

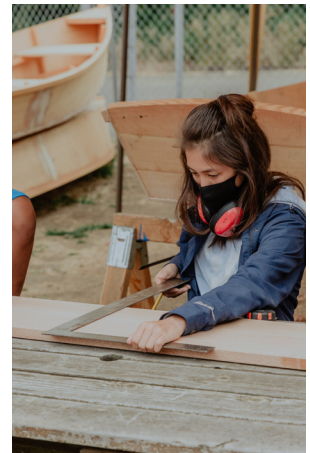
# Whatever It Takes: Summer 2021

OregonASK Network



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The photographs used in this report were captured from comprehensive summer learning programs across the state of Oregon in 2021. Special thanks to Wind & Oar, My Voice Music, Todos Juntos, Trackers, Boys & Girls Club, YMCA Child Development Center, and Airway Science for Kids for allowing us to share the magic.

# Introduction

It is tempting to think of childhood summer as a carefree time filled with summer camp, long days in the sun, melting popsicles, and freedom from schoolwork. And for some families, that's exactly what summer is. But for many other, less privileged families, summer camps and vacations are out of reach, parents juggle work and child care while school doors are closed, and school meals no longer offset childhood food insecurity. Inherently, summer is a time of privilege and inequity. A foundational meta-analysis of summer learning found that all students lost mathematics and reading knowledge over the summer, but that losses were greater for low-income students (Cooper, Nye, et al., 1996). Peterson and Vandell (2021) reported that low-income students and children of color are much less likely to have access to summer enrichment, and America After 3pm (Afterschool Alliance, 2020) found that youth in higher income families are almost 3 times as likely to participate in a summer program compared to youth from families with low incomes. Even more, many families lose vital supports when school closes for the summer. As noted in the National Academies of Sciences *Shaping Summertime Experiences* report, families can lose, “access to healthy meals, access to medical care, daily supervision, and structured enrichment opportunities.... During the summer, low-income children and youth have lesser gains—and in some cases losses—in reading aptitude, greater exposure to violence and crime, and further weight gain for those with obesity.”

Summer is often a lost opportunity, especially for under-served youth. But it doesn't have to be. Summer has tremendous potential to support academic learning, social emotional learning, and healthy development in youth. When evaluating summer programs against ESSA's Evidence Standards, for instance, McCombs et al. found evidence that academic learning, at-home learning, social and emotional well-being, and employment and career summer programs were effective in terms of improving youth outcomes. Every Summer Counts' longitudinal analysis of the National Summer Learning Project found that among all students offered the summer program, there were short-term, statistically significant benefits in academic learning, and that high attenders and repeat attenders reaped the most benefits. The research base for summer learning is expansive; [The National Summer Learning Association](#), [The Wallace Foundation](#), and the [RAND Corporation](#) all have searchable resource libraries on summer learning, including peer-reviewed research studies, tools, and other resources. As Peterson and Vandell (2020) state, “Bottom-line, quality summer and afterschool opportunities have the evidence base to be deployed to help improve student learning and performance on a variety of factors critical to student success.”

In 2019, 19% (or 115,457) of Oregon's youth participated in a structured summer experience, including summer learning programs, sports programs, summer camps, summer school, summer jobs, and internships (America After 3pm, 2020).



These summer learning opportunities were offered through a disjointed web of organizations, including traditional summer camps, local cities and parks and recreation departments, youth development organizations like Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCAs, schools, churches, community-based organizations, and a whole host of other organizations. Traditionally, there has been little public funding available for summer learning, and parents are primarily left to their own devices to find and pay for any activities for their children. Research from America After 3pm indicates that this disjointed system has resulted in limited access that does not keep up with demand. In 2019, 36% (or 179,941) of Oregon's youth were not in a summer program, but would be enrolled if one were available to them, compared to the 11% that actually participated. At the household level, 62% of families say that they would have enrolled their child in a summer program if one were available, an increase from 48% in 2009.

But in 2021, we threw out the playbook. Summer 2021 saw an unprecedented level of attention and infusion of federal funds through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) III funding for states and schools. According to a national survey of school district leaders by the School Superintendent Association, summer programs were the top investment of ARP funds, with 75% of respondents saying they spent funds on summer learning and other enrichment opportunities. Federal stipulations mandated that \$11 million of Oregon's \$1.12 billion share of ESSER III funds be spent directly on summer learning. Oregon, however, went above



and beyond these federal funds. Governor Kate Brown and the Oregon Legislature committed \$250 million to a comprehensive Summer Learning and Child Care Funding Package. This historic investment, in addition to a few smaller funding streams, transformed the landscape of summer learning in Oregon, making publicly-funded summer learning opportunities available at a scale that has never been seen before. This report explores what that funding made possible, and offers a glimpse of what summer learning looked like across the state in 2021.



# Methodology

With support from the National Conference of State Legislatures, OregonASK launched a summer learning data collection effort mirroring our data collection and mapping of afterschool programs. Our goal was to put together a comprehensive landscape of summer learning opportunities in Oregon. In practice, this meant creating a list – as exhaustively as possible – of camps, classes, and other youth-serving programs that operated in summer 2021. Summer learning is a constellation of opportunities offered by a patchwork of providers, including camps, local governments, school districts, non-profits, community organizations, for-profit organizations, and others. To collect information from such a wide variety of providers, we stitched together a multi-pronged approach using a variety of data collection methods. The framing goal guiding the project was to understand which organizations offer summer learning opportunities, what those opportunities are, and where those opportunities are located.

Our primary data collection tool was a short survey for summer program managers and directors. Survey questions included programmatic information about who operates the programs, funding streams, costs and scholarships rates, transportation, activities, partnerships, and barriers. A key part of the survey asked respondents to list any summer learning sites that operated in 2021, the address of each site, the approximate number of youth served (not unduplicated), and the dates and hours of operation. The survey was distributed via email to all program providers in OregonASK's existing database, as well as every school district who received funding from Oregon Department of Education to offer summer learning programs this year. Free registration to OregonASK's Oregon Afterschool Conference was offered in exchange for completing the survey. Two follow-up emails were sent to non-responders.

While efforts were made to collect as many survey responses as possible, not all program providers have the interest or capacity to complete a survey. To ensure the inclusion of as many programs as possible (regardless of ability to complete the survey), we undertook several additional methods to identify summer learning programs:

- » The Oregon Community Foundation provided a list of all programs funded through the K-12 Summer Learning Grant. The list included each program's name, city, and county.
- » OregonASK staff dedicated time to scouring online databases (typically created for parents looking to enroll their children in programs) to identify additional summer learning programs across the state. In order to qualify, researchers confirmed that the program operated in 2021, determined the location where programming was offered, and whether it was an overnight or day program.

Once data collection concluded in September 2021, survey data was cleaned, duplicate responses removed, and results analyzed using Tableau. Summer learning sites identified



through survey responses, online research, and the K-12 Summer Learning Grantee list were combined, sorted, and cross-referenced by program name, site name, and address. Duplicate programs were removed. In some cases, school districts and community-based organizations partnered to offer a full day of programming. Wherever possible, these collaborations were identified and combined in survey results to reduce duplication.

## Response counts

- » **270 survey responses collected.** Please note these survey responses are at the organizational level, and many programs operate multiple sites.<sup>1</sup> Survey response counts broken down by organization type are available in the appendix.
- » **Total of 1,770 summer learning sites identified**
  - » 807 sites were identified through OregonASK’s Summer Learning Survey
  - » 560 sites were identified through online databases and general web searches
  - » 403 sites were identified through the K-12 Summer Learning Grantee list (please note, this does not represent all sites funded through the K-12 Summer Learning Grants; when duplication was identified between the grantee list and the list of sites identified through the Summer Learning Survey, sites were retained on the survey list and removed from the grantee list to avoid double counting).

In total, this data collection effort identified 1,770 program sites across the state. More detailed information (collected through the survey) is available for a sub-set of those programs (46%, or 807 sites). This list of sites is almost certainly not exhaustive, but it is, to our knowledge, the most comprehensive list of summer learning sites available in Oregon.



<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, “program” refers to an entity that offers some type of summer learning programming for youth, including schools, camps, parks and recreation departments, etc. “Site” refers to the physical location where the programming is offered to youth. In many cases, one program may operate multiple sites.

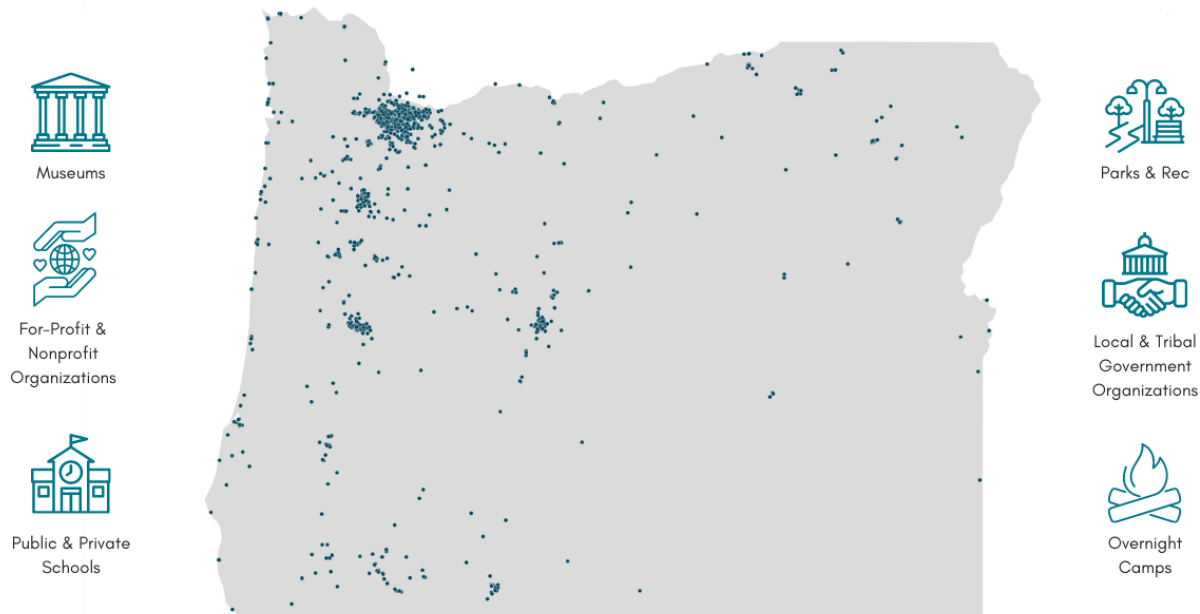


# Summer 2021 at a Glance



This infographic uses information from OregonASK's Summer Learning Survey, which collected 270 survey responses from programs around the state. Those 270 responses represent 807 individual summer learning sites. OregonASK also identified an additional 963 summer learning sites through online research and collaboration with the Oregon Community Foundation. Location information is available for all 1,770 identified sites; all other information is based on survey data that represents our sub-set of 807 sites.

The map below shows the 1,770 summer learning sites identified by OregonASK in 2021. These summer opportunities were offered by a constellation of organizations.



## On average, summer learning sites offered (overnight camps excluded):



20% of summer learning sites offered programming that lasted only one week. The most common start dates were Mid-June through Mid-July, and most common end dates were Late July through Late August

### Median operating capacity

Compared to a "normal" year's capacity

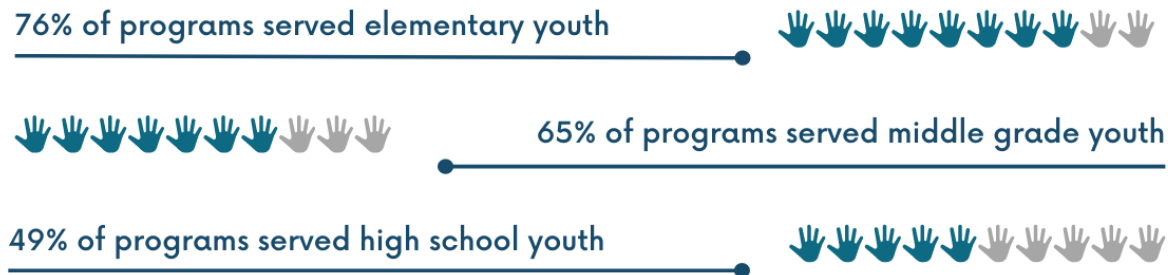
75%

### Programs that charged fees

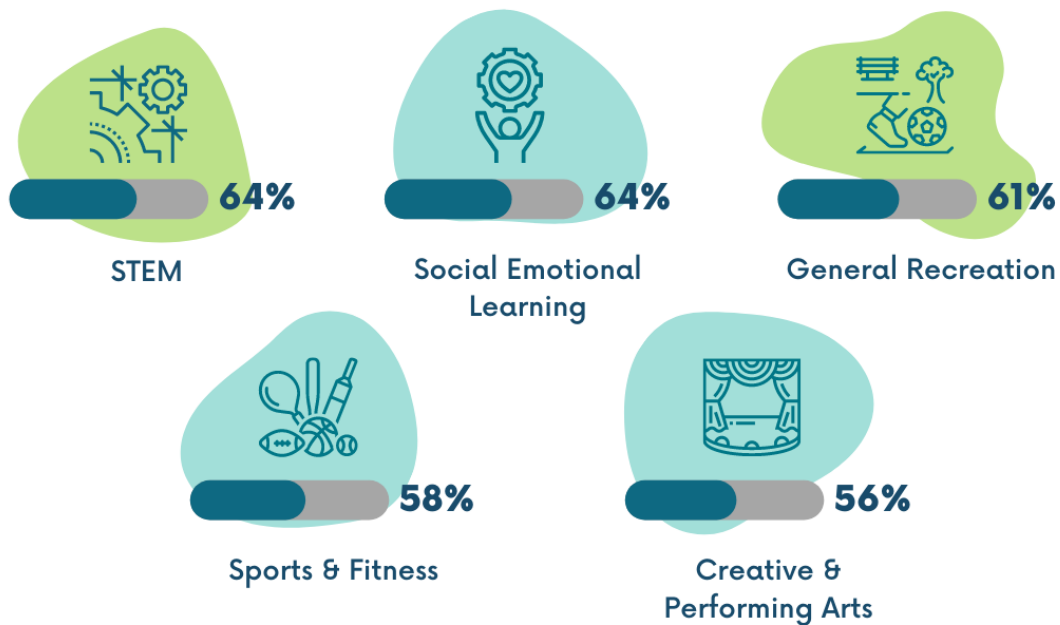
55%



The 807 summer learning sites in our sub-sample had the capacity to serve 94,165 youth.

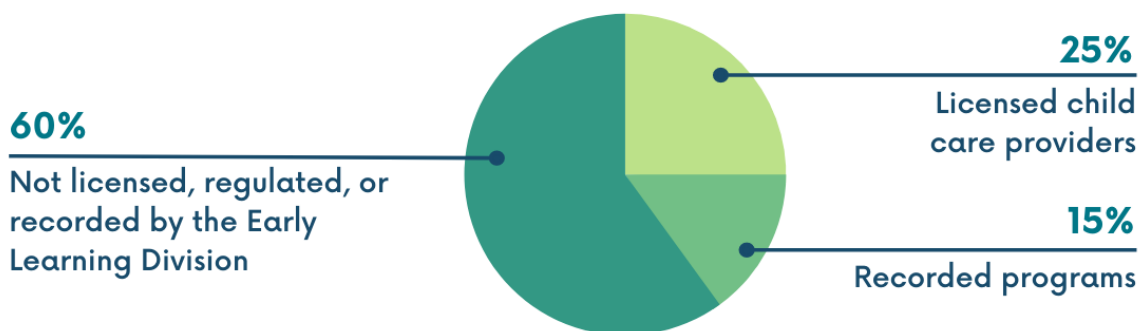


### The most commonly offered activities at summer programs:



### Licensing

Excluding programs offered by public schools and local governments:





# Themes Explored: Funding, Partnerships, and Challenges

## Funding

Typically there is limited public funding available for summer learning. Summer has historically been a time where youth in higher-income families have a wealth of opportunities, and youth in lower-income families have few. Summer 2021 was an exception. Coming off more than a year of distance learning, Summer 2021 was the first chance to bring youth back together to reconnect, have fun, and rediscover their love of learning together. Both the federal and state government rose to the moment and flooded Summer 2021 with a level of public funding never seen before.

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) included a third round of funding through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER III). This act provided substantial new funding available to all 50 states and many local communities extending over at least a 36-month period. The funds can be used to expand and improve existing summer and afterschool programs, and to support partnerships to start new programs, especially in low-income and moderately low-income schools and neighborhoods. Summer learning and summer enrichment are named directly in ESSER III portion of the Act, and guidelines mandate that 1% of funds be set aside at the state level for summer learning. According to an analysis of districts' ESSER III plans from Fall 2021 by Education Resources Strategies, summer learning led the charge in funding investment. Nearly 90% of the

districts studied used ESSER III funds for summer learning (the second most common use of funds, behind SEL support), and the average percent of ESSER III money spent on summer learning was 6.2%, larger than any other individual strategy.

In Oregon, ESSER III funds totaled \$1.12 billion provided to the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) in March 2021. Of that funding:

- » \$1 billion went directly to school districts
- » \$112 million remained with ODE

Of the \$112 million state-level funding:

- » \$56 million earmarked for learning loss
- » \$11 million earmarked for afterschool learning
- » \$11 million required to be spent on summer learning

Governor Kate Brown and the Oregon Legislature, however, went above and beyond the federal government by committing \$250 million of state funding to a comprehensive Summer Learning and Child Care Funding Package. As noted in the press release announcing the spending package, “The Summer Learning and Child Care package will create grants for enrichment activities, academic support, child care and early learning programs. Investments will be made equitably for Oregon’s Black, Indigenous, Tribal, Latino, Latina, and Latinx, Pacific Islander, and children of color, who have borne the disproportionate impact of the last year’s challenges.”



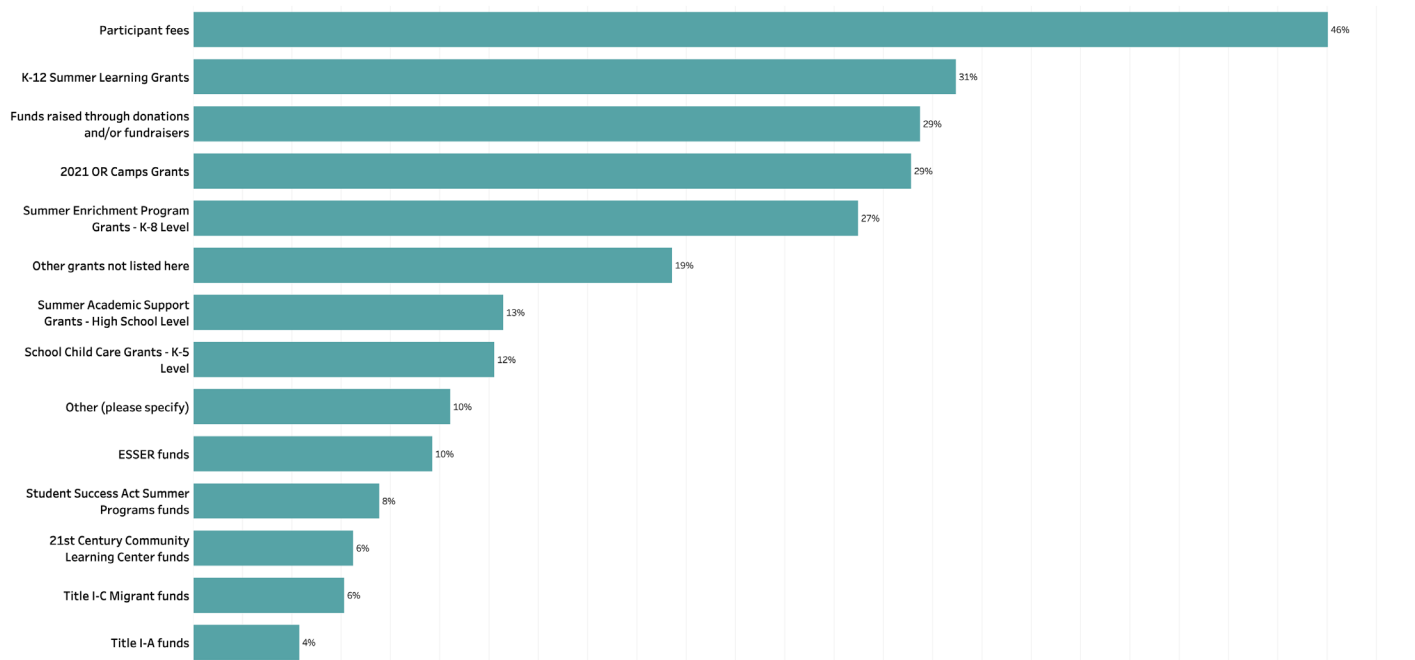
The package contained five specific investments:

- » Summer Enrichment and Academic Programs Grants (K-8): \$90 million
- » Summer Academic Support Grants (High School): \$72 million
- » Summer Learning Grants (for community organizations): \$40 million
- » School Child Care Grants (for wrap-around child care services at Title I Elementary School and Tribes): \$30 million
- » Early Learning Programs: \$13 million  
(more information about the investment package [available here](#))

Funds from these investments dispersed far and wide across the state. ODE has published a report on the portions of the investments they were responsible for, and the Oregon Community Foundation (OCF) has published information about the \$40 million in Summer Learning Grants distributed through their foundation (ODE's report can be found [on their website](#), and OCF's information is available [on their website](#)). The Oregon Summer Program Survey captured information on funding sources for summer programs using a broad net; all types of organizations and all types of funding sources were included. The data below includes public and non-public funding sources, and offers an overview of how all types of summer programs – from schools to overnight camps to parks and recreation departments to non-profits to for-profits – funded themselves in Summer 2021.

### Funding Sources for Summer 2021

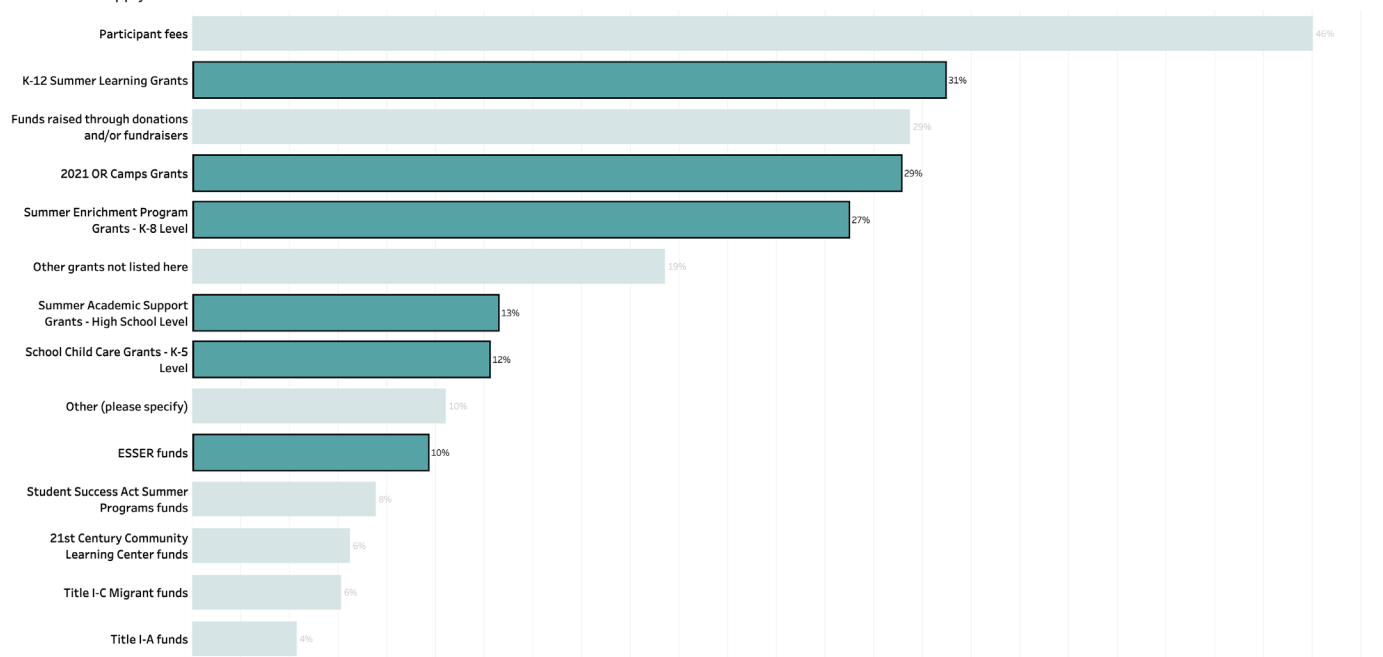
Mark all that apply



According to survey results, participant fees were easily the most common funding source, with 46% of survey respondents reporting using participant fees to generate funding. 31% of respondents reported using the K-12 Summer Learning Grants distributed through Oregon Community Foundation, 29% of respondents each reported using funds raised through donations or fundraisers and funding through the 2021 Oregon Camps grants, and 27% reported using the K-8 Summer Enrichment Grants distributed to schools through ODE. Percentages for additional funding sources are available in the chart above. Additionally, a breakdown of funding source by organization type is available in the appendix.

### Funding Sources for Summer 2021 (COVID-19 Relief Funds Highlighted)

Mark all that apply



Overall, **74%** of survey respondents used **at least one form of COVID-19 Relief funds** in Summer 2021.

## Key Takeaways from the Top Three Funding Sources

### Participant Fees

- » Summer programs run by governmental organizations and for-profit organizations were the most likely to charge participant fees, with 100% of responding governmental organizations reporting participation fees as a funding source, and 84% of for-profit organizations.
- » Licensed, recorded, and regulated programs were slightly more likely to use participant fees as a funding source (71% of responding programs) than programs that are not licensed, regulated or recorded by the Early Learning Division (60%).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> All analyses utilizing license status exclude public school and governmental organizations, as these organizations are never licensed.



## Summer Learning Grants

- » Non-profit organizations were the most likely to report using the K-12 Summer Learning Grants distributed through OCF, with 45% of non-profit respondents citing the grants as a funding source.
- » Recorded programs were the most likely to report using the K-12 Summer Learning Grants, with 65% reporting that they used the grants, compared to 42% of licensed providers and 33% of programs not licensed, recorded, or regulated.

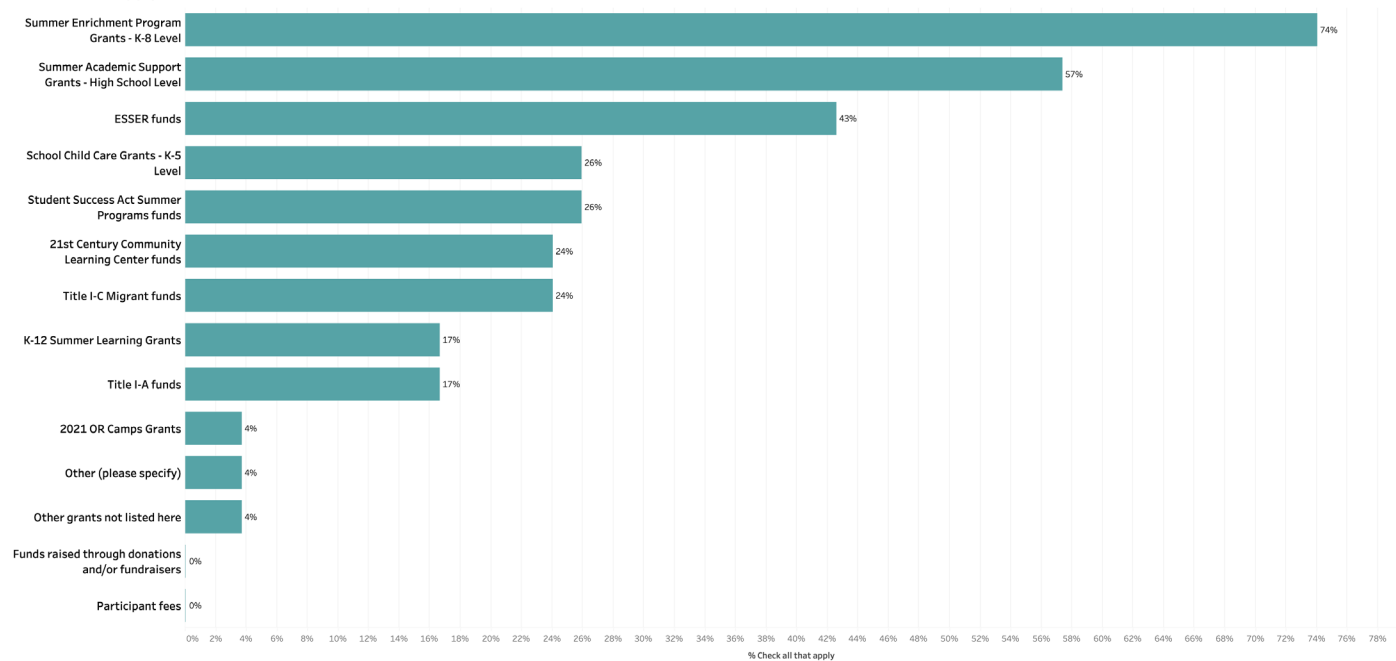
## Fundraisers and Donations

- » Programs run by higher-education institutions and non-profit organizations were by far the most likely to report using fundraisers and donations as a funding source (45% and 56%, respectively).
- » Licensed programs were less likely to report using funds raised through fundraisers or donations (30%), compared to 62% of recorded programs and 52% of programs not licensed, recorded, or regulated.

## School Funding

### Funding Sources for Summer 2021 (Public Schools & Districts Only)

Mark all that apply





74% of responding schools that completed the funding question reported using K-8 Summer Enrichment Grants, 57% reported using High School Summer Academic Support Grants, and 43% reported using ESSER funds. Other sources of funding were less frequently cited, and are available in the chart above.

ODE's final legislative report on the Summer Learning Grant Program indicated that 21% of K-8 Enrichment Grant Expenditures went to third-party contracts (for full expenditures, [see the full report here](#)). According to survey results (and excluding public schools and districts), for-profit organizations were the most likely to report using these third-party contracts, with 42% of for-profit respondents indicating the K-8 grants as a funding source, compared to 19% of respondents from governmental organizations, 18% of respondents from higher-education institutions, and 14% of respondents from non-profit organizations. For-profit survey respondents were also the most likely to report being fully licensed by the Early Learning Division, suggesting that schools may have prioritized licensed programs for their contracts.

ODE's final legislative report also shows that 11% of spending for the High School Summer Academic Support Grants went to third party contracts. Our survey results suggest that, while few non-school respondents reported using these grant funds, programs run by higher-education institutions may have been the most likely organizations to receive contracts under this grant, with 9% of respondents from higher-education institution reporting those grants as a funding source, compared to 2% of non-profit organizations, and 0% of all other categories.

Finally, ODE's report shows that 82% of K-5 Child Care Grant expenditures went to third-party contracts. Survey data indicates that licensed programs were the most likely to report using these third-party contracts, with 33% of respondents from licensed programs reporting using child care grant funds, compared to 15% of recorded programs.



# Partnerships

Partnerships were a key feature of summer learning in 2021. More than half of survey respondents (61%) indicated that their program was offered in partnership with another organization. Partnerships were with and between a wide variety of organizations, including everything from public schools and districts to government agencies to museums and local churches. Survey respondents reported partnerships with:

- » Public schools, school districts, and education service districts
- » Cities, Parks and Recreation Departments, and other local government agencies
- » Museums, theaters, and other cultural centers, including OMSI, Baker Heritage Museum, Columbia River Maritime Museum, Northwest Children's Theater, BEAT Children's Theater, ScienceWorks Museum, and the Museum at Warm Springs
- » Community based organizations, such as Self Enhancement Inc, SUN, Home Forward, local churches, Growing Gardens, and United Way
- » Libraries
- » Youth-serving organizations, such as Boys and Girls Clubs and KinderCare Champions
- » Fitness or sports programs, including Playworks, pools and aquatic centers, bike safety programs, Crater Lake Zip Lines, Rose City Rollers, and Soccer USA
- » Arts and music programs, including Mid-Valley Strings, Youth Music Project, and Lane Arts Council
- » Higher education institutions, particularly 4-H Extension programs
- » STEM programs, such as AKA Science, Engineering for Kids, Women in STEM, Mad Science, and STEM Hubs
- » Tribes and Tribal governments
- » Workforce and industry partners, such as Chambers of Commerce, Rotaries, South Coast Business Employment Corporation, Youth Career Connect Central Oregon, and Southern Oregon Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee
- » Healthcare, including hospitals and mental health clinics

Partnerships between schools and community organizations were reported by survey respondents all across the state. Of the 68 survey responses from public schools, 35% reported working with a non-school organization.



Common partners included:

- » Statewide youth-serving organizations such as YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, and KinderCare Champions
- » Community based organizations such as Community Action Agency, youth shelters, Metropolitan Family Services, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, Latino Network, etc.
- » Cities, county health departments, and parks and recreation departments
- » Libraries, museums, and children's theaters
- » Higher-education institutions, including 4-H Extension
- » Fitness or sports programs, such as bike programs, pools and aquatic centers, etc.

Similarly, about a third (36%) of non-school organizations in our survey sample offered their programming in partnership with a school district. Just 8% reported offering programming in partnership with a higher education institution. Of non-school organizations that offered programming in partnership with a school district, the most common forms of partnership included:

- » Space usage (31% of respondents)
- » Food services, such as Summer Food Service Programs (26% of respondents)
- » Funding support (25% of respondents)

Many partnerships went smoothly, however in some cases, partnerships between community organizations and school districts struggled, as reported by survey respondents in a free-response survey question about challenges they faced over the summer. The following quotes illustrate the most common themes, which often centered around communication, the logistics of using public school buildings, and space allocation.



*“Our biggest challenge has been working in partnerships with school districts. The Wednesday before our programs started is when we got information about background checks, fingerprinting, and access badges. We could not get into schools without these things, these things would take about a week or two to complete, and the programs were supposed to start 5 days after that meeting. The school districts are not giving clear directions to their partners in a timely manner and a lot of programs are suffering because of it.”*

*“The district tells us which school we can operate out of each summer, then the Principal decides what space we can use within the school. Generally principals are not very generous with our ability to use the school. This year for example, we had groups in narrow hallways and common areas instead of classrooms. Since covid, principals have been slightly more forthcoming with space so we can spread the kids out.”*

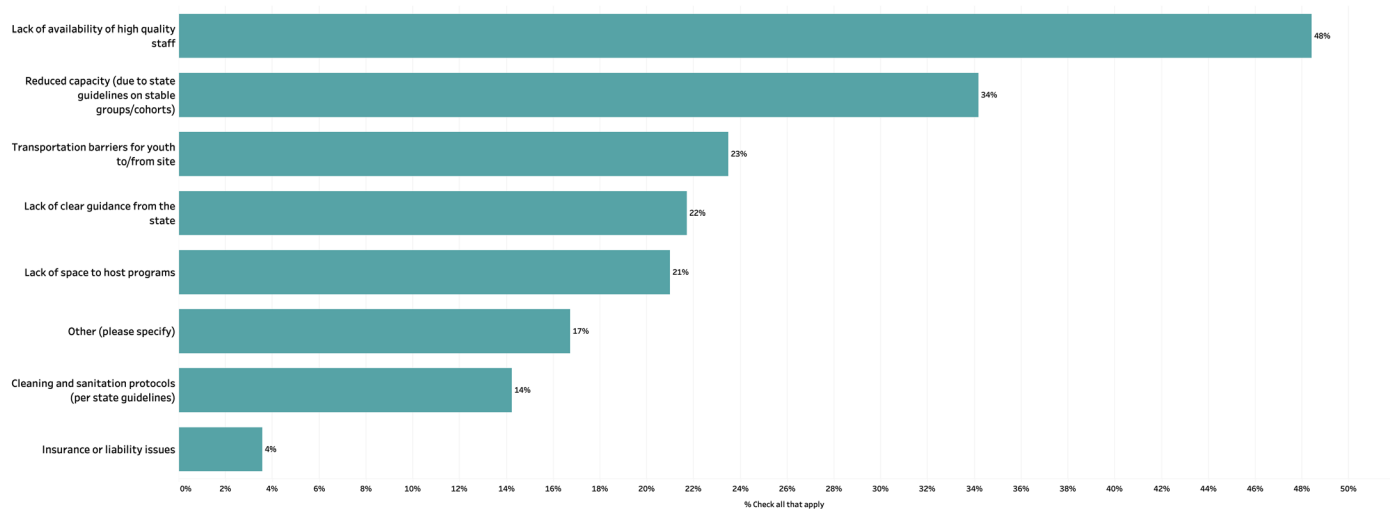
*“[The school district] chose to put our program at the same school/site as three other programs. It was difficult to share the space and not mix cohorts. For example, any outdoor/exercise activities were limited to the field or the gym which was hard to rotate through and schedule. It was also difficult to hire staff for only 3 weeks. Perhaps if it was longer people would have been more interested. Once again, [the school district] made this decision which limited what our organization could do to be flexible with our dates in order to attract more qualified staff.”*

# Challenges

Summer 2021 was a unique time that brought much needed opportunities to learn, play, and reconnect for youth all across Oregon. But it also brought a unique – and often daunting – set of challenges for organizations striving to offer summer learning opportunities. Survey respondents reported facing a wide variety of challenges as they planned and implemented their programs, ranging from limited job applicant pools to transportation barriers to constantly having to adapt to the ever-changing dynamics of the pandemic. The chart below shows the challenges programs faced, ranked by frequency of responses.

Some of the most-cited challenges are explored briefly below, with supporting quotes from a free-response survey question that asked respondents to reflect on their biggest challenges.

Please select any challenges or barriers you faced while preparing for programming this summer. Mark all that apply.





## Staffing

48% of responding programs reported that they faced a lack of high-quality staff for Summer 2021, making it easily the most commonly reported barrier, surpassing even challenges related to the pandemic. Staffing challenges, as reported by survey respondents, were often multi-faceted. Many programs struggled to find job candidates and to offer competitive compensation. Some respondents noted that the scarcity of applicants meant that it was difficult to find any staff at all, let alone highly qualified youth development workers. Unprecedented delays at the Central Background Registry held up new hires for some programs, sometimes for days or weeks. And even when staff were hired, some programs reported that tight turnaround times made staff training an additional challenge.

*“Finding staff has been the biggest barrier this summer! Its also hard to retain staff when other places are offering a higher wage.”*

*“Lack of qualified staff. This year we had very few returning staff members and hired college students and others with four-year degrees to operate the program. Student growth was diminished due to staff experience.”*

*“Some CBRs took months to process with awful customer service from ELD”*

*“Time frame was short to hire staff (over 100). Backup at ODE background checks caused long delays.”*

*“Our biggest challenge has been the lack of staffing. We would have liked to offer this opportunity to more students, but we lacked the staffing capacity to do so.”*

*“Staffing has been incredibly difficult. Low wage earners are being asked to do a lot during Covid-19. Burnout is high.”*



## Pandemic Related Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a whole host of additional challenges for programs to overcome. While some programs reported struggling with COVID protocols (like mask wearing or cleaning and sanitation protocols), programs more commonly expressed frustration with how COVID-19 guidance was issued by the state. Many programs felt the guidance was unclear or confusing, and published far too late (often weeks or months after programs began planning for summer). Survey respondents also struggled with stable group limits that reduced their capacity to serve youth and increased staff costs, due to lower staff-to-youth ratios.

*“Because our population is extremely vulnerable to infection/disease, we had to be extra cautious with the Covid policies.”*

*“Everything constantly changing, which makes sense given the circumstances, but means that you have to plan for a hundred different possibilities and, two weeks before your first camp, are still unsure what will change by then.”*

*“It was challenging to plan our programs with the ever-changing and unclear guidance from the State. Most parents here start planning their child’s summer in February. This year parents were not sure what to do, and we all had to wait and see. It would have been easier on our end if we had clear guidance earlier. But I also know that the pandemic issues continued to change as well.”*

*“Our numbers have been reduced significantly due to the square footage requirements, and we are concerned that many youth are not getting the services they need in our community.”*

*“Reduced capacity meant that we could not serve as many ages during one week. While income was reduced our staff to camper ratio decreased (to facilitate smaller cabins, groups, etc) so expenses were higher per camper.”*

*“The ever-changing guidelines were difficult to keep up with. COVID and recovery in our area were hard to predict which made it hard to know what the coming months would hold which made it difficult to get summer camps ready to go since they require a lot of advanced planning to make happen. We don’t fault state officials, though. Pandemics are not something any of us are familiar with weathering so it stands to reason there would be difficulty.”*



## Short Timeline

While not an option in the pre-populated multi-select question on challenges cited above, timeline challenges surfaced as a major theme through responses in open-ended questions. Schools and programs appreciated the funding made available for Summer 2021, but many noted that the turnaround time between receiving funding and implementing programming was far too short. Some programs reported that the short turnaround time limited their ability to provide high quality programming at the capacity they wanted to. And for some community organizations who received grant funding or contracts with school districts, funds were sometimes approved or released only weeks or days before summer began.

*Specifically, a new program typically requires 2 months advance time just to finalize logistics, and we typically had 2-3 weeks. Partners simply needed more time. Secondly, our [school district] distributing funds created an immensely onerous conditions of contracting and less than 2 weeks to communicate with community partners. This compressed all decision making and led to increased work, blockages, and obstacles to offering camps. This cut our capacity to offer camps from 10 weeks to 3 weeks.*

*Our biggest challenge was receiving the funding so late in the year and trying to plan for a quality program. I'm hopeful that this funding will be continued and we will be able to have time to plan out more quality programs.*

*There was a sudden availability of funding for [our organization] to operate out of [the local school district], so [we] only had less than a month to prepare for 4 weeks of programming.*

## Youth Connection and Engagement

The vast majority of challenges cited by survey responders were centered on operational logistics, such as the concerns over staffing ratios, COVID protocols, and planning timelines described above. Some programs, however, described facing challenges in youth engagement and in being adequately prepared to support youth facing collective and individual trauma from the pandemic.

*Because we have come off of almost 2 years of not [having] programming in buildings we lost our connection to students and families. It was hard to get them to come out for summer programming*

*Getting students interested in [our program was a challenge] since everyone is working. High School students are working more hours than I have seen in 15 years of doing this work.*

*As far as the biggest challenge this year running Summer camps that I have seen across many youth programs was the increase in incident reports, behavioral issues and mental illness/disabilities, resulting in increased needs for trauma informed practices and social emotional learning. I believe this correlates with pandemic impact on our communities and K-12 audiences.*



Just one of the barriers described above would be challenging for a summer program in a normal year. But virtually all programs reported multiple barriers, and many described facing a tangle of interconnected challenges rooted in the pandemic and a workforce shortage. Transportation challenges were exacerbated, for instance, by requirements for stable cohorts and social distancing, which are more challenging in a confined bus. Similarly, staffing shortages were compounded by enhanced cleaning and sanitation protocols that added extra duties, and by cohort limits that forced programs to maintain lower staff-youth ratios. And yet, hundred of organizations – from community-based organizations to schools to local government to non-profits and for-profits – rose above these challenges, put Oregon’s youth before themselves, and made summer learning opportunities available across the state.

*It’s been a very intense but extraordinary summer. The layers of opening a shuttered business, COVID mitigating protocols, pandemic behaviors, and the tight labor market certainly created a new set of challenges like never before.*

*The combination of COVID-19 safety and being prepared for high heat, potential smoke, and possible fires have created a combination of factors that make it increasingly difficult to plan effective summer programs... We had a much more difficult time finding high quality instructors and camp counselors this year because generally everyone is so exhausted from the past year. It has been harder to engage our more at-risk students and students of color. This is attributed to a combination of feeling fatigue from the last year and the devastating effects of the Alameda Fire particularly for our Latino/a/x students. For many of our students, financial pressures from COVID and the fires has meant that either they need to work summer jobs to help their families, or they need to provide childcare for siblings so their parents can work more. We are trying to remain responsive and to adjust where we can in order to be as accessible as possible.*

*I stayed up for about a month until 12, and woke up at 4! But worth every minute. WE MUST CONTINUE TO FUND ENRICHMENT. Kids learn the most by doing, and experiencing. I am so proud of the program [we] put together. I have 240 kids enrolled at [the elementary program] and going so well. Monday kids had African drumming, today Polynesian dancers! This is what a true education is all about...but it takes money.*



“We have been operating in-person since June ‘20 and the constant danger of COVID to our staff and kids health and wellness, ever changing COVID protocols, and expanded operating hours to 9.5 hours a day vs. 4 hrs a day, has been very difficult and extremely expensive. We stepped up when school districts and other entities sheltered in place, yet we didn’t receive a fraction of direct financial support that school districts received while we performed the critical in-person work day in and day out in the middle of a pandemic for 70 youth every day. We served as a life line for families that needed help and a place for their child to attend school online and get support while they worked. Doing the difficult task of ramping up our operations to meet the needs of our families for over a year and then going straight into operating a summer camp program while expanding our services to two sites for 180 youth total has been very challenging. We haven’t truly had a chance to recalibrate or even rest. It is proving to be one of the most stressful and

daunting times in my 15 year career ... Our school district was kind enough to award us a grant for operation this summer but most of their staff are taking the summer off while programs like ours ... continue to work in-person with youth and help prepare them for the upcoming school year and provide them and their parents critical services over the summer. I always knew places like [us] were doing essential work to uplift children and help them reach their full potential. Now I also know that we are willing to do Whatever it Takes to help kids and their families in their darkest hour. We continue to serve underserved youth in the most difficult time and are operating with the least amount of direct support i.e. resources from state and federal agencies with deep pockets. Having places where children can engage in-person with a caring adult is a CRITICAL resource now and I am proud of each and every organization stepping up to answer that call.





## Recommendations

The summer learning programs represented in this report operated more than 1,700 sites across the state. Our subsample of programs represented 807 sites that had the capacity to serve more than 90,000 Oregon youth. Nearly three-quarters of these programs made use of public COVID relief funding in some way. But even the 90,000 slots represented in our sub sample does not meet the demonstrated demand for summer learning. Before COVID, the Afterschool Alliance found that nearly 180,000 youth in Oregon wanted to be in a summer program, but didn't have one available to them. That number has undoubtedly only grown during the pandemic, as students endured months of distance learning and COVID shutdowns.

Oregon's leaders acknowledged that growing need, and made a historic investment in summer learning for one year. That investment made summer learning opportunities widely available state-wide in summer 2021. But the demand does not evaporate after one year, and summer learning loss will not disappear. Oregon youth, particularly those in underserved communities, need opportunities not just for one year, but every year. The best way to provide these opportunities is to ensure that the historic summer spending package of 2021 is not historic at all, but rather the harbinger of a new normal.

But more than just funding, we need a comprehensive summer learning system that ensures that summer learning opportunities are available not just to those that can afford them, but to all youth and families that need them.



Considerations for a comprehensive system include:



**Summer funding should be committed well in advance.** Districts and community organizations alike reported facing significant challenges from the short funding timelines in 2021, and many had to compromise on quality or duration as a result. Research has shown the planning for high-quality summer programs should begin early in the school year, and Oregon’s own [Summer Learning Best Practice Guide](#) suggests that planning start in September.



**Summer funding must include direct support for community-based organizations.** Nearly 60% of the programs reported here were operated by non-profit and for-profit organizations within the community. These community-based organizations make up the heart of summer learning in Oregon, and future fundings streams must acknowledge and support them by creating significant and dedicated funding streams for community organizations.



**Invest in resources to support school-community partnerships.** Partnerships between schools and community based organizations strengthen summer learning opportunities, and are mutually beneficial. Research from McCombs et. al (2011) found that “partnerships between districts and community-based organizations provided increased benefits and lowered costs.” Yet some school-community partnerships struggled in 2021. Resources and technical assistance are needed to support these partnerships, and to create a balance of power between partners and streamline onerous contractual procedures.



**Create systems for accountability and reporting.** An important part of ensuring equitable access to opportunity is to assess the current landscape and identify gaps in access. The list of summer programs reported here can serve as a starting point, but it is not adequate to gain a full understanding of Oregon’s summer learning landscape. Future funding for summer learning must not only include reporting systems that help identify gaps in access, but also help programs assess and improve the quality of their program.



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