



ECS Idea Paper

American Reinvestment & Recovery Act

Education Commission of the States • 700 Broadway, Suite 810 • Denver, CO 80203-3442 • 303.299.3600 • Fax: 303.296.8332 • www.ecs.org

Maximizing Education Reform in the Stimulus Bill: Enhancing Summer Learning Programs

A joint project of the Education Commission of the States and the National Center for Summer Learning

The Challenge:

As states and districts prepare for the disbursement of billions of dollars from the federal stimulus bill, there is a tremendous opportunity to both create jobs quickly and take a major step towards closing the achievement gap through innovative programming. Extensive research shows that lack of access to high-quality summer learning programs negatively impacts the academic achievement, health and social development of children in high-poverty communities.

In fact, recent research from Johns Hopkins University shows that two-thirds of the achievement gap in reading can be attributed solely to unequal summer learning opportunities. However, most states and districts have not made summer learning a policy priority, resulting in an incoherent system of summer opportunities for low-income children and youth that is too reliant on parental fees and private funding. While most states invest in summer school programs, an upcoming ECS report shows that many states cannot accurately determine how much, if any, state funding is being used for summer learning due to state formula and reporting issues.

The Solution — Utilizing ARRA funds to develop and enhance summer learning programs:

States have an unprecedented opportunity to use ARRA funds to develop, enhance and expand innovative summer learning programs that help close the achievement gap. As an added incentive, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has made clear that summer learning programs and expanded learning time are key components of his education reform agenda and should be part of state applications for the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top fund.

States can utilize the following ARRA funding streams to enhance summer learning programs:

- **Title I, ESEA:** The U.S. Department of Education has encouraged the use of Title I ARRA funds for summer learning and expanded learning programs. States could facilitate this by:
 - Providing guidance to districts that encourages innovative use of these funds for summer programs
 - Using a portion of the state set-aside to fund technical assistance and capacity-building efforts at the state and local level
 - Ensuring that districts receiving Title I School Improvement Fund grants (Section 1003 (g)) include a summer learning component in their school improvement plan
 - Encouraging a second round of Supplemental Educational Services (SES) notifications be sent to parents this spring to ensure new funds can be used to provide SES over the summer months for eligible students.

- **State Stabilization Fund:** A portion of these funds can be reserved to either maintain or scale up existing summer programs at the local level and to fund innovative pilot programs that complement school-day and after-school learning.

Additionally, funds can be used to develop more robust data and assessment systems that measure what students know and are able to do beyond just academic test scores. Such systems ensure that states have the data to not only judge academic progress, but the effectiveness of a wider range of programs that support academic success, such as programs for summer, after-school, teacher training, professional development and teacher recruitment.

The Benefits:

Utilizing ARRA funds to support high-quality summer learning programs has many potential benefits:

- Creates and/or saves jobs quickly to stimulate the economy this summer
- Can play a significant role in narrowing the achievement gap for low-income students
- Provides an opportunity to leverage additional state and federal funding for summer learning
- Addresses the issue of expanded time and innovation, both of which have been discussed by Secretary Duncan as critical to successful Race to the Top applications
- Provides an opportunity to pilot innovative models this summer and to develop a framework to collect data about the most effective and scalable models for future public and private investment.
- Can position states and state policymakers as leaders in an emerging education reform issue that is likely to expand significantly in future years.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Which ARRA funding sources can be used to support summer learning programs?

Nearly all education related ARRA funds can be accessed to support various types of summer learning programs. In addition to the programs described above, states also can reach across departments and utilize the following funding streams: Workforce Investment Act and Summer Jobs; IDEA; AmeriCorps and VISTA; and Child Care and Development Block Grants (CCDBG).

We already invest state funding in summer programs. Why should we use this new federal funding when we need to close budget gaps and fund other education priorities?

While 35 states invest funding in summer learning programs, most are narrowly focused on remedial programs for struggling students with poor data collection to evaluate impact. Given the compelling research on summer learning programs and the achievement gap, ARRA provides an opportunity for states to fund more comprehensive and innovative summer learning programs that provide a blend of academic and enrichment activities to better engage students and teachers. Additionally, such programs could leverage existing state and local funds and meet Secretary Duncan's goal of moving beyond the status quo and developing innovative expanded learning time programs that could help states secure grants from the competitive Race to the Top fund.

What does a high-quality summer learning opportunity look like? How can we build state and local capacity to support these programs?

While there is no one-size fits all model, a high-quality summer learning program is intentional about building skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that promote academic achievement and healthy development to. Policymakers should consider the following elements when developing innovative summer learning programs:

1. Increase the *duration and intensity* of traditional models towards a research-based, six-week, full-day model.

2. Incorporate a blend of *engaging academic and enrichment activities* that look and feel different than the traditional school day
3. Increase *participation* to include all students in Title I schools, rather than only those not meeting state standards.
4. Increase the number of *partners* and public agencies that are engaged in summer learning programs to improve capacity and leverage funds.

High-quality summer programs run by school and non-profit organizations already exist in most communities. Capacity can be built through technical assistance and professional development from state and national agencies and organizations, and increased partnerships between schools and non-profit organizations.

How will we support these ARRA funded summer programs when funding runs out in two years?

Since most states already fund certain forms of summer learning programs, ARRA funds could be used to continue these programs and to develop model summer learning programs that would yield the highest return on investment for future years. Additionally, programs like Title I are annual appropriations that can continue to be used to support summer learning programs. Finally, there are efforts at the federal level to create a dedicated funding stream for summer programs and due to increased interest from the Obama Administration and philanthropy, public and private funding for summer learning programs is likely to increase in the future.

This idea paper was a joint project of the National Center for Summer Learning and the Education Commission of the States. If you have any questions or comments about this paper, you can contact Jeff Smink at the Center (jsmink@jhu.edu) or Michael Griffith at ECS (mgriffith@ecs.org).

For more information on ARRA and summer learning, please visit www.summerlearning.org/recovery

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