



# Whatever it Takes: Summer 2021

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Summer is a time of privilege and inequity. Low-income students and children of color are much less likely to have access to summer enrichment<sup>1</sup>; in fact, youth in higher-income families are almost 3 times more likely to participate in summer learning compared to their lower-income peers.<sup>2</sup> This inequity matters. When schools close for the summer, families can lose “access to healthy meals, access to medical care, daily supervision, and structured enrichment opportunities....During the summer, low-income children and youth have lesser gains – and in some cases losses – in reading aptitude, greater exposure to violence and crime, and further weight gain for those with obesity.”<sup>3</sup>

Summer learning has tremendous potential to support academic learning, social emotional learning, and healthy development in youth. But in Oregon, summer learning programs are supported by a disjointed system made up of a patchwork of providers – including public schools, overnight camps, parks and recreation departments, non-profit organizations, museums, and for-profit organizations, and many others. This disjointed system creates inequitable access to summer learning. In 2019, for instance, about 115,500 of Oregon’s youth participated in a structured summer experience, but there were nearly 180,000 more youth who would participate in a program if one were available to them.<sup>4</sup>

In Summer 2021, however, Oregon threw out the playbook and committed unprecedented funding to summer learning. On top of the American Rescue Plan and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds, Oregon’s leaders allocated \$250 million to a comprehensive Summer Learning and Child Care funding package. This report explores what that funding made possible.

### Methodology

With support from the National Conference of State Legislatures, OregonASK used a multi-pronged approach to comprehensively map summer learning programs in Oregon. Information about summer programs was collected in three primary ways:

- Short survey for summer program managers (responses collected June–September 2021)
- List of grantees from the K–12 Summer Learning Grant, provided by the Oregon Community Foundation
- Research through online databases to identify additional programs.

<sup>1</sup> Peterson, T.K. and Vandell, D.L. The Evidence Base for Summer Enrichment and Comprehensive Afterschool Opportunities. Washington, DC: Collaborative Communications. 2021

<sup>2</sup> Afterschool Alliance. America After 3pm: Summer. Time for a Game-Changing Summer, With Opportunity and Growth for All of America’s Youth. 2021

<sup>3</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-Being for Children and Youth. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Afterschool Alliance. America After 3pm: Summer. Time for a Game-Changing Summer, With Opportunity and Growth for All of America’s Youth. 2021

## Findings

Through surveys and additional data collection, OregonASK:

- **Collected 270 survey responses** (please note these responses are at the organizational level, and many programs operate multiple sites)
- **Identified 1,770 summer learning sites**
  - 807 were identified through OregonASK's Summer Learning Survey
  - 560 were identified through online databases and general web searches
  - 403 were identified through the K-12 Summer Learning Grantee list

For an overview of survey findings, including average days and hours of operation, operating capacity, and activities offered by summer programs in Summer 2021, see our [Summer 2021 at a Glance infographic](#). Additional prominent themes from Summer 2021 are explored in-depth in [the full report](#); these themes include funding, community and school partnerships, and challenges to operation.

## Recommendations

The incredible opportunities from summer 2021 would not have been possible without the unprecedented funding support from the Oregon legislature. But Oregon youth, particularly those in underserved communities, need opportunities not just for one year, but every year. And more than just funding, we need a comprehensive system that ensures that summer learning opportunities are available not just to those that can afford them, but to all youth and families that need them.

Our current summer learning system is disjointed, and made up of a patchwork of providers that have little public funding in a normal year — and that system only reinforces privilege and ensures inequitable access. When thinking about a coordinated system that would support youth and families during the summer months:

- **Summer funding should be committed well in advance.** Many districts and community organizations had to compromise on quality or duration in 2021 because they didn't have enough time to plan. Research shows that planning for high-quality summer programs should begin in September.
- **Summer funding must include direct support for community-based organizations.** Nearly 60% of the programs reported here were operated by non-profit and for-profit organizations within the community. These community-based organizations make up the heart of summer learning in Oregon, and future fundings streams should acknowledge and support them by creating significant and dedicated funding streams for community organizations.
- **Invest in resources to support school-community partnerships.** Partnerships between schools and community based organizations strengthen summer learning opportunities, and are mutually beneficial, and research shows that these partnerships increase benefits and lower costs.
- **Create systems for accountability and reporting.** Any future funding for summer learning should include reporting systems that help identify gaps in access, and also help programs assess and improve the quality of their program.