Summer Status of Youth  For many children and youth, summer means family vacations, camping, or any other number of enriching activities. As for millions of other youth, when school comes to a close, their access to safe and academically-enriched environments diminishes and is replaced with lost opportunities and risk-taking behaviors. In fact, more than half of the achievement gap in ninth grade can be explained by summer learning loss that disproportionately affects our low-income students. Summer learning programs, however, are emerging as a key strategy to prevent summer learning loss.

What are summer learning programs? As defined by in America After 3PM Special Report on Summer, summer learning programs are “safe, structured program(s) that provide a variety of activities designed to encourage learning and development in the summer months.”

Why are summer learning programs important? Summer learning programs are beneficial to our young people for a number of reasons. These programs promote strong working relationships with school and community partners to fully support youth both academically and socially. Summer programs provide ample time to allow for the exploration and application of the regular school year content in a structured, yet cost-effective manner. Summer learning programs are in a unique position to provide hands-on, engaging activities that complement, rather than replicate, the school day learning while incorporating youth voice, inquiry, and family engagement. Studies now show that non-academic experiences during the summer can support success during the school year, including higher grades and test scores.

Why are summer learning programs especially important to low income youth? Summer learning programs provide a safe and engaging environment for all youth, but are especially beneficial in aiding ethnic minority and low-income students to narrow the achievement gap. In fact, ethnic minority and low-income children are more likely than others to be in a summer learning program, yet the unmet demand is great. Children without access to summer learning programs are at particular risk of losing academic, social, and emotional gains accrued during the school year. By increasing our investment in summer learning programs, we can better support our youth’s learning.

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