



The National Center **Making Summer a Successful and Presents: Sustainable Strategy for Student Growth**

April 14, 2022

Webinar Summary

The National Center Presents..., is a virtual interactive series that will link educational researchers, policy makers, and practitioners as they elevate actionable knowledge, examples, and resources on national topics of interest.

Moderator: Brenda McLaughlin, National Comprehensive Center

Panelists: Dr. Allison Crean Davis, Westat
Dr. Leslie Goodyear, EDC
Patricia Lewis, Grand Prairie ISD
James Lane, U.S. Department of Education

Summer learning and enrichment is an evidence-based approach to academic growth and social-emotional development and a critical post-pandemic educational strategy. Administering a high-quality and impactful summer program isn't easy – it requires thoughtful planning and the engagement of a diverse group of educators and community partners. Launching or expanding summer programming requires district staff to possess resources, knowledge, and skills that may be new or not fully developed. This *National Center Presents...* session featured a robust conversation with national summer researchers and local practitioners about what it looks like to design, execute, and sustain summer learning and enrichment programming over time.

What does the evidence say?

The webinar began by highlighting RAND's pivotal publication, [Getting to Work on Summer Learning](#) (Schwartz, et al., 2018), which elevates evidence-based guidance about how districts can establish and sustain effective summer learning and enrichment programs. These include:

- » Early robust planning
- » Qualified staff with content knowledge and grade level experience
- » Sufficient time on task
- » Targeted recruitment and focus on attendance
- » Written curricula aligned to student needs and interests



- » Fun and engaging enrichment
- » Positive culture and climate with small class/group sizes
- » Opportunities for cost savings through partnerships, centralized planning
- » Program leader with knowledge and influence.

While these best practices remain true, the data for this study was collected from 2011 through 2014 and the context surrounding summer programs has shifted dramatically over the past several years. Researchers leading two recent and ongoing studies by EDC and Westat shared emerging findings about how summer opportunities may be shifting in relation to the pandemic and targeted stimulus funding.

Preliminary findings from the EDC study show that:

- » Prior to the pandemic, summer programs were more likely to focus on literacy and special populations' needs.
- » In contrast, during the first summer of the pandemic (2020), districts shifted their focus to social-emotional learning, hybrid instruction, and racial equity.
- » The Westat study picked up during the second summer of the pandemic (2021), when summer became a national, and highly-resourced, priority to accelerate student learning and well-being. Early findings suggest that within this new context, a strong majority of districts throughout the US delivered some kind of summer offering in 2021, and nearly all expressed a sustained commitment to do so through at least 2022.

What does it look like in practice?

Grand Prairie ISD, Grand Prairie, Texas, exemplified the big push districts made in 2021. Patricia Lewis, Associate Superintendent provided her expertise and insight around her district's collaborative effort to create, implement and sustain the successful MY CAMP summer program. This program created growth opportunities for staff, students, and parents and reinvigorated excitement surrounding summer learning in her district, capitalizing on a camping theme. Key components of the summer learning program, including innovative program design, creating excitement and enthusiasm around camp culture, and involving her district colleagues, paved the way for success.

What are some key takeaways?

Here is how Patricia's work demonstrated the way the principles in the Rand study work in the field.

- » **It's important for everyone to have a seat at the table.** Rather than working in silos, representation throughout the district was critical to the collaborative implementation of the MY CAMP program. Grand Prairie ISD used the following strategies:
 - › Forming a steering committee including a wide variety of stakeholders that meets monthly



- › Engaging principals throughout the planning and implementation process
- › Having strong leadership and support from the superintendent down
- » **There is more than one way to fund summer.** ESSER funds weren't used in Grand Prairie's strategy as they were concerned with sustainability. Once the funding amount was set, they were able to create the budget. They leveraged the broad membership steering committee to assist with using funds from different areas.
- » **Messaging matters.** It is important to create engaging and exciting messaging. Use trusted messengers such as principals, family engagement staff, or community partners, and ensure information and registration are easy to access for parents and caregivers.

Shared Resources

- » [RAND Summer Learning Series, Getting to Work on Summer Learning, 2nd Ed.](#)
- » [Wallace Foundation Summer Learning Toolkit](#)

