



Tabletop Session Summary

June 10, 2021

Keep Them Coming: Attendance as the Key to Summer Learning

Presenters: Hedy Chang, [Attendance Works](#); Matthew Hathaway, [Teachers in the Parks](#)

This tabletop discussion explored strategies for maximizing student attendance in summer programming after a prolonged period of disruption.

Session Highlights

- » Chronic absenteeism (i.e., missing 10 percent or more of school days) is a primary cause of students falling behind in school.
- » There have been significant increases in chronic absence during the COVID-19 pandemic and especially among students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. This context makes the need for engaging summer learning programs more critical. Research suggests at least 20 days of attendance in a quality summer program is necessary to realize the academic benefits of the program.
- » To achieve that goal, a tiered approach towards attendance and engagement can help, starting with foundational whole school supports and employing other tiers of support as needed. The other tiers include universal prevention (e.g., small attendance incentives), early intervention (e.g., outreach to missing students to understand challenges), and intensive intervention (i.e., wraparound case management).
- » In addition, opportunities exist this summer to reestablish routines and for students to reconnect with enrichment and physical health activities that have been hindered over the last year. Schools and programs can also use this time to demonstrate to families that procedures are in place that are effective in keeping kids safe. Each of these can help bolster attendance.

Shared Resources

- » [Getting to Work on Summer Learning: Recommended Practices for Success](#)
- » [Pathways to Engagement: A Toolkit for COVID-19 Recovery Through Attendance](#)
- » [Summer Learning Recruitment Guide](#)
- » [Summer Learning Toolkit](#)



Questions and Answers on Keep Them Coming: Attendance as the Key to Summer Learning

What are your thoughts on paying incentives to parents (e.g., those eligible for free or reduced-price meals) based on summer program attendance and other factors?

Paid incentives work if you know that financial barriers are the reason students are not showing up. They can also be effective for older youth who would otherwise need to work to help support their families. What helps students to show up in any situation (school or summer learning) is understanding what is preventing them from showing up in the first place.

What can we do at the outset that solidifies belonging and attendance (both with students and families) so that they keep attending?

Pay attention to who shows up on the first day and focus on ensuring those students continue to attend. Utilizing the power of young people to staff programs can also help. For example, one program used older camp counselors as peer mentors to connect with the younger kids. These types of positions could be paid through COVID relief funds.

Young people can also be part of a leadership program and help recruit and support engagement. The key is creating a universal program where everyone in the community feels welcome but to also have targeted recruitment to ensure that kids who need the program the most are being reached. Thus, programs need to create a sense that “this is a community where I want to and can belong” and then make sure that everyone feels that they belong.

Also, pay attention to the student-teacher ratio. Ideally, there would be no more than ten students assigned to one teacher. Teachers could make phone calls to all parents for that summer. The smaller the ratio, the better chance there is for a teacher to notice when a student is not in attendance. REAP, Inc. in Portland, Oregon is linking attendance throughout summer programming this year to incentives at their week-long annual event where they have keynote speakers, sponsored activities, and workshops for students. One opportunity includes a special VIP tour of the Moda Center where the Portland Trailblazers play.

What are your thoughts about sending instructional opportunities out into the field where students are already congregating during the summer?

Providing a “camp feel” with daily meetings, t-shirts, cheers, and songs coupled with enrichment everyday can give summer learning a joyful feel. While it is important that summer learning has a light feel (especially when you change the environment), it is not just recreational. There is a serious literacy need right now as well as other priorities that need to be addressed over the summer. Teachers can go through all the components of a literacy lesson (responding to reading, shared reading, and independent reading) on a blanket in a park. It is just important to underscore that sending teachers to the park means sending them there for work (i.e., for specific literacy instruction tied to best research practices).

What are some of the more creative and/or best practices for recruitment that you have seen for summer programming?

Research suggests that good attendance during summer starts with a strong recruitment process. In Connecticut, the governor used COVID relief funds to create a Learning, Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) that targets 15 districts with the highest levels of chronic absence. The program identifies community-based organizations that could be collaborating with the districts. Staff at these organizations then go on home visits and, through them, share information about the summer learning opportunities that are available. There are also newly developed applications that streamline the



application/enrollment process by pre-filling information. Making enrollment easier and reducing the paperwork barrier is also a key component in recruitment.

Removing the stigma of the deficit model can also help attract more kids to summer programs and widen the pool to more children and families. Encourage districts to recognize and address the summer slide for all children. Districts can start small and grow over time by developing a reputation of providing a positive experience for children. They can, for example, have students who attend their programming this year bring a friend the next year. Many of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs are hiring outreach coordinators to focus on recruitment and retention of students that involves a multi-tiered approach.

In terms of hiring practices, programs or districts can investigate easing hiring requirements for short-term programs.

