

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

YEAR-ROUND LEARNING

LINKING SCHOOL, AFTERSCHOOL, AND SUMMER LEARNING TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS



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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

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.

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

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

- *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.
- *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 after 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.

To read the full report and learn more about the programs and initiatives that participated in the study, visit: www.hfrp.org/Year-Round-Learning

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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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