background on the National Forum on Effective Summer Learning in Libraries

Public libraries have the much-needed resources, programming, and flexibility to meet the learning needs of young people in the community and an ability to add something unique and valuable to enhance learning outcomes. The Urban Libraries Council (ULC) recognized this important opportunity to both build awareness of the public library’s critical role in supporting the educational success of young people and begin to identify how the role is currently being fulfilled via library summer learning programs and practices. ULC first formed a strategic partnership with the [National Summer Learning Association \(NSLA\)](#), the leading authority on summer learning to research emerging library summer learning program models and practices. In addition, ULC formed a partnership with the [Metropolitan Group \(MG\)](#) to convene a National Forum on Effective



Summer Learning in Libraries. The forum included expert thought leaders from inside and outside the library field to explore the challenge of assessing the effectiveness of library summer learning programs in advancing learning goals.

To fulfill their potential as summer learning leaders, libraries are exploring how to identify learning goals and assess the effectiveness of their programs' achievement of the proposed goals and the learning outcomes gained by participants. Although there are national efforts to adapt assessment practices in libraries, in the education area, the field as a whole lacks a common understanding of how to identify learning outcomes and what to measure, relevant measurement tools, and an analytic framework to understand how the impact of library-based summer learning programs can be captured and communicated. To begin the exploration of these issues, the National Forum on Effective Summer Learning in Libraries, including this resulting publication, intends to:

- discuss strategic concepts, research, and emerging models that can be used to support libraries as they intentionally move to address summer learning outcomes;
- identify areas of strength and opportunity for libraries to understand and assess their effectiveness as summer learning providers;
- identify gaps in existing knowledge, emerging library practices, existing research, and measurement methodologies; and
- establish recommendations for action and research to yield practices and tools that support public library leaders in assessing the effectiveness of their summer learning programs.

This paper provides a starting point for library leaders, researchers, summer learning leaders, and educators to continue to work together to yield practical resources to improve program effectiveness, as well as tools that generate evidence of library summer learning programs' impact on learning outcomes. Both the ULC-NSLA research initiative, [Accelerate Summer](#), and the National Forum on Effective Summer Learning in Libraries are made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (Grant Numbers: LG-07-14-0154-14 and RE-66-15-0035-15).

Convening Expert Thought Leaders

On December 3rd and 4th, 2015, a diverse group of experts were convened for a National Forum on Effective Summer Learning in Libraries in Washington, DC. Convening thought leaders from both inside and outside of the library field was essential to gain diverse perspectives on identifying participant learning outcomes and assessing program effectiveness and to consider the potential of beginning this new work for libraries. Joining the conversation were 22 expert stakeholders, including forward-thinking city, county, and state library leaders; school district leaders; out-of-school-time (OST) and formal summer learning leaders; education and youth development researchers; early literacy program leaders; and foundation leaders (See Appendix B, Forum Participants). To inform the conversation of this diverse group of thought leaders, MG and ULC conducted a scan of existing, published research on measuring summer learning initiatives in libraries and other OST settings. The result of this research was compiled in a literature review titled [Measuring Summer Learning in Libraries](#) and was shared with participants in advance to provide a solid grounding in what is already known and to spark thinking. During the forum, the group engaged in a conversation on program models and measurement practices currently in action in the library field and in the OST/summer learning field, on learning outcomes that libraries want to achieve with their summer programming and that potentially can be measured, and on the need to build the capacity of public libraries to frame and assess the effectiveness of their summer learning programs. (See Appendix A, Forum Agenda).



Assumptions and Context

The following assumptions and context drove our work on the National Forum on Effective Summer Learning in Libraries and the development of this publication:

- **The use of summer learning terminology:** Recognizing that libraries have a deep history and tradition of summer reading programs, it is important to acknowledge that the term *summer learning* is used intentionally and is wholly inclusive of summer reading. Summer learning is used to capture the breadth of learning opportunities and programming available at or via the public library during the summer months and helps to frame library programming within the context of the broader summer learning field.
- **Summer is a critical time:** Many emerging ideas and concepts in this white paper focus on the importance of identifying learning outcomes, planning skills-based activities, etc., and these concepts are clearly not exclusive to activities that only happen during the summer. However, because libraries are uniquely positioned to provide diverse and expansive learning opportunities during the summer months, it was important for this national forum to focus on the effectiveness of *summer* learning at the library, although concepts might also apply to programs that take place during other times of the year.
- **Focus on school-aged/elementary school youth:** Again acknowledging that libraries are implementing critical programming during the summer months and throughout the year for early learners, teens, and others, this white paper focuses largely on assessing the effectiveness of library summer learning programs that engage youth in the age range of K–5th grade. By effectively addressing the summer slide during these early elementary years, libraries greatly impact a child’s long-term educational success.
- **Focus on education/learning outcomes:** Via their diverse programming, their vast print and technological resources and their depth of expertise and knowledge, public libraries impact the community in many ways. As such, a broad scope of community outcomes can be assessed and demonstrated to various community stakeholders. This white paper focuses on identifying and assessing learning outcomes for young summer learning participants and acknowledges that these outcomes are impacted by other community issues that libraries also address.
- **The conversation has only just begun:** As one forum participant stated at the end of the two-day conversation: this is just the “tip of the iceberg.” Assessing the effectiveness of library summer learning programs in advancing critical learning goals is a complex, multifaceted issue. Although this white paper captures key points made by the convened thought leaders, it does not solve the issue, nor does it intend to imply that libraries should become testing centers or be held accountable for the same outcomes as schools. Instead, it invites YOU to engage in the work, explore concepts with your colleagues inside and outside of the library, and build partnerships that can continue to advance the library’s role as an essential education institution.



II. School-aged Youth Need Opportunities to Learn during the Summer and Libraries Are Uniquely Positioned to Meet This Need

All Youth Risk Learning Loss When Not Engaged over the Summer Months

Without meaningful learning opportunities, the summer months become a time of risk for students. This “summer slide” or summer learning loss, caused by lack of engagement in constructive activities, can have devastating and long-term consequences on academic achievement and healthy development. It is critical to ensure that all children, especially those from low-income communities, have increased access to opportunities to engage in positive, supportive learning activities between school years.

A Johns Hopkins University study found that up to two-thirds of the ninth-grade achievement gap in reading between young people from lower and higher income households could be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities in the elementary school years¹. The consequences of these lost opportunities are cumulative, resulting in students from lower-income families falling two to three years behind their peers by the time they reach fifth grade, leading to a significant ninth-grade achievement gap².

Participation in high-quality summer learning programs can curb these losses and positively impact key education goals such as achieving grade-level reading benchmarks³. The RAND Corporation’s report, “Making Summer Count: How Summer Programs Can Boost Children’s Learning,” found that summer learning programs with high-quality instructors and parent involvement, among other factors, can mitigate summer learning loss, and even produce learning gains⁴. Engagement in summer learning activities is particularly important in the early elementary years when youth make the critical shift from learning to read to reading to learn, discover, create, problem solve, and so on.

Public Libraries Increase Access to Summer Learning Opportunities and Resources

With research demonstrating the critical importance of participation in high-quality summer learning activities to keep young people engaged and thinking, it has become increasingly imperative to ensure that all young people have access to such summer learning opportunities. In response to this urgent educational challenge, libraries today are demonstrating a remarkable ability to innovate new learning environments and establish partnerships with city/county governments, schools, museums, recreation centers, and other community organizations to multiply learning opportunities both inside and outside of the library. As noted in the IMLS strategic plan, libraries help to level the playing field and provide opportunities that might otherwise be unavailable to many low-income children and families. This notion has been nowhere more evident than during the summer months when libraries are exponentially expanding access to learning activities and resources to more kids in more places and in more ways.

As part of this effort, an increasing number of libraries are building on their long-standing success with summer reading^{5 6} by expanding the scope of summer programs to include learning in other domains and academic areas. Piloting diverse, hands-on summer learning programming is an exciting and important transition for libraries, providing millions of North American children and youth with access to learning opportunities during the summer months, helping them retain and build on the education they receive during the school year.



Because libraries are trusted community anchors—embedded within the community—and do not have an academic framework or curriculum that they must follow, library leaders are able to respond to community learning needs in unique ways that other education institutions and organizations cannot. Using their flexibility, innovation, and community connections, libraries provide diverse, inquiry-based, and connected learning opportunities that foster and grow positive attitudes towards learning while increasing academic gains and career readiness. Through partnerships with schools, museums, and other community-based organizations, libraries are increasing outreach to children and families—especially those from low-income communities, who cannot afford fee-based summer learning programs. In so doing, North America’s public libraries are filling a critical gap during the summer months by providing access to learning opportunities for children, youth, and families where these opportunities wouldn’t otherwise exist.

Five key Library Education Assets identified by ULC in its [Leadership Brief: Partners for Education](#):⁷

1. Because of their position as **safe, trusted, inclusive community hubs**, libraries are in touch with the changing education needs of the community.
2. Libraries are the only education institutions that **connect with individual learning needs from birth through senior years**.
3. Libraries know how to use **diverse education formats**, from one-on-one coaching to building high-tech skills. They keep abreast of changing learning models without abandoning approaches that are timeless.
4. Nobody does **personalized and customized learning** better than libraries. They meet individuals where they are and help them continue their learning progress.
5. Libraries are adept at **building partnerships to support education goals**. Libraries seek out and thrive on partnerships that broaden impact.



III. Libraries Are Evolving to Provide Multiple and Diverse Learning Opportunities during the Summer Months

Libraries have always been known for their summer reading programs. The many, many children and youth who engage in these important programs are often the most engaged and willing readers. Today, an increasing number of libraries recognize the need to build on their long-standing success with summer reading and expand the scope of summer programs to stay in tune with new knowledge about what constitutes high-quality summer learning and growing expectations about the results that these programs should generate. The Accelerate Summer partnership between ULC and NSLA investigated and identified the ways in which public libraries are delivering summer learning activities. A national survey of library leaders, observation site visits with eight programs, and select phone and in-person interviews led to the discovery of an ongoing evolution of programming, partnerships, learning goals, and assessment practices. The evolution of summer learning in libraries does not mean that summer reading programs are being replaced or forsaken. It means that libraries are using the experience of over 100 years of summer reading to implement new and innovative program models, learning goals, and assessment practices, and that there is much to be learned from this evolution.

“*Readiness for learning: This is our niche. We are preparing kids to learn and thrive.*”

— Luis Herrera, City Librarian,
San Francisco Public Library,
IMLS Board Member

“*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

The Evolution of Program Models: Summer Learning Inclusive of Summer Reading

Via the [Accelerate Summer](#) initiative, it was found that traditional, incentive-based summer reading programs and integrated, hands-on summer learning exist as part of a broad continuum of library-based summer learning programming.

Summer Reading PLUS

Summer reading programs, traditionally designed for school children to promote independent reading during the summer months when school is not in session, are enhanced by allowing and encouraging readers to also earn credits for participation in STEM; maker spaces; connected learning; and other hands-on, inquiry-based, and participatory learning activities. These “summer reading plus” program models allow young participants to engage in activities at the library or at home and link these experiences with books and reading material. In fact, over 70% of surveys received from library leaders as part of the Accelerate Summer initiative indicated that some form of hands-on/interactive summer learning activities are available via the library. For example, one of the libraries visited, [St. Paul Public Library](#) recently renamed their program [Summer Spark](#) “because we want to engage kids more deeply, encouraging learning and activity in addition to and beyond reading.”⁸ In addition to reading, the Summer Spark activity card allows participants to earn prizes for writing a poem, inventing a snack and writing the recipe, or drawing a favorite character, among other fun learning activities.

High-Quality Drop-in Learning Activities

Often, the definition of summer *learning* programs may be misunderstood as requiring enrollment in a full-time, five- or six-week “camp,” when, in reality, libraries’ drop-in and self-directed models of summer learning



embody high-quality practices in areas identified in the [National Summer Learning Association's \(NSLA\) Summer Learning Program Quality Assessment \(SLPQA\)](#), a tool designed to assess and advance the continuous improvement of summer learning programs. These program practices include inquiry-based learning, shared facilitation, program spirit, and displaying youth-produced work, among others. Because of strong practices in program design, a young person can participate frequently in a library's drop-in programs at any point and benefit from skill-building activities. Linking program activities thematically, for example via the [Collaborative Summer Library Program's](#) 2015 "Every Hero Has a Story" theme, makes them more powerful and facilitates the connection of those activities to reading. As noted by awarding their first-ever [Founder's Award for Excellence in Summer Learning](#) to the Chicago Public Library's [Summer Learning Challenge](#), NSLA has recognized that, via these high-quality, drop-in, skill-building opportunities, libraries play a special role in the summer when schools are closed and young people need safe spaces and options for inquiry-based learning activities.

Enrollment Programs

Libraries are also piloting focused, enrollment-based programs that may be a part of or complimentary to the broader summer reading programs. These more focused programs are often offered on a week-to-week basis, aim to address specific learning outcomes such as early literacy and grade-level reading or elements of STEM learning, and are specifically targeted for youth and families who do not have access to other educational support. The [New Haven Free Public Library](#) implemented an early literacy program called "[READY for the Grade](#)" with support from the [New Alliance Foundation](#) and in partnership with local schools. Via this program, enrolled kindergartners through third-graders receive twice weekly, two-hour small group bilingual tutoring sessions and engage in weekly family nights with their caregivers, including a nutritious meal and family literacy activities.

This evolution of library summer programming illustrates how library leaders are recognizing their ability to respond to community learning needs in new and innovative ways, using a diversity of approaches. There is no "one size fits all," and libraries must be responsive to the needs of the local community and the expectations of local decision makers. Within this context, public libraries are expanding their summer offerings and increasing outreach to engage more kids and families, in more ways and in more places.

The Evolution of Learning Goals: Reading, STEM, 21st-Century Skills, and More

As public libraries evolve their summer programming and expand the kinds of activities that are offered to participants, they are also evolving the ways in which they establish learning goals for individual activities and for their entire summer of programming. However, variations in library summer learning programs and activities are impacted by differences in funding and resources, staffing structures and organizational capacity, and community context, including local laws and regulations, geography, community size, and community assets and needs. Acknowledging this diversity helps frame the challenges and opportunities presented through the ongoing evolution of learning goals and outcomes for library summer programming.

Learning outcomes related to literacy and reading, especially early literacy and grade-level reading have been and will remain critical for library summer learning programs, even as they evolve from traditional, incentive-based summer reading programs. Libraries are partnering with schools to establish summer learning goals that align with curriculum and with local governments to align with broader community-wide goals to maintain or gain reading proficiency. Further, libraries are focused on the outcome of instilling a *love* of reading or an increased level of engagement in reading.

More broadly, libraries are balancing the importance of setting summer learning goals that advance academic achievement with the equally important outcomes that result from the joy of independent discovery and self-



directed investigation into topics of interest that are at the heart of learning at the library and are a critical part of ongoing skill development.

In the evolution of library summer learning goals, two main areas of learning outcomes have emerged: academic skill development, and 21st-century skill development.

Academic skill development: The summer slide primarily refers to the loss of academic learning that takes place when school is not in session and young people are not prompted to think and reason. Libraries are planning summer programming intended for participants to gain academic skills through activities aligned with school-based curriculum and academic standards, such as literacy and reading proficiency, science, math, history, writing, etc. These types of academic development goals for library summer programs are best achieved through intentional partnerships with schools, museums, local governments, and other organizations that can help design content-focused learning activities.

21st-century skill development: Beyond academic learning, summer at the library fosters “joyous discovery” and allows young people to develop skills that are separate from but complementary to the academic skills gained in school. As Jen Rinehart, Vice President of Research and Policy for the [Afterschool Alliance](#) shared, the out-of-school time (OST) field has long advocated that these skills are “precursors to academic achievement and equally important.” There are many different labels used by the education field to describe skills related to critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and teamwork, decision making and creativity, and so on (e.g., 21st-century, noncognitive, social/emotional, “soft” skills, executive function, and many others). Libraries are increasingly incorporating this type of skill development into the learning goals for their summer programs. Cultivating skills based on a child’s personal desire to learn and read about a topic—and engaging them in the process of discovery while fostering a love of reading and learning—are inherently aligned with what libraries offer to young people during the summer and throughout the year.

These two areas of learning outcomes are meant to be neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive in terms of acknowledging the multiple and varied learning outcomes and skills gained by library summer learning participants. Instead, they are meant to acknowledge the type of learning that libraries provide and the outcomes that have value to educational success. Naming these learning outcome areas also further uncovers a possible framework for assessing the effectiveness of library summer learning programs.



IV. Emerging Practices and Resolvable Obstacles for Assessing the Effectiveness of Library Summer Learning Initiatives

Getting to Proof of Concept: Library Summer Programs Produce Learning Gains

As libraries continue to innovate and evolve their summer learning programs and expand the number of young people accessing summer learning opportunities, now is the time to explore methods of framing and assessing the effectiveness of summer learning at the library. What constitutes a high-quality library summer learning program? What are the key elements of a successful library summer learning program? What learning outcomes do library leaders want summer participants to gain? What outcomes can be measured and should be measured? What measurement and assessment tools can be used most easily by library leaders to best demonstrate effectiveness? What gaps and obstacles exist for libraries in identifying and measuring learning outcomes as part of their summer programming?

“It’s about concrete outcomes that no longer make library summer learning a ‘nicety,’ but show how you can demonstrate learning gains.”

— Lester Strong,
Vice President and CEO,
AARP Foundation Experience Corps

An exploration of these questions can help to:

- **Identify emerging best practices in library summer learning program and activity design that can be replicated to further increase program quality.** Assessments can be used to identify programs and activities that yield the best results in terms of participant learning outcomes. With assessment results, libraries can apply evidence-based “best practices” to future program design and/or increase the number of these types of programs and activities offered. Conversely, programs and activities that are shown to be less effective in generating learning outcomes can be modified or discontinued to make room for more effective interventions.
- **Produce preliminary evidence that demonstrates the positive impact that library summer learning programs have on participants.** The data gathered through assessments would provide libraries with solid evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of these programs in reducing the summer learning slide.
- **Make the case for increased funding for effective library summer learning programs.** Assessment results help position libraries to request increased funding for programs that have proven effective in increasing learning outcomes.
- **Reach more young people via library summer learning programs.** Being able to demonstrate the effectiveness of library summer learning programs would provide libraries with a strong argument for increased or more robust partnerships with schools and other community-serving organizations and institutions. These partnerships would increase libraries’ engagement with the community and lead to greater enrollment in programs, thus enabling them to reach a broader portion of the community and an increased number of young people.

Initial exploration of concepts and ideas responding to the questions above reveal that there *are* emerging assessment practices from both inside and outside the library field that can help libraries continue to explore methods to assess the effectiveness of their summer learning programs. Although useful practices have emerged, there is much more work yet to be done. The following sections provide a review of the emerging practices discovered, including areas of strength and opportunity as well as the unique obstacles related to assessing the effectiveness of library summer learning. Also provided are suggested action steps that can



further enable library leaders to embark on a process of assessing the learning gains from their summer programs as well as recommendations for further research and action to support libraries in their evolving role as summer learning leaders.

The Evolution of Library Assessment Practices: Sign-ups, Surveys, Badges, and Data-Sharing

Assessing the effectiveness of innovative library summer learning program models with diverse learning goals is perhaps the biggest challenge in the broad evolution of library summer programming. The challenge stems from the library field's developing awareness of the difference between outputs and outcomes and the conclusions that can be drawn by evaluating each.

Outputs are quantifiable measures of process and action and describe “what we do.” For example, the number of young people who participated in a specific summer learning activity is an output. In their briefing on [“Outcome Based Evaluation Basics.”](#) IMLS defines outcomes as “benefits to people: specifically, achievements or changes in skill, knowledge, attitude, behavior, condition, or life status for program participants.”⁹ For example, if a young person is able to read at a more advanced level as a result of participation in a library summer learning program, an outcome has been achieved.

Maggie Jacobs, Director of Educational Programs at the New York Public Library noted that some output data, such as attendance and program/project completion are important to measure because research has linked these outputs to long-term success.¹⁰

Accordingly, the assessment of library summer learning programs could include all points on the spectrum of evaluation, which makes it all the more challenging to identify a common framework including appropriate and replicable assessment tools and resources. The challenge is further compacted by the previously discussed broad range of library summer learning program funding, staffing, capacity, resources, local laws and regulations, and communities served.

Illustrating the broad spectrum of practices, the following methods to assess both program quality and learning outcomes gained by participants are currently being utilized by public libraries:

- **Library use:** Increased foot traffic in the library and engagement with the library.
- **Participation levels:** Sign-up and completion numbers for summer learning program participants.
- **Internal group assessment:** Library team members convene to self-evaluate, discuss best practices, share lessons learned, and critique their summer learning program and incorporate their ideas into planning for future programming.
- **Participant surveys:** Libraries develop surveys for participants to self-report learning gains, to evaluate the program, to share their thoughts and suggestions, and more. Survey results inform program improvements and adjustments for the next year.
- **Observations:** Library staff members evaluate program effectiveness by observing participants engaged in the program activities.
- **Badges:** Youth earn badges, usually a “digital badge” that captures their work progress and acquired skills and competencies via a visual representation marking their achievements.
- **Individual program assessments:** Libraries set learning goals for participants in targeted programs (such as New Haven Free Public Library’s small-scale enrollment program discussed previously) and



conduct surveys or other testing designed to measure the specific learning goals gained.

- **City/county/state data:** As described in the section to follow, many cities and counties have research entities (universities, research firms, etc.) that manage citywide and countywide data as well as the U.S. census data. Public libraries are building partnerships with such entities to help correlate summer program participation data with census and other demographic data to determine impacts on certain neighborhoods or populations.
- **Data-matching with school assessment scores:** Through partnerships with schools and school systems, and often with the help of third-party research entities, more and more public libraries are able to match summer program participant data with school assessment data to demonstrate that students who participate in library summer programs score better on standardized tests than those who do not. Some examples are provided in the section to follow.

In addition to these measurement practices, many specific, research-based assessment tools are currently in use both inside and outside of the library field. A list of these tools is provided in Appendix C.

As captured by a forum participant in a closing reflection, “When we are trying to assess impact of a given program, we need to know whether/which/how much a program is aligned with desired outcomes. This informs program design.” As library summer programming continues to evolve and libraries increasingly strive to achieve educational outcomes, establishing intentional learning goals for program participants becomes the critical first factor.

Establishing the goals of the program and gaining clarity on the intent of the program will further enable assessment of library summer learning program effectiveness vis-à-vis broader community educational goals. Equally important is for libraries to keep joy sacred and provide fun in learning. Essentially, as libraries evolve their summer programming, they need to find a way to keep learning fun and “not like school” at the same time that they need to find a way to demonstrate that their programs lead to educational gains for young people. Via examples and deeper exploration into the learning outcome areas discussed previously, the next sections provide a deeper dive into this complexity.

What Can Be Learned from Other Sectors

In addition to the expert experience of leading library directors and executives, much can be learned from experts in youth development and education; from school district leaders; and from OST, formal summer learning, and early literacy sector leaders. Researchers and school leaders are continually exploring models and frameworks to assess learning gained in both nonschool and in-school settings to determine which educational approaches and interventions work best. Like libraries, the OST and summer learning sectors have faced challenges in planning learning activities that are meaningful yet fun, aligned with curriculum and standards yet don’t feel like school, and determining what learning outcomes for which they should be held accountable. More and more, school leaders are recognizing that “schools can’t do it alone” and are seeking the collaboration of local government and other community organizations to build seamless systems of services for school-aged youth.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- To assess impact, programs must be designed with intentional learning outcomes.
- Libraries should try to align outcomes with those that are of interest to the community served.
- Keep the joy of learning sacred and continue to infuse fun into learning programs and activities.



Lessons from the OST Field: Planning Skills-based Activities and Programs

Based on an understanding of learning gains made via participation in certain types of activities, OST programs have been able to use students' completion of activities/programs that require a certain level of knowledge or skill as indicators of long-term success. This same framework is being used by libraries to draw preliminary conclusions about the learning outcomes of their summer programs. For example, Chicago Public Library's [Rahm's Readers Summer Learning Challenge](#) designs summer learning activities based on the [Framework for 21st Century Learning Skills](#) and, through a strategic partnership with the [Museum of Science and Industry](#), incorporates three STEM/STEAM-central learning tracks: Read, Discover, Create. Acknowledging that the program "demonstrated excellence in accelerating academic achievement and promoted healthy development for low-income children and youth,"¹¹ Chicago Public Library was awarded an NSLA [Excellence in Summer Learning Award](#) in 2015. Also displaying an example of this skills-based activity completion approach to assessing learning outcomes, the Broward County Library (FL), encourages summer learning activity leaders to use a planning worksheet that incorporates skill-building into any fun learning activity. With careful planning of activities that intend to instill specific skills, library leaders can use participation and activity completion as a proxy for results that might otherwise be acquired from assessments and tests.

Using Research-based Assessment Tools

Building on previously discussed concepts, OST programs are using basic tools to assess outputs that are precursors to academic achievement, such as tracking attendance and reduction in disciplinary incidents, and making correlations between these outputs and skills-based outcomes such as increased excitement for school, development of social-emotional skills, etc. Additionally, many of the research-based assessment tools and resources identified (see Appendix C), including the [Devereux Student Strengths Assessment](#) and the [Every Hour Counts Measurement Framework](#) and others are widely used by OST programs to assess outcomes such as critical thinking, persistence, collaboration, and others. Also widely used by NSLA and the youth development field is the previously discussed [Summer Learning Program Quality Assessment](#), developed by NSLA in partnership with the [Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality](#). This tool was designed to advance continuous program improvement by assessing qualities of learner experience that optimize skill building in both the noncognitive and academic domains. Via ULC's strategic partnership with NSLA, it was found that most of the library summer learning programs visited during the summer of 2015 embody the high-quality practices identified by the tool as building important skills, including inquiry-based learning, shared facilitation, program spirit, youth choice, and so on.

Aligning Academic Learning Outcomes via Library-School-Community Partnerships

More and more public libraries are establishing intentional partnerships with schools and city/county government networks to align summer programming with academic standards and curriculum and to institute data-sharing agreements. Via intentional partnerships with schools, libraries are able to better identify and reach students who are in the most need of academic skill development, align goals, leverage knowledge and resources, and create integrated approaches leading to stronger outcomes.

Examples of library-school summer learning partnerships for academic learning:

- **The New Haven Free Public Library** works directly with the schools in their branch neighborhoods to identify struggling K through third-grade readers to enroll in their REAdy for the Grade summer learning program and establish the literacy learning goals. Via funding support from the [New Alliance Foundation](#), an external evaluator designed pre- and post-reading assessments aligned with school curriculum and found that 83% of program participants achieved the goals.¹²



- **In Fort Worth, TX, the public library** is designing summer learning activity templates that are specifically aligned with the Texas Education Agency’s curriculum standards in English language arts/reading and science to be implemented via their [Worth Reading](#) program. Again, in this case, by designing activities that are aligned with curriculum standards, library leaders can use activity completion and regular program participation as a determinant of program effectiveness in advancing critical learning goals.¹³

Sharing Data to Demonstrate Gains in Reading Achievement

Beyond planning intentional learning activities that are aligned with school curriculum, library-school partnerships also cultivate the ability to share data so that the library’s data on summer learning program participation can be matched with the school’s data on standardized test scores to determine how library summer learning participation impacts the test scores. In fact, this ability for libraries to demonstrate how they “move the needle” on reading achievement is perhaps the most important outcome for libraries to report to decision-makers, community leaders, and families. The lack of grade-level reading proficiency looms large, with the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)¹⁴ scores indicating that only 36% of fourth-graders nationwide scored at or above proficient level on the reading assessment and only 18% of low-income fourth-graders (eligible for free and reduced-price lunch) scored at or above proficient. This means that, in today’s economy, less than one out of every five low-income fourth-graders is reading proficiently. These statistics create an imperative for libraries and schools to share data related to summer learning program participation and reading assessment scores to demonstrate the impact of library summer learning participation on early-grade reading achievement.

Using reading test scores to demonstrate outcomes achieved by library summer learning programs does not intend to indicate that library summer programming should only focus on reading and literacy activities. In fact, Chicago Public Library’s Summer Learning Challenge includes the theme “all learning counts” and is designed to instill 21st-century skills and STEM/STEAM learning. However, via their data-sharing agreement with Chicago Public Schools brokered by youth development research entity, the [Chapin Hall Collaborative](#) at the University of Chicago, they were able to demonstrate that “youth who participated in the 2013 program, especially for the youngest children and those students with the highest levels of involvement, on average performed better on standardized academic assessments relative to peers with equivalent prior academic backgrounds, and personal and neighborhood circumstances.”¹⁵

Additional examples of libraries with data-sharing agreements resulting in the demonstration of gains made via summer learning programs include:

- **Mid-Continent Public Library** also engaged a third-party research entity, the [Kansas City Area Education Research Consortium \(KC-AERC\)](#), to work with three local school districts to gather and assess the reading scores of students both before and after summer break, finding that summer reading program participants demonstrated gains in reading achievement from spring to fall. Results of the assessment were published in their [Summer Reading Program Effectiveness Study](#).
- **The Library of Virginia** partnered with the Virginia Department of Education and worked with an international research company, [McREL](#), to examine several aspects of the ways in which participation in library-based summer reading programs impacts reading achievement. Through the [Summer Reading Program Impact Study](#), several reports were published, finding that 84% of summer reading participants in grades one through seven were reading at or above their reading level, among other key findings.¹⁶

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Expanding on data sharing with schools, many libraries are also participating in city and county-wide education initiatives aimed at accomplishing collective impact. For example, in Chicago, the Public Library is part of the [Chicago City of Learning](#) involving the Mayor’s Office, the school district and several universities, and community-based organizations and foundations. In Philadelphia, PA, the Free Library convenes the [Read! By 4th](#) initiative, a citywide effort involving 50 organizations aiming to majorly increase the number of students in Philadelphia entering the fourth grade at reading level by 2020. Many library CEOs across the country are also now partnering with school superintendents and mayors/county executives as part of the [ConnectED Library Challenge](#). The challenge calls upon these leaders to work together to ensure that every child enrolled in school can receive a library card. In many communities, this process involves one student identification number that is used by both the schools and the library, allowing for a more seamless sharing of data and more seamless year-round programming. In addition to increased access to summer learning, libraries are critical partners in ensuring that all youth in the community have access to technology, family learning opportunities, and even meals and nutrition. Libraries’ leadership of the ConnectED Challenge, their intentional partnership with schools, and their involvement in other local collective impact efforts recognize and amplify the contributions of libraries as essential education institutions and strengthens the effectiveness of their summer learning programs.

Resolvable Obstacles for Assessing the Effectiveness of Library Summer Learning Programs

Great progress has been made among libraries that have already built strategic partnerships with schools, local governments and museums, and established intentional summer learning goals and assessed outcomes. However, challenges and gaps in knowledge, experience, and methodologies remain, and are important to acknowledge. Uncovering and naming the obstacles will help to enable the development of solutions and continued progress.

“*Libraries need help with how to move this forward, how to change the culture and align learning with educational goals and implement programs designed to reach outcomes.*”

— Gleniece Robinson,
Library Director, Fort Worth Library

Resolvable challenges related to demonstrating the effectiveness of library summer learning programs in achieving learning outcomes include:

- **An organizational culture shift is needed and takes time.**

Library leaders are in the process of thinking through how they approach their role as education institutions and how to develop intentional learning programs. This is an ongoing process that takes time and transformation. Libraries with small staffs might not have the capacity to devote the time that is needed to plan and implement intentional learning activities for participants or assess learning outcomes. Libraries need resources and time to provide staff with specific training that will give them the ability to set clear learning goals and design assessments that measure outcomes; to implement the assessment tools; to make sense of the data; and to use the assessment results for program improvement, messaging to decision makers, etc., while also acknowledging that this represents a cultural shift. Library leaders have also noted that some library staff might be “change averse” and, in addition to increased aptitude via training, they need support in coming to a new understanding about what it means for a library to be relevant in the changing education landscape.

- **Dedicated funding to support evaluation is needed.**

Evaluation and assessments can be expensive and beyond the operating budget for most public libraries. Thus, more funding is needed to enable libraries to complete assessments of their summer



learning program effectiveness, access needed data, and demonstrate the gains of participants. The brand new [Funding Resource Guide](#) from NSLA can support libraries in identifying summer learning funding resources.

- **More collaboration is needed to share assessment tools and data.**

Some of the existing assessment tools are only available to certain organizations or institutions and inaccessible to libraries. Further, although some school districts are willing to share data, many are not, even with a third-party research institution. Even when achievement data is made accessible, school districts may change the tests administered year after year, which makes it difficult for libraries to track progress even when data-sharing agreements are in place. Thus, further exploration is needed to examine how to make the sharing of tools and data more feasible for all parties.

- **The privacy of students and their families must be protected.**

Even with data-sharing agreements, privacy laws for youth (the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or [FERPA](#)) can create confusion about what data can be accessed and how, and which data can be used by libraries and their partners to assess learning gains resulting from youth participation in summer learning activities. Sharing data for evaluation purposes must be done in such a way as to protect the privacy of participating students and their families.

- **Evaluation of drop-in programs is difficult.**

It is more of a challenge to assess the learning that takes place in the high-quality drop-in models that constitute many library summer learning programs (described previously). The challenge stems from the fact that the amount of learning a participant is exposed to is not controlled or prescribed in the more informal context of a drop-in program. There are minimal, if not zero, known assessment tools that measure learning gains from the kind of drop-in, self-directed summer learning activities available via the library. Additional thought should be concentrated on how to measure the effectiveness of such programs.

- **Reaching and demonstrating gains for underserved children is critical.**

Through partnerships with schools and community entities, and as trusted community anchors, libraries are identifying and serving the kids who may otherwise not have access to summer learning activities. Still, reaching and engaging children most in need during the summer months remains difficult. And libraries are challenged with the task of producing data and evidence that confirms that they are serving the large segment of children who are not being served elsewhere. Via the survey conducted as part of the Accelerate Summer initiative, a majority of libraries reported needing additional guidance and resources on “engaging youth from low-income families” in their summer programming.¹⁸

- **Parents and communities need to be brought along.**

Just like the organizational cultural shift that is needed inside the library, a shift in understanding among communities and families is also needed. Many children and families understand summer as a time for fun and associate the word “learning” with school, which may decrease their engagement in library summer learning programs. Further, requesting time from young people and parents to complete surveys and assessments, along with the corresponding disclosure of personal information could result in disengagement and decreased patronage. Thus, there is a recognized need to educate parents and the broader community about the value and opportunities available through summer learning programs in public libraries.



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

“*Acknowledge and embrace that the challenge of assessing outcomes for library informal summer learning programs hasn't yet been resolved.*”

— Monica Logan, Vice President of Program and Systems Quality, National Summer Learning Association

As captured in the quote above, the work has only just begun and the evolution must continue with an openness to all of its messiness and complications. A key takeaway is simply that libraries can measure summer learning outcomes. As intended, the work of the National Forum on Effective Summer Learning in Libraries identified both areas of strength and gaps in knowledge and practice while initiating a discussion of the strategic concepts, research, emerging models, and measurement tools that can further enable library leaders to assess learning outcomes gained

by summer participants and the effectiveness of summer programming in general. In other words, the discovery and resolution has just begun and can continue by following a few suggested action steps, outlined below.

1. Engage Library Staff in a Cultural Shift: Becoming Educators and Evaluators

This paper highlights the exciting evolution of library summer programming and, as with all evolutionary change, success requires hard work and extra time, energy, and resources. A challenge of this change involves ensuring that library staff members are on-board with the need for and the importance of identifying learning goals for their summer programs and measuring the effectiveness of programs in meeting the goals. Library leaders can foster this critical organizational change and cultural shift by engaging staff in a process of understanding the needs and assets of the communities they serve, and aligning summer learning programs with these needs.

“*We need to prepare staff to deliver high quality programs and understand the extent to which they achieved the learning objectives they've targeted. It's also important that we understand how to demonstrate how those learning objectives matter in school and in life.*”

— Andrea Sáenz, First Deputy Commissioner, Chicago Public Library

When library teams have access to and understand community youth data related to reading proficiency, access to technology, STEM learning opportunities, and so on, they can better connect with the significance of their ability to make positive change and the incentive to understand *how* the summer learning programs offered by the library are contributing to positive outcomes for youth. It has been said that libraries should declare ownership of the summer learning space to increase recognition of their contributions among community education leaders. When library summer program leaders understand how their activities are aligned with community learning goals, they will also understand the need to demonstrate related participant outcomes so that library summer learning becomes part of a community-wide effort.

More specifically, continuing education and professional development is needed for library learning program leaders on how to:

- plan summer programs and activities with intentional learning goals;
- understand the difference between outputs and outcomes, subjective vs. objective assessments, and individual vs. population gains;



- use assessment tools so they can document learning when it is happening;
- understand how to gain access to, gather, analyze, and interpret data to determine how and which outcomes were gained;
- use data to help manage programs on the ground; and
- communicate or translate what the data findings mean to the public in terms of the library's role as an essential education institution.

2. Identify Key Local Partners and Develop, Cultivate and Sustain Partnerships

“How can a school system support libraries, how can we build common vocabulary about assessment and use assessments to guide us and improve quality? These questions set the intention of our partnership and guide our work together.”

— Lori Canning, Director,
Early Learning/School Readiness,
The School Board of Broward County, FL

To support the assessment of library summer learning effectiveness, libraries can build intentional partnerships with key local entities such as schools, museums, and government offices. Working together with other organizations that are invested in the achievement of the same groups of children and youth can strengthen the identification of learning goals, assist in the implementation of practical measurement tools and practices, and establish processes for data sharing and alignment.

Critical local partners may include:

- **Schools:** to identify practical learning outcomes aligned with curriculum and standards, share data, identify student participants, promote summer learning programs, and generally align programming.
- **Out-of-school time (OST) programs:** to identify 21st-century learning outcomes, share data, align programs, and assist with assessment implementation processes.
- **City/county government offices:** to align programming with city/countywide education networks and departments, such as parks and recreation, to share data and increase recognition of both the library's contribution and shared education goals.
- **Museums:** to collaborate on learning outcomes based on content expertise and assist with designing and conducting learning assessments.
- **Nonprofits that provide direct services, such as United Way:** to provide services and track information related to services that enhance summer learning, such as free meals for youth and families.
- **Local universities and colleges:** to design and conduct measurement assessments and analyze data.

Through a citywide effort called Read! By 4th, led by Executive Director Jenny Bogoni, the Free Library of Philadelphia convenes a partnership of 50 public and private organizations aiming to increase the number of students in Philadelphia entering the fourth grade at reading level. As Jenny shared during the forum, “The library focused on how we can fill gaps that others can't fill. We identified that mid- to late-August was devoid of summer camps and learning opportunities so we piloted 'Back to School Jumpstart Camps' to build kids' enthusiasm for school while building literacy skills.” The camps ran for the last three weeks in August and successfully achieved reading gains for young participants.



3. Design Summer Learning Programs and Activities with Intentional Learning Goals to Provide a Better Path to Measurement and Assessment

The two emerging focus areas for learning outcomes—academic skill development and 21st-century skill development—provide useful and adaptable context for planning programs and activities with intentional learning goals. For example, summer reading programs are enhanced when learning goals for associated activities are aligned with curriculum standards and school-based guidelines for reading proficiency. Libraries are also uniquely positioned to provide nonacademic skill development and demonstrate outcomes aligned with 21st-century skills. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills can be difficult to measure and require consistent dosage over time. Instead, libraries can develop activities that allow participants to practice the skills with benchmarks for project completion that align with established benchmarks for skill acquisition. Studies show that developing strong noncognitive skills actually propels learning in other domains and improves academic performance¹⁹; if libraries can demonstrate that they provide learning opportunities intended to increase these skills, they will have the surrogate evidence of their effectiveness as summer learning providers that can be communicated to schools and other local education partners.

At the Broward County Library a fun summer activity focused on “nail art,” led by a professional nail designer easily became a skill-building activity as it was designed to develop youth participants’ ability to project-plan, follow instructions, make decisions, etc. All of the steps in the nail art activity required the use of critical thinking skills and when activities are planned to achieve this kind of skill development, learning outcomes can be measured by using completion as a proxy for testing.

4. Investigate the Availability and Use of Key Data to Demonstrate Outcomes and Populations Served

Library-school partnerships that allow for data sharing are perhaps the most significant and promising way for libraries to demonstrate the effectiveness of their summer learning programs. Registration in library summer learning programs and participants’ completion of specific activities are data points that can be captured by libraries. Through the process of matching summer learning participation with reading achievement test scores, libraries can readily demonstrate that: 1) students who participate in library summer learning score better than those that do not; and 2) students who participate maintain or make gains in their reading achievement between the spring and the fall. The ConnectED Library Challenge, discussed previously, has the potential to greatly strengthen and multiply the intentional partnerships and data processes needed to advance the availability of such demonstrative results.

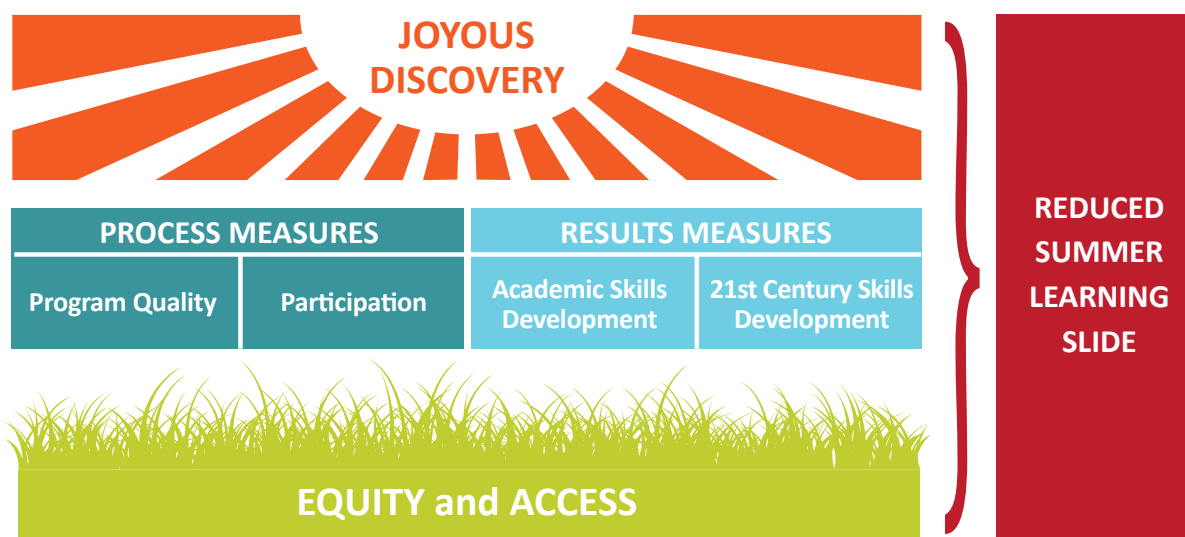
Beyond schools, there are many local research entities that are invested in discovering evidence of the interventions and activities that “move the needle” on youth learning outcomes. These education and youth development research organizations manage data sets from the United States Census Bureau and many other community entities and are interested in working directly with libraries to help align their data with broader data sets and education initiatives. Both the [Chapin Hall Collaborative](#) at the University of Chicago and the [Kansas City Area Education Research Consortium](#), discussed previously,



are examples of such research entities that have enabled the libraries in those communities to access and make use of data. With the legal protocols and the ability to broker data-sharing agreements, these research organizations can follow the FERPA laws and make use of important data to assess learning outcomes while protecting the privacy of young library patrons. With access to data related to which neighborhood branch has high numbers of summer learning participants and aligning this data with other data and indicators for that neighborhood, libraries can demonstrate that they are reaching underserved children, one of the ongoing challenges discussed previously. By identifying and building intentional partnerships with research entities managing such data in their communities, libraries can explore how to share and assess data in ways that are similar to what has been done by the Chicago and Mid-Continent Public Libraries.

5. Explore Multiple and Varied Ways to Demonstrate Program Effectiveness

As previously discussed, identifying a common framework for assessing the effectiveness of library summer learning programs is challenged by the multiple ways in which effectiveness *could* be evaluated. Capturing ideas discussed by forum participants, Metropolitan Group developed and shared the following graphic meant to provide a straw-man framework for assessing the effectiveness of library summer learning in reducing the summer learning slide.



As reflected in the illustration above, Process measures are those focused on “outputs,” such as program quality (e.g., vis-à-vis NSLA’s SLPQA) and participation levels (e.g., how many children are participating, how often they participate, etc.). Results measures are those focused on whether learning outcomes were gained in the two categories described earlier: academic skill development and 21st-century skill development. These measurement opportunities are bracketed by qualities of summer learning at the library that are critical to maintain because they prominently differentiate library offerings from other summer learning programs: the joy of discovery (which is central to the educational role of the library) and equitable, expanded access for more youth (which is one of the library’s unique attributes). Measuring process and results will undoubtedly require different sets of measurement tools and resources because they examine two very different sets of data points.



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

In addition to local universities and research entities, there are many regional and national research organizations, sector leaders, and philanthropic foundations that are invested in discovering evidence of what works when it comes to gaining ground in educational and youth development outcomes. Notably, the [Wallace Foundation](#) has supported the production of several landmark publications on summer learning and youth development. Research reports and briefings produced by these organizations can help inform appropriate learning outcomes and assessment practices, while participating in their webinars, conferences, and meetings can help increase recognition of libraries as key contributors to reducing the summer slide and advancing learning outcomes. In addition to Chapin Hall and the Wallace Foundation, a few of the local, regional, and national education research and philanthropic organizations providing useful reports and tools include:

- The [Baltimore Education Research Consortium \(BERC\)](#) is similar to Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, and BERC's mission is to conduct and disseminate long- and short-term strategic data analysis and research that informs decisions about policy and practice to improve the educational and life outcomes of children in Baltimore.
- The [Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality](#) empowers education and human service leaders to adapt, implement, and scale best-in-class, research-validated quality improvement systems to advance child and youth development.
- [University of Pennsylvania's Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy](#) is an initiative that focuses on the development and use of integrated data systems (IDS) for policy analysis and program reform.
- [U.S. Dept. of Education Regional Educational Laboratory Program \(RELS\)](#) work in partnership with school districts, state departments of education, and others to use data and research to improve academic outcomes for students.
- The [NOYCE Foundation](#) supports the informal science community to develop work that addresses the gaps that exist in outcomes measurement, research and evaluation, etc.
- The [Harvard Family Research Project](#) helps stakeholders develop and evaluate strategies to improve the well-being of children, youth, families, and their communities.
- [American Institute of Research](#) supports educators and social service professionals, families and students, leaders and policymakers, to identify effective education programs and resources; to develop policies and services that promote well-being; and ultimately, to translate evidence into action.

Reports from the [Wallace Foundation](#) for further reading:

- [An Analysis of the Effects of an Academic Summer Program for Middle School Students](#)
- [Ready For Fall? Near-Term Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-income Students' Learning Opportunities and Outcomes](#)
- [Making Summer Count: How Summer Programs Can Boost Children's Learning](#)
- [Foundations for Young Adult Success](#)



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

As captured in this paper and in the literature review prepared for the National Forum on Effective Summer Learning in Libraries, there are already a number of comprehensive measurement tools and methods in use by libraries, OST time programs, and educational institutions that effectively assess both academic and 21st-century skill learning outcomes (see Appendix C). Test-driving some of these existing measurement tools and assessments could produce two levels of useful evidence, including what outcomes are being gained by library summer learning participants AND what assessment tools can actually work in the library setting. Libraries can help identify which aspects of a tool or tools work and which do not, and potentially initiate a conversation with the organization that created the tool to explore customization for use by libraries. Libraries piloting and tailoring existing tools that are being used by programs in other settings also have the potential to generate a pool of evidence that demonstrates if and how young people gain certain learning outcomes more effectively in library-based programs in comparison to other programs. This would provide libraries with specific evidence of the distinct value they hold within the community. It would also allow libraries to make a stronger case for forging partnerships and increasing funding.



VI. Looking Forward: Recommendations for Further Action and Research

This report has established that libraries are key contributors in the broad efforts to address the needs of school-aged youth in building a wide range of skills during the summer months when school is not in session. The report has also initiated a much-needed conversation on the opportunities and challenges related to demonstrating the impact of such efforts in libraries. There is more work yet to be done. A common vernacular around learning outcomes and assessments is still evolving, and a framework or frameworks that will enable libraries to demonstrate the effectiveness of their summer programs in advancing learning goals for young participants is needed.

What follows is a recommended blueprint to further the capacity of libraries to strengthen and demonstrate the effectiveness of their summer learning initiatives:

- 1. Develop a strategic guide to support libraries in intentionally organizing as learning/education institutions,** including continuing education/training/professional development practices that facilitate a cultural shift and develop an increased understanding of the importance and value of planning and assessing summer learning (and all learning) programs to achieve essential skill development for participants.
- 2. Research and produce a report that identifies model partnerships (e.g., library/school/local government/community) for summer learning** that includes strategies for: reaching and engaging low-income and academically at-risk youth; accessing data and establishing data-sharing agreements; and providing seamless systems of learning opportunities for all youth in the service area.
- 3. Establish a framework for what constitutes quality library summer learning programming** based on validated elements of high-quality youth programs and scalable library best practices for instituting learning goals and planning programs that achieve the goals. The framework should include a set of tools that libraries can use to plan and deliver such programs.
- 4. Initiate a library summer learning logic model or theory of change** that proposes key learning outcomes that libraries can achieve and the resources, activities (inputs), and outputs that provide a path to achieve them. The logic model should include recommended terminology defining outputs and outcomes and describe library summer learning in the context of a broader vernacular for measuring library outcomes.
- 5. Design a national library summer learning assessment tool** that can be piloted to capture and demonstrate learning outcomes. Develop a national report with resulting evidence that shows the ways in which library summer learning programs lead to educational gains for school-aged youth. Disseminate the report to key external stakeholders in the local government, education, literacy, and out-of-school time sectors.

Conclusion

As reflected in this white paper, public libraries are uniquely positioned to provide summer learning opportunities, particularly for youth who might not otherwise have access to such opportunities. In their continuing evolution to diversify their summer programming to meet this need, libraries will require more guidance, assistance, and support in setting goals and measuring the effectiveness of their summer learning programs. Demonstrating that their summer learning programs are successful in achieving learning outcomes for school-aged youth is essential to libraries in building the partnerships and accessing the resources needed to sustain and grow these programs over time. The recommendations and call to action articulated previously represent a step forward in that direction.



VII. Appendices

APPENDIX A: Forum Agenda

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2015

Welcome

Introductions

Review of Accelerate Summer Findings

Library Summer Learning Models and Measurements

- Mid-Continent Public Library
- Chicago Public Library
- New Haven Free Public Library

Consultative Conversation: Library Summer Learning

- What learning outcomes do libraries achieve for summer program participants?
- What learning outcomes can be measured and should be measured?
- What assets are available to libraries to enable learning assessments?

Wrap-up, Key Takeaways, and Reflections

Networking Dinner

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2015

Day 1 Re-cap and Reflections

Summer Learning Models and Measurement

- National Summer Learning Association

OST Learning Models and Measurement

- Afterschool Alliance

Consultative Conversation: Summer & OST Learning Outcomes & Measurement

- What is important for library leaders to know about the ways in which summer learning and OST programs assess learning outcomes?
- What learning outcomes and tools from the summer learning/OST fields may be applicable to libraries? How?
- What are the unique challenges that libraries face in measuring learning outcomes and capturing program effectiveness?

Making Meaning and Moving Forward

- What partnerships do libraries need to develop and cultivate to achieve and measure summer learning outcomes?
- How can libraries make use of available measurement tools to demonstrate their impact on learning outcomes?
- What additional measurement tools and training elements are needed by libraries?

Key Takeaways and Recommendations



APPENDIX B: Forum Participants

Susanne Bell

Senior Consultant
Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

Jenny Bogoni

Executive Director, Read! By 4th
Free Library of Philadelphia

Lori Canning

Director, Early Learning/School Readiness
The School Board of Broward County, FL

Tim Carrigan

Senior Program Officer, Library Services
Institute of Museum and Library Services

Enid Costley

Children's and Youth Services Consultant
Library of Virginia

Ron Fairchild

Director, Network Communities Support Center
Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

Xia Feng

Public Services Administrator- Youth Services
New Haven Free Public Library

Leslie Gabay-Swanston

Director of Community System Building
National Summer Learning Association (NSLA)

Luis Herrera

City Librarian
San Francisco Public Library

Maggie Jacobs

Director of Educational Programs
New York Public Library

Kevin Kirkpatrick

Senior Executive Vice President/Principal
Metropolitan Group

Monica Logan

Vice President of Program and Systems Quality
National Summer Learning Association

Nicholas Mader, PhD

Senior Researcher
Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

Lisa McClure

Community Engagement Manager
Broward County Libraries Division

Steven V. Potter

Library Director and CEO
Mid-Continent Public Library

Jen Rinehart

Vice President, Research and Policy
Afterschool Alliance

Gleniece Robinson

Library Director
Fort Worth Library

Andrea Sáenz

First Deputy Commissioner
Chicago Public Library

Emily Samose

Director, Education and Learning Initiatives
Urban Libraries Council

Ann Stone

Senior Officer, Research and Evaluation
The Wallace Foundation

Olivia Stone

Senior Associate
Metropolitan Group

Lester Strong

Vice President & CEO
AARP Foundation Experience Corps



APPENDIX C: Assessment Tools

Library-based Tools

- [Project Outcome](#)

“Project Outcome is dedicated to helping public libraries understand and share the true impact of essential library services and programs with simple survey instruments and an easy-to-use process for measuring and analyzing outcomes. Developed by library leaders, researchers and data analysts, Project Outcome surveys, resources, training and supportive online community provide public libraries with everything they need to apply their results and confidentially advocate for their library’s future.”²⁰

- [Edge](#)

“Edge is a nationally recognized management and leadership tool that is helping libraries and local governments work together to achieve community goals. With this professional tool, libraries can be better positioned to address community issues - like creating a stronger economy, ensuring workforce development and leading lifelong learning.”²¹

- [The California Library Association’s Outcomes-Based Summer Reading](#)

“CLA’s Summer Reading Outcomes Initiative helps libraries present outcomes-based programs and is an ALA summer reading best practice.”²²

OST and School-Based Tools

- [STAR Assessment](#)

“STAR assessments are standardized, computer-adaptive assessments created by Renaissance Learning, Inc., for use in K-12 education. Each is a “Tier 2” assessment of a skill (reading practice, math practice, and early literacy, respectively) that can be used any number of times due to item-bank technology. These assessments fall somewhere between progress monitoring tools (“Tier 1”) and high-stakes tests.” (from Wikipedia)²³

- [DIBELS – Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills](#)

“The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills from kindergarten through sixth grade. They are designed to be short (one minute) fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of early literacy and early reading skills. These research-based measures are linked to one another and predictive of later reading proficiency. The measures are also consistent with many of the Common Core State Standards in Reading, especially the Foundational Skills.”²⁴

- [Every Hour Counts Measurement Framework](#)

“The Every Hour Counts Measurement Framework is designed to serve as a blueprint for understanding the impact of programs on youth outcomes, making improvements at the system and program levels, and influencing policy.”²⁵



- **[Devereux Student Strengths Assessment](#)**

“The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) is a 72-item, standardized, norm-referenced behavior rating scale that assesses the social-emotional competencies that serve as protective factors for children in kindergarten through the eighth grade. The DESSA can be completed by parents/guardians, teachers, or staff at schools and child-serving agencies, including after-school, social service, and mental health programs.”²⁶

- **[Afterschool Outcome Measures Online Toolbox](#)**

“The Afterschool Outcome Measures Online Toolbox provides programs with a means to measure program quality and student outcomes using scales that have well-established reliability and validity. The Online Toolbox includes students’ reports of the quality of their experiences in their program, including their engagement in program activities, supportive relations with program staff and supportive relations with peers in their afterschool program.”²⁷

- **[DRA – Developmental Reading Assessment Second Edition PLUS](#)**

“The Developmental Reading Assessment, Second Edition PLUS (DRA™2+) is a formative reading assessment through which teachers systemically observe, record, and evaluate changes in student reading performance. DRA2+ is a proven diagnostic assessment that provides teachers with recommendations for scaffolded support to increase student reading proficiency. DRA2+ is supported by sound validity and reliability analyses.”²⁸

- **[The Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes \(SAYO\)](#)**

“The Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes (SAYO) measures eight outcome areas that research suggests are linked to long-term positive development and academic and life success in afterschool program youth... Programs collect data on the outcomes aligned with their goals and practices...[via a] pre- and post-test that demonstrates changes and gains made over the course of the year.”²⁹



VIII. Notes

- ¹ Alexander, 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
- ² McCombs, 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).
- ³ Miller, Beth A., [The Learning Season: The Untapped Power of Summer to Advance Student Achievement: Executive Summary](#) (Quincy, MA: Nellie Mae Education Foundation, 2007).
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