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Boston After School & Beyond, Boston, MA



Summer School and Reading Proficiency

States can do more to ensure policies reflect best practices



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Summer reading has emerged as a key component of state legislation aimed at promoting student literacy. However, legislation has only scratched the surface when it comes to promoting best practices for effective summer reading programming.

School districts are investing in structured summer reading programs to ensure students are on track to read proficiently as they approach the end of third grade. The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) spoke with researcher **Geoffrey Borman** to learn more about what states are – and are not – including in summer reading policies.

What prompted your research? Many states are putting in place stronger policies to ensure students are reading on grade level by the end of grade three, often with the consequence that students who don't meet this goal may be held back. Current legislation in Iowa focuses on intensive reading instruction during the summer and throughout the school year for these students to remediate their reading deficiencies so that they can achieve grade-level proficiency in reading and stay on track. We wanted to provide an overview of the characteristics of summer school requirements in state literacy legislation, describe the best practices for summer school programs, and determine the prevalence of these best practices in states' summer school legislation.

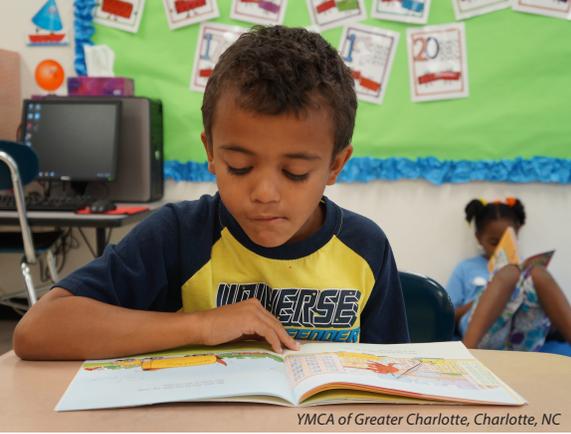
How did you choose the "best practices" for summer school? Our determinations of summer school best practices came from evidence presented in academ-

ic meta-analyses and literature reviews of summer learning, our expert opinion, and other authorities in the field of summer learning and summer school. This initial assessment of best practices will continue to be refined in future policy recommendations as we conduct deeper reviews of all known research on summer school programs and their effectiveness. Ultimately, we selected 13 best practices that the research suggests are important to summer school success.

What did you discover? There is a lot of variety across the country. Although 41 states have literacy legislation on the books, only 19 require or recommend that students who are reading below grade level attend summer school. And of these 19, only 14 states mention at least one of the 13 best practices, with the average number of practices at 2.2. The most common practice included in state policy is program evaluation—tracking fidelity and results to ensure the program is meeting its objectives. Mandates around teacher qualifications, research-based program design, and program duration were the next most common best practices.

What evidence points to the success of these policies in improving student achievement? This is precisely what we hope to evaluate next. When





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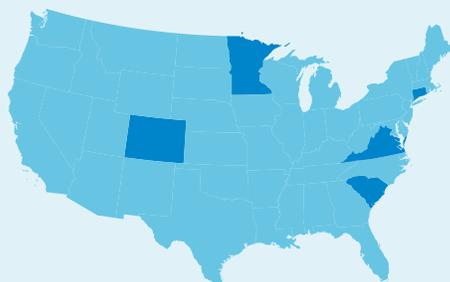
13 Best Practices

and their prevalence in state summer school policy

Number of states that include these best practices (out of 19 states)

➤ Early Planning	0
➤ Coordination with Schools	0
➤ Teacher Qualifications	6
➤ Teacher Training	4
➤ Transportation/Meals	3
➤ Enrichment Activities	0
➤ Community Partners	2
➤ Duration	5
➤ Individual/Small Group Instruction	1
➤ Parental Involvement	4
➤ Research-based	6
➤ Program Evaluation	8

Examples of Best Practices in State Policy



Connecticut requires support to help parents read with their children at home.

Minnesota and **South Carolina** recommend collaboration with community partners for enrichment, volunteers, space, and other resources.

Colorado requires reports on student progress, and **Virginia** requires annual revisions to programs based on evaluation results.

written into legislation, can these best practices actually promote system-wide success in improving student achievement? Implementation strategies will likely vary from state to state and could also affect success.

Why do you think so few state laws explicitly mandate best practices? Few states have actually linked the development of legislation with the research literature on summer learning and summer school. It may seem like a fairly intuitive linkage, especially considering the recent emphasis on evidence-based education and social policy, but policymakers have rarely made this connection in the summer school and literacy legislation we've examined.

Of the best practices not currently found in legislation, which do you think hold the greatest promise for successful summer reading programs? We did find legislation urging schools to adopt research-based practices in 6 states. However, I do not believe that number is high enough. In my opinion, all schools should seek out and implement summer school programs that have strong empirical evidence of success. In order to promote replicable positive outcomes for kids, I believe that this is the most important best practice. I believe that some policymakers are reticent to legislate specific programs or curricula, but if we have strong evidence that certain programs and practices make a difference for students, we should promote their widespread adoption.

There seems to be a wide variation in duration of summer literacy programs. Is there an ideal amount of time students should spend engaged in structured reading activities during the summer? There is considerable variation. We found that Harris Cooper and his colleagues, in their 2000 meta-analysis of summer school programs, and Patricia Lauer and her colleagues, in their 2006 meta-analysis of out-of-school-time programs, which included summer school programs, both estimated the effect of program duration on academic impacts. Cooper and his team found the largest effect sizes on academic outcomes for remedial summer

school programs that are between 60 and 120 hours in length, while Lauer and her colleagues found out-of-school-time reading programs of between 44 and 84 hours in length had the largest effect on reading outcomes. Together, these estimates suggest an appropriate program duration of between 60 and 84 hours.

These policies incorporate summer learning as a remediation strategy. Do you think summer can also support acceleration of literacy achievement? Absolutely, yes. As a remediation strategy, summer school is a key policy, because it offers a way to provide struggling students with the extra instructional time that they need to catch up to their peers. However, I believe that summer school policies can be more proactive, and can promote opportunities for students to read, attend summer camps, and engage in other summer learning opportunities that may stem the achievement slides that students often experience during the months when they are out of school. Ideally, by offering these opportunities summer after summer, we can prevent the achievement gaps from growing and intervene before many students struggle, fall behind, and require remediation.

What do you see as the biggest roadblock to quality literacy instruction in the summer? I think many states and districts fall short due to a lack of resources. Summer school often becomes a lower priority relative to the regular school year. I also believe that state legislators can do more to develop regulations that further support the adoption of evidence-based summer school programs.

What are the next steps in this research? I believe that the next steps are to evaluate how a set of legislated summer school best practices can actually change the quality of summer school implementation and the results achieved for students. In addition, we need a wider array of summer school programs that have sound evidence that they can consistently improve student achievement and are truly replicable across a variety of contexts.

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The vision of the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) is for every child to be safe, healthy, and engaged in learning during the summer. To realize that vision, our mission is to connect and equip schools, providers, communities, and families to deliver high-quality summer learning opportunities to our nation's youth to help close the achievement gap and support healthy development.

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