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ResearchBRIEF
Youth Community Connections
Minnesota's Statewide Afterschool Alliance

Engaging Youth In Summer Learning Opportunities

Access to summer opportunities increases academic outcomes and decreases the achievement gap.

Summer programs can be fun, enriching, and promote learning outside of school. Youth participating in high-quality summer learning opportunities of any kind perform better when they return to school in the fall. These youth are less likely to experience summer learning loss than are non-participating youth.

The “opportunity gap” between youth from low-income or disadvantaged households and youth from middle and upper-income households can result in learning loss that affects the achievement gap.

BENEFITS OF SUMMER PARTICIPATION

All young people, regardless of family background, experience learning losses when they do not engage in enrichment activities during the summer.

- ◆ Access to summer learning opportunities decreases summer learning loss
- ◆ Research spanning 100 years shows that students typically score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer vacation than they do on the same tests at the beginning of the summer
- ◆ Most students lose about two months of grade level equivalency in mathematical computation skills over the summer months
- ◆ Low-income students lose more than two months in reading achievement, despite the fact that their middle-class peers make slight gains
- ◆ Programs for learning acceleration and for remediation of learning deficiencies have both shown positive gains in participants’ knowledge and skills
- ◆ Impacts are greater for programs with a well-defined focus or goals and for those providing individual or small-group attention to participants

SUMMER PROGRAMS ENGAGE STUDENTS IN LEARNING

Summer learning programs provide students with diverse opportunities to apply and explore skills they learn in school in ways that are relevant to their interests and their future.

Choice is important as young people and their families decide how they will spend their time. Choice over *what to do, where to do it* and *who to do it with* increases the engagement of young people in their own learning in meaningful ways.

ABOUT THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

Youth from low-income and other disadvantaged households often have less access to enrichment programs during the summer than youth from middle and upper-income households. This is often defined as the opportunity gap, which can result in learning loss that affects the achievement gap.

- ◆ More than half of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by the opportunity gap, or unequal access to summer learning opportunities
- ◆ As a result of the opportunity gap, low-income youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enter college
- ◆ Low-income youth have lower participation rates (66%) in after-school or summer programming than do higher-income youth (92%)
- ◆ Participation rates vary based on ethnicity, race, and length of time in a community. In Minnesota, youth of immigrants (67%), youth of color (74%), and white youth (91%) participate in at least one program per year.
- ◆ Cost is a factor: 59% of low-income parents said it’s hard to find high-quality programs