

Year-Round Learning

Linking School, Afterschool, and Summer Learning to Support Student Success



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Executive Summary

Learning consists of all the ways that youth acquire new knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors. It happens not just in school, but also through afterschool and summer activities, time spent with the family, and increasingly, through interaction with digital media. Broadening our ideas about where, when, and how learning happens helps communities to create richer learning pathways that have the potential to

- Include more youth development opportunities to help young people gain the skills necessary for lifelong learning and a healthy adulthood.
- Offer a seamless learning environment that can help promote school success and stem summer learning loss.
- Efficiently use resources outside of schools to help close the achievement gap.

This research brief is designed to inform the discussion among policymakers and providers (including districts, schools, and afterschool and summer learning organizations, among others) about how to expand learning time for today's youth. Because examples of various ways to achieve a policy goal are often useful in the early stages of discussion, this brief describes one possible approach—year-round learning—and highlights promising initiatives underway.

Year-round learning consists of intentional, community-based efforts to connect school, afterschool, and summer learning. Institutions involved in these efforts are committed to working together to support positive youth outcomes, develop continuous learning pathways, and provide equitable opportunities for both students and families. This

Emerging research suggests that connecting learning environments can lead to better outcomes.

Principles of Year-round Learning

Four key principles emerge for supporting children and youth through year-round learning:

1. Removing barriers to learning and increasing access to learning supports and enrichment opportunities
2. Being student-centered and family-centered
3. Building on organizational commitment, capacity, and flexibility
4. Engaging and being active in the local community

Removing barriers to learning and increasing access to learning supports and enrichment opportunities

- *Acknowledging and working with the effects of disadvantage.* The 14 initiatives in this study are trying to remedy some of the disparities affecting their participants through providing experiences and opportunities on par with what is offered in more privileged areas.
- *Increasing access to services.* In order to alleviate disadvantages to improve student learning, initiatives provide access to a variety of health and social services for both students and families and help families navigate the college testing and application landscape.
- *Exposing youth to new learning environments.* These initiatives provide youth with learning opportunities that they do not access during the regular school day, such as field trips, college visits, or activities like music or photography.

Year-round learning consists of intentional, community-based efforts to link school, afterschool, and summer learning.

approach provides youth—often in distressed areas—with access to quality learning environments across settings, as well as across the year. We offer examples of year-round learning efforts from 14 initiatives across the K–12 system, with many focusing on middle school and high school and some continuing into college. This approach shows promise:

- *Aligning work with school and district standards and curriculum.* While several community-based programs actively work with schools to align curricula, in many cases the alignment happens through teachers and staff who either act as liaisons between schools and programs or are on staff as teachers, mentors, or coaches at a school.

Being student-centered and family-centered

- *Providing key supports to help students get and stay on a pathway to high school, college, and beyond.* Programs that are implementing year-round learning can create pathways that lead to acceptance into competitive high schools and colleges, and the attainment of successful careers. This strategy includes building close relationships with school- or community-based role models, and providing internship opportunities and projects that build the critical thinking, life, and career skills needed to succeed.
- *Encouraging and tracking participation across the year and over time to ensure youth stay involved and engaged.* Being student-centered means paying attention to when and how youth participate; initiatives cannot support students if they are not attending programs.
- *Involving families in learning in order to keep youth engaged and help reinforce academic and developmental messages at home.* Initiatives are working to understand how to involve the participants' families in learning to create consistency between various learning environments and help families become successful learning partners.

Building on organizational commitment and capacity

- *Planning and implementing for year-round learning.* Initiatives that offer year-round programming have arrived at this approach over time. Some initiatives have grown out of a long conversation with the community about its needs and wishes while others expand from success of more limited programs.
- *Having a champion.* These initiatives often have a champion—someone who is leading the charge for reshaping a community's understanding of what the education system can be.
- *Establishing common goals and outcomes, often using shared data.* Conversations between afterschool and summer providers and school teachers about their respective goals can help all parties to see that they exist to support students and can help each other by working together. Using data to identify student needs and progress is one way to support these shared goals.

Engaging and being active in the local community

- *Being participant-driven.* Many initiatives rely on local decision-makers, such as schools and parents and students, to determine the scope of their programming, thus ensuring that they are providing services that youth and the community need and want.
- *Understanding and being involved in the local community.* To truly relate to the local context, people involved with the initiatives need to be part of the community fabric. For example, program staff can make intentional efforts to understand youth's interests and realities outside of the school and program hours. Initiatives can also make sure that multi-site programs are flexible enough to tailor their work to local environments.
- *Leveraging existing local resources to offer comprehensive services and learning opportunities.* Effective year-round learning requires many stakeholders to share responsibility for learning outcomes. This entails creating partnerships among youth organizations, school districts, parent groups, and public youth-serving agencies.

Conclusion

Year-round learning is a promising way of thinking about learning time and opportunities and how to organize them to support youth development, particularly for economically and otherwise disadvantaged youth. It raises questions for educators, youth-serving organizations, parents, and students themselves to consider, including: what does it take to fully leverage community resources for year-round learning, and how can we design a seamless learning pathway that connects opportunities across developmental stages, calendar time, and learning environments, including digital media? The 14 initiatives studied for this brief offer starting points, but more work is necessary. Their early successes and challenges suggest the need for continuing dialogue and mutual learning among all those committed to guiding youth toward productive lives now and in the future.



Year-Round Learning

Linking School, Afterschool, and Summer Learning to Support Student Success

There is growing national discussion about the need to create a more expansive definition of learning to include all the ways that youth can access educational opportunities—not just through the traditional school model, but also through afterschool activities, time spent with the family, and increasingly, through interaction with digital media.¹ Broadening our ideas about where, when, and how learning happens helps communities to create richer learning pathways that have the potential to include more nonacademic opportunities to help youth gain the skills necessary for a healthy adulthood, offer a seamless learning environment that can help stem summer learning loss, and tap resources outside of schools for additional opportunities to help close the achievement gap.² This brief is designed to help inform discussions among policymakers and providers about how to expand learning opportunities for today's youth.

Introduction

In this brief, we introduce and analyze one approach to expanded learning that provides students—often in distressed areas—with access to quality learning environments across the year, through what we call *year-round learning*. At the center of this approach are the efforts that organizations and communities make to connect different learning environments and ensure that youth have continuous developmental supports, access to a broad range of learning, and smooth transitions between grades. Specifically, year-round learning consists of intentional, community-based efforts to connect school, afterschool, and summer learning to support positive youth outcomes, develop continuous learning pathways, and provide equitable opportunities for both students and families.

Year-round learning brings schools, community organizations, and other youth-serving institutions together to support youth more comprehensively than any one of these institutions could manage alone. Connecting these supports can go a long way toward reducing barriers to learning, helping underserved youth learn and grow, and offering them opportunities on par with their more-advantaged peers.³ Efforts to ensure that children and youth have access to quality learning environments across the year can

benefit youth in meaningful ways, including better engagement in learning, successful grade transition, prevention of summer learning loss, and strong social development.⁴ Research on linkages between schools and summer programs highlights benefits of these types of partnerships, including improved relationships with youth and families, greater student exposure to a variety of staff and instructional approaches, and better alignment across content, as well as challenges in the areas of planning, staffing, and resources.⁵ For individual youth, being part of these initiatives can offer stability in sometimes unstable environments, opportunities to develop strong and meaningful relationships with adults and peers over time, and uninterrupted learning support thanks to the continuity of curricula and program staff who come to better understand youth's learning styles over time.

Year-round learning consists of intentional, community-based efforts to link school, afterschool, and summer learning.

Year-round learning is happening in many communities across the country, and in this study—part of Harvard Family Research Project's ongoing efforts to document and analyze comprehensive and complementary learning systems—we have found a wide variety of ways in which organizations are implementing this approach.

This brief examines efforts that are approaching learning time in new ways and bringing community resources together to provide these learning environments. The brief highlights different configurations of year-round learning, presents common principles used by programs and initiatives doing this work, provides early lessons from these initiatives, and profiles six of these programs and initiatives in an Appendix to illustrate the themes discussed in this brief.

Methods

To identify examples of year-round learning, we researched regional and national databases as well as Harvard Family Research Project's OST Research and Evaluation Database (www.hfrp.org/OSTDatabase) and complementary learning database, reviewed evaluations of programs when available, and obtained recommendations from key informants. We compiled over 100 examples of efforts to connect learning

environments from which we chose the 14 programs, community initiatives, and school districts for this study (see table 1 on page 4).

To inform our understanding of year-round learning, we gathered data for this report from (1) interviews with staff at the 14 organizations, covering topics such as program structure, activities offered, benefits and challenges of connecting across the school year, partnerships with schools and other organizations, family involvement, and funding and political contexts, (2) documents from these organizations, and (3) related evaluations and other literature that served as background materials for our analysis.⁶

Each of the 14 programs and initiatives implementing year-round learning have each demonstrated success

in providing quality learning opportunities for youth, are making strides toward significant organizational goals, or are using evidence-based approaches to support youth in innovative ways. These 14 initiatives make up a group that is diverse in approaches, goals, and levels at which they operate (see textbox, below); as a whole, they provide a new perspective on how learning can be constructed in innovative ways to help students succeed.

These initiatives in this study support students across the K–12 system, with many programs focusing on middle school and high school and some continuing into college. Most initiatives have been in existence between 9 and 20 years; two are older and three began more recently. Most draw on a diverse set of partners and are intentional about aligning their curricula across programs or with the district or subject-level standards.

Year-round learning models

Organizations that have both afterschool and summer components. Initiatives implementing year-round learning often run summer and afterschool programs with links to school-day learning. Many of these programs have a particular focus, which might be sports, social justice, or other topics that can carry youth's interest throughout the year. They also combine academic and non-academic learning—supporting youth's in-school development while also nurturing social, civic, and personal development. Organizations, though, intentionally make the afterschool and summer components feel different, so that summer programming might be less structured at times or might allow more opportunities for lengthier project-based work. Intentionally linking afterschool and summer programming helps students engage in a given program or activity for a prolonged period of time, which has the advantage of building a sense of belonging, encouraging positive peer and adult relationships, and increasing students' engagement in the program.

Community-based programs that serve youth in cohorts. While many programs serve different youth throughout the year, of special interest are the instances in which programs work with the same group of youth over many years—what we call a cohort model. Most of these cohort models start in the middle school years, with some working with students until their high school graduation, and at times, through their undergraduate experience. Many also require youth to apply to the program. The emphasis is often on academics, mentoring, college visits, and college application processes. The advantage of a cohort model is the opportunity for students to have continuous long-term learning opportunities that in turn allow youth to develop strong long-term relationships with each other and with adults. With these extended relationships, program staff can adjust to accommodate students' learning styles, identify emerging social and academic issues, and offer appropriate services and experiences that challenge and support students' development.

School-initiated programs. It is increasingly common for schools to partner with afterschool and summer programs in recognition that these programs provide critical complementary supports for youth, both in the realm of academics and in social and emotional development. While some schools have expanded their learning time through these partnerships, other schools have started school-initiated year-round learning opportunities in which the school is the main facilitator of the learning that happens outside “regular” school time.

Community- or district-based models. Several districts and communities have begun to intentionally link school and out-of-school time opportunities to promote year-round learning. These may be community schools, school district initiatives, or zones. Harlem Children's Zone is the most notable example of a zone model, but there are many types of zones and other community-wide initiatives, such as Beacon programs in New York City and San Francisco.

Table 1. Year-round learning initiatives in this study

Program/Location*	Grade Served	Focus	Year-round Components
America SCORES www.americascoreres.org National	K-8	Academic enrichment Sports Service learning	Afterschool program (literacy and soccer) Summer program (5 affiliates offer part- or full-day sports and enrichment)
Big Picture Learning www.bigpicture.org International	K-12	Academic enrichment College preparation Tutoring/mentoring Advising/counseling Service learning	Afterschool programs (<i>Learning Through Internships</i>) Summer program (9th grade <i>Summer Infusion</i> orientation program; apprenticeships) College preparatory schools (<i>College Unbound</i>)
Bottom Line www.bottomline.org Boston and Worcester, MA	11-College	College preparation and graduation College transition	Afterschool and Saturday program (college <i>ACCESS</i>) Summer (transition program) College-based support/advising (<i>SUCCESS</i> program)
Children's Aid Society Community Schools www.childrensaidsociety.org/community-schools New York City	K-12	Academic enrichment College preparation Health Tutoring/mentoring Social-emotional development Service learning Family services Community services	Afterschool programs (academic enrichment, service learning, arts) Saturday programs (academic enrichment, sports, arts) Summer programs (half- and full-day enrichment activities, overnight camps)
Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools www.childrensdefense.org/programs-campaigns/freedom-schools/ National	K-12	Academic enrichment College preparation Service learning Civic engagement Leadership development Health Family services	Afterschool programs (academic enrichment, enrichment, sports) Summer program (six-week full-day academic and enrichment program)
Cincinnati Community Learning Centers www.cps-k12.org/community/CLC/CLC.htm Cincinnati, OH	Birth-age 18	Early childhood Academic enrichment College preparation Tutoring/mentoring Advising/counseling Health Social-emotional development Family services Community services	Afterschool programs (<i>Mind Peace</i> mental health program; <i>Leave No Child Inside</i> ; internships, academics, arts, community programs) Summer program (<i>Fifth Quarter</i> academic enrichment)
Des Moines Public Schools Department of Learning Supports** https://events.r2it.com/birdies/charityDetails/Principal/Learning%20Supports%20Web%20Page.htm Des Moines, IA	Prenatal-age 21	Early childhood Academic enrichment Tutoring/mentoring Prevention Transition*** Service learning Social-emotional development Family services	Afterschool and summer programs (<i>SUCCESS</i> social-emotional program; <i>Project CONNECT</i> mentoring and prevention program) Family resource center (<i>Central Carver</i>)

*Programming changes may have occurred since the time of data collection.

**The department name has been changed to the Department of Learning Services, and the Project CONNECT component has ended since data collection.

***Refers to programs offering orientation for the next grade level or stage of education.

Table 1. (continued)

Program/Location*	Grade Served	Focus	Year-round Components
Groundwork www.groundworkinc.org New York City	K-12	Academic enrichment College preparation Sports Tutoring/mentoring Advising/counseling Social-emotional development Leadership development Family services Community services	Afterschool programs (<i>Groundwork for Youth</i> academic enrichment and sports; <i>Groundwork for Success</i> college preparation) Summer program (<i>Camp Power</i> ; <i>Groundwork for Youth Summer Academy</i>)
Harlem RBI www.harlemrbi.org New York City	PreK-College	Academic enrichment College preparation Transition Tutoring/mentoring Advising/counseling Sports Social-emotional development Leadership development	Dream Charter School Afterschool programs (baseball; homework help; literacy workshop; choice time; <i>EarthFriends</i>) Summer programs (age-specific, full-day, youth-directed)
The Higher Achievement Program www.higherachievement.org Washington, DC; Alexandria and Richmond, VA; Baltimore, MD	5-8	Academic enrichment College preparation Transition Tutoring/mentoring Service learning Civic engagement Social-emotional development Leadership development	Afterschool programs (<i>After-School Academy</i>) <i>High School Placement Program</i> Summer program (six-week <i>Summer Academy</i>)
Oakland Unified School District Complementary Learning Department http://publicportal.ousd.k12.ca.us/19941081117568637/site/default.asp Oakland, CA	PreK-12	Academic enrichment Social-emotional development Health Early childhood Family services Tutoring/mentoring Transition College preparation Sports	Afterschool (academic enrichment, arts, sports, health, family programs, safety) Apprenticeships/internships Saturday programs Summer program (credit recovery, transition programs, academics, enrichment, specialty programs, health)
Rainier Scholars www.rainerscholars.org Seattle, WA	6-College	Academic enrichment College preparation Advising/counseling Tutoring/mentoring Transition Leadership development	14-month intensive academic program Afterschool (homework support and tutoring; 7-9th grade advising; 10-12th grade leadership retreats, internships) Saturday programs (enrichment) Summer programs (middle school transition program, summer school, in- and out-of-state overnight camp placements)
Say Yes to Education Syracuse www.sayyessyracuse.org Syracuse, NY	K-5	Academic enrichment College preparation Advising/counseling Tutoring/mentoring Service learning Health Family services	Afterschool program (academic support, enrichment, sports) Summer program (two 12-week sessions of arts, sports, service learning)
Sunflower County Freedom Project www.sunflowerfreedom.org Sunflower County, MS	7-12	Academic enrichment College preparation Sports Service learning Civic engagement Leadership development	Afterschool program (tutoring, study hall) Saturday program (<i>SLAM</i> academic program; <i>Media Production</i>) Summer programs (six-week <i>Freedom School</i> ; internships)

Principles of Year-round Learning

The 14 programs and initiatives in this study share four key principles for supporting children and youth through year-round learning. These principles are consistent with research on quality learning experiences and programming, but can be implemented in a deeper and more seamless way when learning environments are linked across the year. The four principles are:

1. Removing barriers to learning and increasing access to learning supports and enrichment opportunities
2. Being student-centered and family-centered
3. Building on organizational commitment, capacity, and flexibility
4. Engaging and being active in the local community

The initiatives in this study do not necessarily all carry out these principles equally, but the principles do stand out among the initiatives as a whole.

The programs implementing year-round learning maintain these core principles throughout the school year and summer, but many adjust curriculum to fit the opportunities and constraints of each. One provider noted that the program “couldn’t meet our goals of

The role of summer in year-round learning

The attention to summer learning in these initiatives highlights several benefits of year-round learning. One provider noted, for instance, that their summer programs can fill gaps in students’ school-year learning. Summer programming can also help deepen students’ engagement with the program. One provider, echoing the thoughts of many others, noted that expanding their school-year services into summer was “by far the best thing we did in terms of impact on kids” because it gave them more opportunities to strengthen relationships with participants, gave youth more learning time, and allowed youth to feel more commitment to the program. There are also more opportunities for family engagement in the summer, whether through required parent meetings or through informal interactions that cannot happen during the school year, and several programs report that their relationships with families are strengthened during the summer.

getting youth ready for college if we didn’t have them over time,” but it is not always possible to have the same focus and level of engagement across the year. CDF Freedom Schools, for example, maintain their focus on literacy throughout the year but have children read a book per week during the summer and switch to a book per month during the school year to accommodate other program components such as homework help. Similarly, their parent engagement requirements transition from once per week during the summer to once per month during the school year.

Removing barriers to learning and increasing access to learning supports and enrichment opportunities

The most often-cited goal among initiatives in this study was removing students’ barriers to learning. The youth served by these initiatives often do not have access to resources that address social, emotional, and academic challenges, limiting their ability to learn. Youth often also lack access to enrichment opportunities that support positive youth development. These programs and initiatives are, in the vast majority of cases, working with youth who are in need of additional support, whether those youth are referred to the program, or whether the program is seeking them out.

There are many ways that programs and initiatives in this study work to remove barriers to learning for their participants:

- *Acknowledging and working with the effects of disadvantage.* Providers are trying to remedy some of the disparities between youth participants and their better-off peers. One academic program that requires youth to apply, for instance, tries to identify students “with the greatest number of barriers to higher education” for enrollment in the program. First and foremost, these initiatives want to provide youth in distressed urban areas with equitable opportunities. One urban program created its after-school component after families asked for extracurricular activities similar to those available in suburban areas. Many other programs report something similar: giving youth opportunities they would not otherwise have because their families are struggling—including the belief that college is accessible and attainable.
- *Increasing access to services.* Alleviating disadvantages to improve student learning also

entails increasing access to a variety of services for both students and families. Programs are bringing dental services into neighborhoods that have never had access to dental care, as well as coordinating vision screenings in the summer, legal services, and help with youth employment through internships, among other services. Des Moines Public Schools Department of Learning Supports, for example, offers case managers, “parent centers” within schools, computers that parents can use for job searches or creating résumés, and a range of classes for families, such as GED preparation and English as a second language (ESL). Providers reported that these services help their youth participants be successful in the classroom. College access is another big draw in the services that programs offer: Programs help families navigate the college testing and application landscape so that low-income families are on a level playing field with families who have had knowledge about how to navigate these hurdles “passed on from generation to generation,” as one provider put it. For at least one program, this connection to other services has been a major factor for motivating principals to bring the program into their schools.

- *Exposure to new learning environments.* These initiatives, like many out-of-school time efforts, often provide youth with exposure to learning opportunities that they do not have during the regular school day, whether doing a hands-on science project, having a significant amount of time to read out loud, going to a museum for a field trip, or going on a college visit. Programs like Say Yes to Education Syracuse offer enrichment activities often absent in low-income communities such as photography, architecture, radio and film, and publishing. Others offer overnight stays at summer camps or college campuses, allowing students to immerse themselves in a different learning and support environment.
- *Aligning work with school and district standards and curriculum.* Beyond leveling the playing field for students and families, several year-round programs align their work with schools’ curricula or standards to help ensure that their efforts connect with and expand upon the learning that occurs during the school day. In many

Aligning efforts to solve a testing problem

One initiative has used the extended written response component of proficiency tests—a major stumbling block for many students—to engage the community to help improve student performance on this test:

[We] teach all of our partners, whether they are afterschool partners or the school nurse, what extended response means. So the ballroom dancing teacher, after he finished teaching ballroom dancing, had the kids write a paragraph about what they had learned. And the school nurse, if the kids weren’t too sick, would have them write a paragraph about why they were there to see the nurse!

cases the alignment happens through teachers and staff who either act as liaisons between schools and programs, or are on staff as teachers, mentors, or coaches after school. Programs that share staff have either full-time staff in schools or school staff working in the afterschool and summer programs. In the Children’s Aid Society Community Schools, it is the education coordinators who facilitate the alignment of the school and afterschool components. These coordinators are generally lead teachers or department chairs during the school day who then reinforce the links between the afterschool curriculum, the summer themes, and school curriculum. Another model is for school-day teachers to serve as afterschool staff. At America SCORES sites, school-day teachers and coaches also serve as program instructors and soccer coaches, which helps to build trusting teacher–student relationships (see page 14 in Appendix).

Through this alignment, program staff can learn the needs of individual students and can work with schools to help address specific challenges. Teachers also benefit when they have the chance to see youth outside the classroom excelling in a particular area. These efforts to align with schools and other institutions have the additional benefit of giving these initiatives legitimacy in the community and with their partners by demonstrating that they have the capacity and will to support student achievement both inside and outside the classroom.

Being student-centered and family-centered

These programs and initiatives in this study focus their work on students' needs, goals, and progress. Many of these programs use a developmental lens for their work, intentionally tailoring their programs to the specific needs of age groups and even individuals, developing achievement plans around individuals' needs or areas in which they are struggling, and filling gaps in what students need. Programs are working to be student- and family-centered in the following ways:

- *Providing key supports to help students get and stay on a pathway to high school, college, and beyond.* Programs that are implementing year-round learning can create pathways that lead to acceptance into competitive high schools and colleges, and the attainment of successful careers. This strategy includes building close relationships with school- or community-based role models, and providing internship opportunities and hands-on projects that build the critical thinking, life, and career skills necessary to succeed after high school. Big Picture Learning and Bottom Line illustrate two ways schools and programs are creating continuous pathways to college by linking different learning contexts. Big Picture Learning offers the Learning Through Internship/Interest (LTI) program that places students in a field of their choosing and engages them in a project with an expert mentor, while Bottom Line works with individual students during their high school years—guiding them through college visits, application, and admission processes—and continues to work with students in small groups at their respective college campuses, helping with the transition to college academics and campus life.
- *Encouraging and tracking participation across the year and over time to ensure youth stay involved and engaged.* Being student-centered also means paying attention to when and how youth participate; initiatives cannot support students if they are not coming to programs. A program that operates year-round, however, will inevitably face challenges related to the retention of its students. Attrition may happen when students start a new school year and their schedules or interests change. There are also

Encouraging participation via a cohort model

The cohort models in this study give youth a group identity and help them develop strong ties to their peers and the program, which in turn can keep attendance up. One provider reported that the program gave youth opportunities for relationships that they could not find elsewhere because the multi-year component gave youth the opportunity to cultivate trust and friendship. Participants came in saying they had no friends in their high schools, but after a year reported that the other participants became their family and best friends, and “despite what experience they might be having at school, when they come to that peer group or that class at our center...they have that community.”

multiple events occurring over the course of 12 months that can interfere with the consistency of a year-round program, including shifting daylight hours, sports seasons, holidays, family vacations, changes in transportation availability, and peaks in school workloads.

These year-round initiatives in this study have successfully found ways for youth to stay involved across the year and over multiple years. By meticulously tracking and regularly reviewing students' attendance data, one program found that students' attendance rates were likely to drop off between November and January and adjusted their recruitment and retention strategies accordingly. Multi-year programs, meanwhile, often structure programs to add responsibility over time or to have “extras,” such as field trips, for the older youth in the programs. Having year-round programming also encourages engagement: One program reported that youth's engagement during the school year is higher after youth have attended their summer camp, while another program finds that retention is strong because “there's not time for [students] to get lost; there's no time off.” Harlem RBI, for example, has found innovative ways to engage students over time through both sports and peer interaction (see page 15 in Appendix).

- *Involving families in learning in order to keep youth engaged and help reinforce academic and developmental messages at home.* Supporters of

year-round learning understand the importance of family involvement in helping to keep youth engaged in the programs year-round and over time. Family involvement also helps to create consistency and reinforce learning and developmental messages across learning contexts (in school, in afterschool and summer programs, and at home). One program in fact tells families, “We don’t enroll a student, we enroll the family.”

The CDF Freedom Schools’ family involvement strategy is a good example of a year-round effort to strengthen families, youth, and their communities. The CDF program sites regularly engage families in meetings and other workshops on topics such as financial planning and literacy, book clubs, and support groups that meet community needs (see page 15 in Appendix).

Building on organizational commitment and capacity

At an organizational level, the initiatives in this study make year-round learning happen in three ways:

- Planning and implementing for year-round learning.* Programs that offer year-round programming have often arrived at this configuration over time. The afterschool component may grow out of the success of a summer component or vice versa. Some initiatives have grown out of a long conversation with community members about their needs and wishes for local resources. Organizations in this study, then, demonstrate a commitment to making these components work together. One initiative included in this study uses a community engagement process that involves hundreds of parents and community members giving input into the planning process at their neighborhood schools. Another initiative has a behind-the-scenes “cross-functional” team working to solve problems in the planning process. In another city, a large part of the planning has to do with creating a sustainable infrastructure to support the initiative and the students in it; it uses seven task forces to bring together members of the community from higher education, the mayor’s office, the school board, and other

“We don’t just enroll a student, we enroll the family.”

institutions. These efforts help the initiative become a “movement” in the city rather than a discrete program. The Higher Achievement Program is one example of an organization that is committed to using a process of continuous improvement to make sure its afterschool and summer components work together and work with the school system (see page 16 in Appendix). This commitment to the process of implementing year-round learning, the programs hope, will improve the likelihood that they are in the communities to stay.

- Having a champion.* Because year-round learning often entails changing people’s thinking about where learning happens and what supports students need, these initiatives often have a champion—someone who is leading the charge for reconfiguring a community’s understanding of what the education system can be. One program director works on encouraging institutions to “shift their paradigms just a little bit and think about serving children a little bit differently.” In another initiative, the director encourages other community leaders to think about youth in a broader context and says that “inch by inch,” this change in perspective is permeating the school district.
- Establishing common goals and outcomes, often using shared data.* Part of creating this kind of paradigm shift is creating shared goals and outcomes among community institutions. Many schools recognize that partnerships with community organizations can help their students be successful, while afterschool and summer programs are increasingly focusing more on what they can do to promote academics in order to help students achieve in school. Conversations between afterschool and summer providers and school teachers about their respective goals can help all parties to see that they exist to support students and can help each other by working together. Programs are increasingly using data to identify student needs and progress as a way to support these shared goals. At least eight initiatives in this study are tracking student assessment and progress. In some district- and

community-level initiatives, there are efforts to bring data from across agencies together into one system to track student performance in schools, which services they are using, and what activities they are involved in; one city calls this a Partnership Dashboard. Another city is implementing an “early warning” system to identify students who are falling behind and who might be at risk for dropping out of school, with indicators ranging from poor achievement to tardiness, so that partners can target those students for additional support. Even at the college level, one program continues regular assessments of students to see where they might need help.

Engaging and being active in the local community

Whether an initiative is entirely local in its scope or tailors its programs to each of its sites, understanding the needs and culture of a particular place is an important part of establishing year-round learning. Programs are “not just tenants in a shopping mall,” as one respondent noted, but integral parts of communities and of youth’s lives. This is true both at an organizational level and at a student level, and is manifest in three ways in the initiatives in our study. Specifically, initiatives are focusing on

- *Being participant-driven.* Many initiatives rely on local decision-makers, such as schools and parents and students, to determine the scope of their programming, thus ensuring that they are providing services that youth and the community need and want. In Cincinnati, the Community Learning Centers (CLC) are driven by community needs (see page 17 in Appendix), with one school’s CLC based on Montessori principles while other schools operate under different models of their own choosing. Another city has established local school-based centers where families can check out learning materials and use computers and attend parent enrichment nights that cover everything from financial literacy to learning how to knit.

Programs are “not just tenants in a shopping mall,” but integral parts of communities and of youth’s lives.

- *Understanding and being involved in the local community.* To truly relate to the local context, people involved with the initiatives need to be part of the community fabric. This can mean making intentional efforts to understand youth’s interests and realities outside of the school and program hours. One director notes: “If the students tell me that there’s something going on and they’ll give me enough notice, I’ll go to the church gospel or Christmas performance... and it’s important. It really is to just show that you’re present, not just when it’s important to you, but also when it’s important to them.”

To ensure that programming is based on local youth’s needs, one program has older youth serve as advisors; these advisors know what the younger participants experience in their day-to-day lives in their neighborhoods and schools and can say, “I did this, and you can do it too.” Programs in this study with multiple locations also ensure that these locations are flexible enough to tailor their work to local environments, so that the programs feel rooted in the place.

- *Leveraging existing local resources to offer comprehensive services and learning opportunities.* Effective year-round learning requires many stakeholders to share responsibility for learning outcomes. This entails creating partnerships between youth organizations, school districts, teachers, families, students, and public youth-serving agencies. Multiple partners with diverse capacities can help year-round programs offer comprehensive services and opportunities to students that are not likely to be available elsewhere. Many of these initiatives rely on partnerships with community organizations and agencies to serve youth, leveraging existing resources in order to do their work more effectively and efficiently. Schools, local service providers, local government agencies, colleges and universities, and foundations topped the lists of partners for the initiatives in this study. According to one provider, “We didn’t give birth to a new service [or] any new agencies. Everything already existed, and [we provided]

the opportunity to be able to marry them and have them take whatever program they were doing some place else, and do it in a school at the invitation of and consistent with and aligned with what that particular site wants, so it's successful, it's got customers, and it works!"

Say Yes to Education Syracuse has obtained the support of a wide range of community leaders and uses existing resources in the school district, public agencies, and nonpro ts to help youth get on the pathway to college, beginning in kindergarten (see page 18 in Appendix).

By leveraging local resources and maintaining a close partnership with the school district, the initiative is working toward becoming an integral part of the city's education community and doing work that would not be possible in isolation. Partnering with districts also has bene ts to community programs: One program reports getting access to "every piece of data" being collected by the local school district on their participants, and another initiative reports working with the district to obtain a list of quali ed students to help the program's recruitment and application process.

Early lessons

ere are several existing models for integrated learning supports, building on years of research and debate about what youth need to become healthy adults. But, to date, little attention has been paid to initiatives that are trying to create continuous supports for youth across the year. Year-round learning, as conceptualized in this brief, is a valuable and potentially powerful model in the universe of reform strategies concerning time for learning, including those that lengthen the school day and year. is study not only sheds light on several promising principles for year-round learning but also yields several lessons for policymakers and practitioners about supporting this work:

Keep the focus on learners. Partnerships and other relationships in these initiatives are typically focused on learning—and speci cally, on what kinds of

supports individual children and youth need in order to learn. Keeping students on a trajectory toward a healthy adulthood will depend on this emphasis on individual pathways for learning. In order to support this goal, decisions at the policy and organizational level need to be focused on outcomes for students

involved in these initiatives and what types of supports year-round learning can provide for students' individual pathways.

Be adaptable to changing environments. Being nimble and accommodating helps year-round programs keep their services at the forefront during times of change in the schools and/or communities they serve.

Working collaboratively and in innovative ways with school systems and principals to position themselves as integral partners in expanded learning, for example, ensures that programs implementing year-round learning continue to provide students with seamless access to diverse services and supports, both a er school and during the summer.

Provide flexible funding. Funding for year-round learning will necessarily come from many sources, given that this model stretches across sectors (public and nonpro t) and across institutions. Funders might be interested in funding an a erschool component, a summer component, or a part of a community school model, but an entire year-round initiative is expensive to run with many moving parts. Programs may not expand in the way they initially wanted, even if the program has a positive impact on youth, due to the cost of the additional sta , resources, and space that running a year-round initiative requires. Desiloing funding and providing exibility will go a long way toward helping these learning partnerships develop and ourish.

Support shared data. Transparency and communication among partners are critical as they work together to support student success. While there are important privacy issues to consider, sharing data can ultimately strengthen outcomes for students. Sharing school assessment test results, for instance, can help to reinforce students' learning goals and target areas for extra attention in a erschool tutoring. is data sharing can come in many forms—from

"We didn't give birth to a new service or agency. Everything already existed, and we provided the opportunity to marry them and offer the services where they were wanted."

informal discussions between partners to shared access to online data systems. But no matter the form, the focus should be on how sharing these data and information will ultimately benefit individual students.

Keep families and the community engaged.

Year-round learning can be even more successful on a large scale within the context of a family and community outreach effort. Actively seeking family and community involvement in youth's learning helps to build external commitment and support for a program, while also supporting healthy families and community development.

Conclusion

As the programs and initiatives in this study suggest, year-round learning is a promising way of thinking about learning time and opportunities and how to organize them to support youth development, particularly for economically and otherwise disadvantaged youth. It can help to close the gaps in access to services and learning opportunities, provide developmentally appropriate activities and challenges, and strengthen student-centered learning.

This new way of thinking about learning time raises questions for educators, youth-serving organizations, parents, and students themselves to consider, including: what does it take to fully leverage community resources for year-round learning and how can we design a seamless learning pathway that connects opportunities across developmental stages, calendar time, and learning environments, including digital media? The 14 initiatives studied for this brief offer starting points, but more work is necessary. Their early successes and challenges suggest the need for continuing dialogue and mutual learning among all those committed to guiding youth toward productive lives now and in the future.

Appendix

Year-round Learning Profiles

The Work of Six Initiatives to Link Afterschool,
Summer, and School-day Learning



America SCORES
CDF Freedom Schools
Harlem RBI
The Higher Achievement Program
Cincinnati Community Learning Centers
Say Yes to Education Syracuse

Year-round Learning Profiles

The six programs and initiatives profiled in this Appendix were chosen because their work highlights a key theme or principle discussed in the accompanying brief, and together they represent a range of different configurations of year-round learning. For more information on these organizations and initiatives, please refer to their websites (found in the table on pages 4–5).⁷

America SCORES

Aligning curriculum and standards to support youth across the year

Developed in 1994 by a public school teacher in Washington, DC, America SCORES promotes positive outcomes for youth including literacy, healthy lifestyles, strong peer relationships, and service. The program operates in 14 cities nationwide, serving 6,000 youth, aged 5 to 15. To ensure that youth have access to positive developmental experiences throughout the year, the program offers a poetry curriculum during the fall semester, a service-learning curriculum during the spring (both programs running in 90-minute sessions 2–4 times a week), and a year-long soccer program, with some sites hosting a summer camp focused on literacy and soccer.

America SCORES offers continuity between youth's school-day and out-of-school time experiences in two ways. First, the America SCORES curriculum committee aligns its program components (literacy, service learning, and soccer) with the National Council of Teachers in English (NCTE) English Language Arts standards, the National Health Education Standards, and the National Standards of Physical Activity. The local program education directors then align these national standards with the local school curricula and district learning goals.

Therefore, what is taught during a afterschool is linked with school-day learning. Second, the America SCORES sites are primarily staffed with teachers whom students have during the school day, which helps youth build trusting and consistent relationships with adults. For example, a student's English teacher may be her afterschool poetry coordinator, and

a student's school soccer coach may also be her afterschool soccer camp coach. As a result, youth experience their teachers in a new light, and teachers often are able to take the program experiences back into their classrooms. In some instances, the America SCORES curriculum has even become a part of the school day. As one program director explains, "In some places, there was no distinction between the school day and program—instead of having poetry only in the afternoons, [teachers] also used our curriculum during the school day—not just for the program kids, but for all of the fourth grade."

The program data (in collaboration with district- and school-wide data systems) offers credence to these year-round efforts. Between 60 and 70 percent of youth in the program participate in both the fall and spring, and many sites, according to program staff, have seen "tremendous development" of youth's teamwork, leadership, soccer and writing skills, and commitment to the program. An evaluation by the American Heart Association and the National Institutes of Health tracked 178 students in third through fifth grade enrolled in the America SCORES Bay Area program; study results suggest that the program increases fitness and may improve BMI in some minority children.⁸ The 2005–06 national evaluation of the program's 12 sites found that America SCORES helps youth achieve positive outcomes including improvement in creative and expository writing, improvements in cooperation and teamwork, and higher confidence levels.⁹

CDF Freedom Schools®

Making families part of the year-round effort

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools® were established in 1992 as community-driven summer programs designed to combine academic preparation with social awareness and activism in predominantly low-income African American communities. CDF Freedom Schools began offering after-school programming after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 in order to better serve children and families from affected areas. With this expansion, CDF Freedom Schools could provide youth participants with access to year-round homework and reading assistance, weekly activities including workshops focused on topics such as social action and conflict resolution, and community-based projects (e.g., policy activities that encourage youth connections with lawmakers and community leaders) that promote academic learning, civic responsibility, and youth development. CDF Freedom Schools have since expanded their after-school programming to 10 sites. The primary goal of the CDF Freedom Schools program is to instill in youth the idea that "I can make a difference in myself, my family, my community, my nation, and my world, with hope, education, and action." The program currently operates in 29 states and has served over 80,000 youth.

The CDF Freedom Schools program recognizes that youth's academic learning and civic engagement are most likely to happen when families are involved. To promote family engagement in the program, CDF Freedom Schools sites offer families workshops on literacy, child development, financial planning, and other topics of interest as identified by parents. The

program also requires families to attend weekly parent sessions during the summer, and monthly sessions during the school year. The relationships generated between program staff and families become organic and supportive, leading to higher youth attendance rates, more family volunteers (to help maintain the facilities and assist with snacks, setup, and cleanup, for example), and greater sense of community within and outside the program. As one national staff member notes, "We do a lot of self-empowerment, believing in yourself, helping parents understand that their kids are capable. Once that foundation is set, then [youth's] literacy and math achievements are celebrated...their whole sense of self-confidence grows, which transfers over to the schools."

Emerging data show that the CDF Freedom Schools strategy to involve families is having a positive effect on children. Families note desirable changes in their children's attitudes towards learning and in taking responsibility for their actions, as well as an overall slight positive change across several dimensions of child development.¹⁰ Studies conducted in 2009 and 2010 by the University of North Carolina of 14 CDF Freedom Schools sites in Bennettsville, SC, and Charlotte, NC, indicate that 90% of the children participating in the summer program maintained or made gains in their reading skills over the course of the summer. Both Bennettsville and Charlotte locations focus on teacher-family collaboration and equipping families with the knowledge and skills needed to support and scaffold youth literacy.¹¹

Harlem RBI

Engaging students over time through sports and academics

Founded in 1991 in East Harlem, New York, Harlem RBI offers year-round programming with curriculum and opportunities for youth that build over time, with the hope that youth will stay with the program year after year. The continuum begins when students enter the REAL Kids Summer and After-School Program

during their tween years (ages 8–11). The REAL Kids program, serving students from 25 to 30 area schools, promotes literacy, social-emotional development, and academic learning. In addition, students have access to Choice Time, with a menu of activity options focused on baseball, soccer, nutrition, and enrichment.

Harlem RBI (continued)

As teenagers, students progress into the TeamBuilders program, designed for sixth through eighth graders to support their social and emotional development, improve their academic skills and school attendance, and promote leadership. In 9th and 10th grade, participants enter TeamWorks, a program focused on service learning, independent projects, and summer jobs such as serving as baseball and softball coaches, umpires, and mentors. Finally, 11th and 12th graders progress into DreamWorks, a “soup to nuts” program designed to prepare students for their post-secondary futures.

Part of the success of the program is the fact that youth form strong bonds with their peers through a cohort model: According to one staff member, “At Harlem RBI, you stay with the same cohort and your group and team through your entire career. All of the

7th graders are moving up to 8th grade team, moving up to the 9th grade team, moving to the 10th grade team, in lock-step.” The organization’s emphasis on youth-directed activities helps to promote cohort engagement and creates a sense of community and belonging, and as a result, youth “say things like, ‘This is a second home to us.’”

The balance between academics and sports builds diverse academic and developmental competencies that support high school graduation and college entry. Staff note that students are “not coming here because they conceive of themselves as future college students; [instead,] they get nested in the program and see that attending college is part of the culture and expectations, and [then that expectation] shifts for them.”

The Higher Achievement Program

Commitment to continuous improvement in year-round learning

The Higher Achievement Program provides a rigorous year-round learning experience for middle school students in Washington, DC; Alexandria and Richmond, VA; and Baltimore, MD, lasting from sixth through eighth grade. Its mission is to prepare students from under-resourced communities for acceptance into top high schools, and keep them on track to college. The program embeds its participants, or “scholars,” in a culture of high expectations, and the scholars, in turn, invest 650 after-school and summer hours to academic and enrichment opportunities per year. As one staff member notes, “It’s a year-round, multi-year commitment.... It takes this year-round commitment to really get on that track for a top high school, which gets you on track for college.” High expectations extend to the program itself; Higher Achievement is committed to continuous improvement and has embarked on a randomized, long-term impact evaluation of the program model—the first of its kind. The evaluation is being conducted by Public/Private Ventures and is tracking learning outcomes of 1,020 student scholars through 2011.

Scholars in Higher Achievement attend 15 hours of after-school programming three days per week from 3:00 to 8:00 p.m. This time is spent on homework help and tutoring; elective classes (including subjects such as dance, music, drama, basketball, and chess); and mentoring sessions in math, literature, and other topics, all taught in small groups by volunteer teaching mentors. During the summer, scholars attend a full-day Summer Academy for six weeks, where they are grouped by grade level and engage in hands-on activities focused on math, literature, science, and social studies. Scholars also attend weekly field trips and one 3-day out-of-town trip to a college or university. The after-school and summer curricula are linked through the four social justice themes of the program—freedom, justice, solidarity, and voice—reinforced through multicultural activities and embedded in the academic courses offered at Higher Achievement.

The Higher Achievement program also collaborates with the public schools that their scholars attend. Full-time program staff members dedicate several

Higher Achievement (continued)

hours each week to visiting scholars in their school classrooms and meeting with their teachers in an effort to serve each student well through individualized services. Each student also receives a 360-degree analysis, which measures changes in skills, attitudes, and behaviors, and identifies areas for improvement: One staff member notes, “If there are scholars who need individual tutoring, we find volunteers to do that, to really make sure that we address the needs of the individual scholars in the program.” Higher Achievement has recently piloted a follow-up program to make sure that recent program graduates are transitioning well. Staff follow up with each student throughout the ninth grade and connect

them to any necessary support services, such as tutoring or social services.

The commitment to year-round learning and continuous improvement has led to positive academic results. The scholars, on average, improve by one whole letter grade in reading and math, progress in GPA from 2.5 in fifth grade to 3.1 by eighth grade, and boost their District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System standardized test scores by 20 percentage points. Today, 95% of Higher Achievement graduates are placed in the top college-preparatory high schools in the DC area, and 93% of alumni have graduated from college.¹²

Cincinnati Community Learning Centers

A “customer-driven” model for supporting youth in need

In 2001, Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) launched the Community Learning Center initiative to turn its schools into “hubs for community services, providing access for students and families to health, safety, and social services, as well as recreational, educational, and cultural opportunities.”¹³ At the same time, CPS leadership invested \$1 billion in equipping every school with the infrastructure necessary to support this broad range of services through a Facilities Master Plan to rebuild or renovate every school in the district. While site-based governance was already in place through Local School Decision Making Committees (LSDMCs), in order to create these new community learning centers, each school and its surrounding community engaged in a comprehensive planning process to develop the vision, assets, needs assessment, and priorities specific to the culture and wishes of each neighborhood. Each community oversees the selection of partnering agencies and maintains ongoing governance of the community learning centers.

Community Learning Centers have overcome and challenged barriers to learning by aligning programs, partners, and services to support children and youth all year long. Nearly every school in CPS has been redesigned and is open for extended hours and year-

round with programming and resources that reflect the needs of the neighborhood. As one observer notes, “It’s completely customer-driven.” For example, one component of the Facilities Master Plan was the creation of space within schools for health clinics. Some communities chose to utilize separate entrances to keep clinics open for extended hours. One school, which sees overcoming physical and mental health challenges as particularly important for student and community well-being, partners with a local pharmacy, primary health care provider, oral health care provider, and a behavioral health clinic to provide services through this space. Communities have also created new K–12 programs, a Montessori program, a museum school, and a community arts center. These investments of community resources are designed to create the conditions necessary for learning, to enhance academics, and to revitalize the surrounding neighborhoods.

Benefits across community learning centers have included higher attendance rates, reduction in disciplinary incidents, improved academic performance, greater parental involvement, and even an influx of young middle-class families who want to send their children to the neighborhood schools.¹⁴

Say Yes to Education Syracuse

Leveraging local resources to help youth on a pathway to college

Say Yes to Education Syracuse, currently serving approximately 3,600 youth, is a district-wide, comprehensive, year-round effort to improve educational outcomes for urban students. Started as part of Say Yes to Education, Inc.—a national non-profit foundation dedicated to helping low-income urban students access higher education—Say Yes to Education Syracuse is designed to engage an entire community in aligning its resources in order to both remove barriers to learning and to help students prepare for and get into college.

Say Yes to Education Syracuse is a partnership of diverse stakeholders—the school district, mayor’s office, county executive, university chancellor, teacher’s union, school board, private and public agencies, and families. As one staff member explains, the initiative wanted to bring together “a group of people that...understood that school districts can’t do this alone, that it takes an entire community to align its resources, its partnerships, as well as community-based organizations, grass roots organizations, congregations.... All of this is about relationships and trust.”

While the services and overall budget are under the school district umbrella, helping students succeed and overcome barriers to learning are top priorities for key leaders in the city. For example, the initiative manages seven main task forces, a community advisory group, and a mass communication campaign, all designed to create sustainability for the initiative, to maintain and grow public/private partnerships, and to keep the public engaged in the effort. The collective efforts have created a sense of year-round investment in students’ learning and development.

Say Yes to Education Syracuse partners with local health providers, enrolling every child in health care. The initiative also works with the Department of Social Services to assist in case management and to streamline information-sharing across agencies. Free transportation to after-school programming is also provided to students in order to make them feel safe and help sustain their participation. And, to ensure students view college as a possibility, Syracuse has partnered with a wide range of colleges and universities to offer financial support to students.

Engaging the district as the key partner in Say Yes to Education Syracuse has also helped to build strong school relationships. The initiative’s school-based staff, such as site directors and program coordinators, oversee academic rigor and professional development.

The district’s certified teachers help to lead after-school and summer programs. The continuity of teachers throughout the school and non-school components helps to build trusting relationships with students. Capitalizing on the vast variety of partners, Say Yes to Education Syracuse also hires over 300 students from local universities and colleges to assist teachers in running seventeen summer camps; these college students help to build the academic curriculum, work in the classrooms, and assist with enrichment opportunities.

Say Yes to Education Syracuse hopes the model will help to transform the entire city into a success story, where every child has the opportunity to succeed.

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About Harvard Family Research Project

Since 1983, we have helped stakeholders develop and evaluate strategies to promote the well-being of children, youth, families, and communities. Our work focuses primarily on three areas that support children's learning and development—early childhood education, out-of-school time programming, and family and community support in education.

Building on our knowledge that schools alone cannot meet the learning needs of our children, we also focus national attention on complementary learning. Complementary learning is the idea that a systemic approach, which integrates school and nonschool supports, can better ensure that all children have the skills they need to succeed. Underpinning all of our work is our commitment to evaluation for strategic decision making, learning, and accountability.



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