

SUMMER PROGRAMS IN CONNECTICUT

CONNECTICUT AFTER  
SCHOOL NETWORK

# WHY SUMMER MATTERS



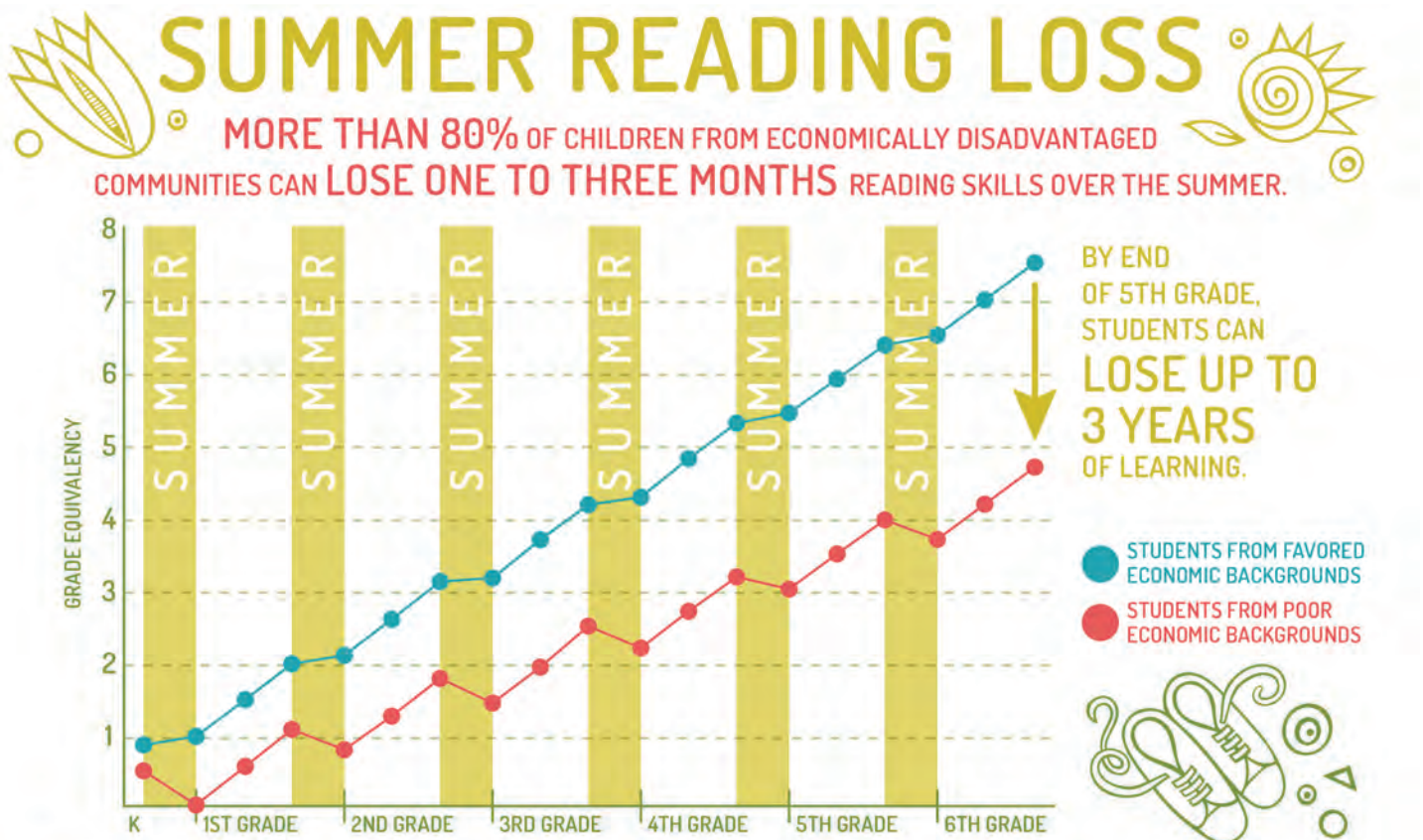




# WHY SUMMER MATTERS

Children laughing and playing four square, the splash of a pool or lake, and family cookouts, each person has their own imagery that signifies summer. For some children, summer means days spent at summer camp with friends, visiting museums and exploring interests, reading a book and relaxing. But for too many Connecticut children, summer is a time of boredom, idleness, stagnation, and inactivity. A lack of opportunity and resources, difficult family circumstances, a need to watch younger siblings—there are plenty of reasons that can make summer a season for learning loss,

weight gain, and apathy. Economic conditions often require both parents to work full-time outside the home, and yet when school is out of session, parents often struggle to weave a patchwork of care options to ensure their children's safety while they are at work. Looking beyond physical safety however, summer is a lost opportunity to maintain and build on learning that society invests in during the school year. **Summer learning loss is cumulative**, and if not addressed, leads to significant achievement gaps between low-income students and their peers from higher-income families.



SOURCE: ALEXANDER, K.L., D.R. ENTWISLE, AND L.S. OLSON. 2007. "LASTING CONSEQUENCES OF SUMMER LEARNING GAP." AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW 72 (4): 107-30. PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATION BY DR. ALEXANDER, FEBRUARY 12, 2015.

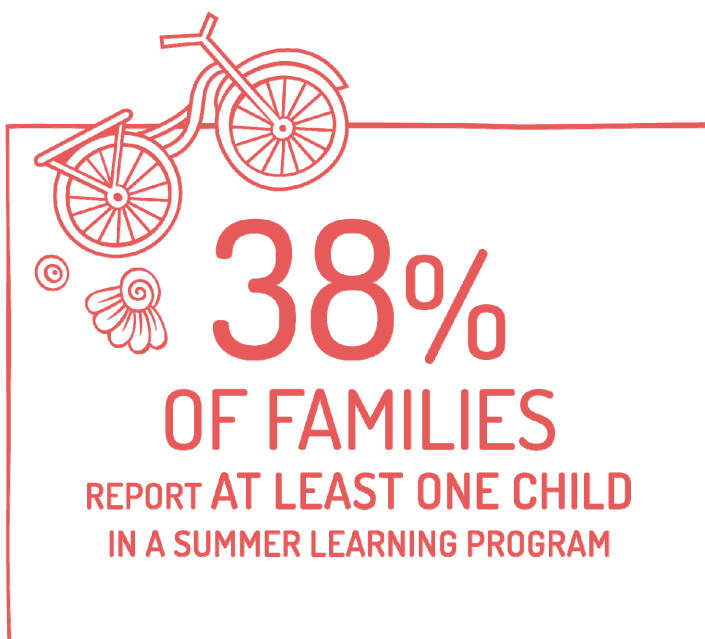
These factors have a proven impact on children's attendance, academic performance, and widen the opportunity gap significantly over time. According to Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, and Muhlenbruck (2000), students not engaged in summer programming lose two months of learning over the summer and classroom **teachers report spending at least three weeks re-teaching curriculum from the previous year** at the start of school.

In order to help ameliorate the impacts of summer learning loss and support our children and families equitably **we must rethink and reframe our concept and expectation of what summer means and why it matters.** Some of this is a new commitment to investing community resources in the provision of more programs for children and youth. Some of this includes redefining the way summer school programs are implemented. Instead of being perceived as a punitive measure for lack of academic progress, it could be marketed as an opportunity and something they should be proud to take part in similar to a model used in New Britain, Connecticut. Capitalizing on existing school-community partnerships through after school programming, communities

could offer full day, holistically focused programming that meets the academic and social needs of children and provides peace of mind for parents so they can be productive in the workplace.

**The research is clear, high-quality summer programs make a difference and can eliminate “the summer slide”.** While the research on summer learning loss has been around for over 100 years, the conversation was brought to the forefront in *The Learning Season*, a 2007 report by Dr. Beth Miller. In it she discusses the “faucet theory”, which essentially states that both middle and lower income children have access to learning resources throughout the school year, however during the summer months, these resources are largely turned off for low income children resulting in gaps in reading and math over time. According to Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson (2007), middle income children are more likely to take part in various activities such as museums, concerts, and field-trips, out-of-town vacations, and be involved in sports activities. This engagement is what makes the difference in the achievement and opportunities for children, and are things that can be provided by summer programs to help close the gap. In a 2014 study of incoming 4th graders, students engaged in a summer program showed an average increase of 17-21% on fall math tests (McCombs, Pane, Augustine, Schwartz, Martorell, & Zakaras (2014). Research over the past decade by the RAND Corporation shows that **high-quality summer learning programs can not only curb summer learning loss, they can help boost student learning.**

Additionally, high-quality summer programs have shown to help reduce obesity and improve healthy choices in children. According to the Food Research Action Council (2007), only 1 in 5





The 50 State Afterschool Network

children receive free or reduced price meals during the summer months. In a 2007 study conducted by von Hippel, Powell, Downey, and Rowland, they examined 5,000 students in 300 schools, and found that **children gained two to three times more weight over the summer as compared to the school year.** They further assert that having a balanced schedule, similar to that of the school-year provided structure, supervision, limited opportunities to eat, and promote physical exercise at least a few times per week. Their study also found that Latino and African-American children were more prone to obesity than peers of other races.

The work of the Anne. E. Casey Campaign for Grade Level Reading has also helped highlight the potential impacts this gap can have on future success. Research has shown that children who cannot read proficiently by 3rd

grade are more likely to dropout by 9th grade thereby limiting their career options and adds a burden to already overwhelmed social programs. According to a 2010 Time Magazine article, **summer learning loss accounts for nearly two-thirds of the achievement gap** (Von Drehle, 2010). As illustrated in the chart above, without intervention such as a high quality summer program, the gap widens with each passing





## WHAT KINDS OF PROGRAMS ARE THERE ?

The Connecticut After School Network recently completed a statewide survey of summer programs for school-age children in Connecticut. The study identified 1,167 programs that provided programming to during the summer of 2017 to approximately 32,928 children ages 6-12. These data were gathered from child care information from the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood along with a survey distributed broadly by the Network and partner agencies. Extensive telephone and email follow-up outreach was conducted as well. While not a complete picture of every summer program in the state, this report shares a picture that is beginning to form of what summer looks like in Connecticut. Programs that were included are child care centers, summer camps, town-run recreation programs, and community based programs. Not included were smaller programs that run for only one or two weeks, such as Vacation Bible School or sports camps to improve specific athletic skills.

### **COMMUNITY PROFILE: NORWICH**

*The Norwich Public Schools Summer Learning Program offers a mix of academic and enrichment programming for serving 354 students over the course of the seven week program. Norwich families with school aged children entering kindergarten through ninth grade in the fall of 2017 were eligible to enroll and 125 students who were identified as needing extra help in reading and mathematics were invited to attend the program for the first two weeks free of cost. Additionally, through their School Improvement Grant, Veterans Memorial Elementary School was able to offer free programming to over 100 Veterans students for five weeks. The Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut (CFECT) was able to offer partial scholarships to 17 additional students.*

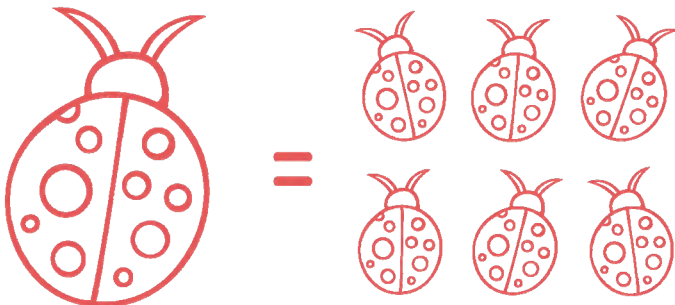
*The program offered experiences such as recreational field trips to Slater Museum, Waterford Beach, and Norwich Bowling and Entertainment Center and community service focused field trips to school gardens at Uncas, Veterans and Moriarty, Malerba's Farm, Mohegan Park and Saint Vincent De Paul Place. Children experienced a variety of on site special programs including: a Magic Show offered through a collaboration with the Recreation Department, a Garden Program through a partnership with Food Corps, African Drumming lessons with Meiklem Kiln Works, and a weekly library program through a partnership with Otis Library.*





## WHO WORKS IN PROGRAMS ?

Summer program staff are largely comprised of college students, school teachers and staff, coaches, community non-profit staff, and volunteers. This offers a mix of skills and interests that summer programs are able to capitalize on when developing offerings. The workforce identified in the Network's survey identified 5,501 staff working in Connecticut summer programs. The vast majority of these people earned only slightly better than minimum wage, making between \$10 and \$13 per hour. While there is a great diversity in the sizes of groups in different programs, **on average there is one staff person for every six children served.**



## COMMUNITY PROFILE: NEW BRITAIN

*The Summer Enrichment Experience (SEE) in New Britain, CT. is a summer learning opportunity that is proven to help students avoid the summer learning loss that is so very common amongst children growing up in poverty. This joint effort brings together the school district, community based organizations and funding partners, all supporting the learning needs of students performing in the lowest 20th percentile on standardized tests.*

*The New Britain SEE program has two distinctive components. One is its "early back" model which helps jump start students for the new school year by starting in mid-summer, after students have had several weeks off. The second element is how it brings together of traditional summer school classes with community partner experiential learning programing aligned with classroom curriculums. Students attend full-day programming for three weeks in August.*

*All of the afternoon enrichment programs include a focus on speaking and listening skills while in the morning, academic teachers reinforce the grade-level skills that students need to move forward. For six summers this program has proven to increase student school year attendance as well as stabilize or improve academic performance as measured by spring to fall standardized testing results for each child.*

## WHO ATTENDS PROGRAMS ?

More than 7 in 10 Connecticut families with children ages 6 to 12 have all available parents in the labor force according to the U. S. Census Bureau, so we know that a majority of children need some form of child care or supervision while their parents work during the summer. *America After 3*, a 2015 report by the Afterschool Alliance, found that **38% of Connecticut families report at least one child is in a summer program**. This research focused on children ages 6 - 12 with programs offering at least 5 full days per week, with **the average child attending 7.4 weeks over a possible 11 week summer**. Compared to programs for younger students, there are far fewer programs for middle and high school students, many of which included counselor-in-training type programs, single skill/single focus programs, and niche camps.



### COMMUNITY PROFILE: WINDHAM

*The Windham Recreation Department hosts Summer Camp each year and is the largest provider in the community. Their program spans for almost the entire duration of the summer and parents can choose to enroll their child for individual weeks or the entire summer. The cost is charged per week that children are enrolled. It is one standard rate but families can apply for Care 4 Kids to assist with this payment. On certain weeks, the cost of camp will fluctuate to incorporate a field trip for students. The frustrating component of this program is that the cost is based upon students enrollment in a full day program. If students have other engagements, like Summer School, the program will not receive them at the half day mark.*

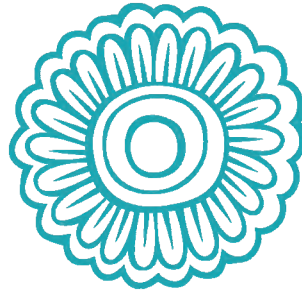
*The other program that occurs for students in Willimantic is the mandated Summer School Program provided by the public schools. These are programs for K-3 students that need focused literacy interventions, an ELL class for students whose primary language is other than English, students*

*with special needs in the Extended School Year program, an algebra readiness camp for rising 8th and 9th graders, and students participating in our Early College Opportunity program. All of these programs are half day programs where students are dismissed at 12:30.*

*While there are additional options in town that include the public library, the Salvation Army, and a few other smaller niche programs, currently students attending mandatory summer school are not able to take part in programs for the second half of the day due to transportation and logistical issues, and are missing out on opportunities that would really benefit them. Both the school district and Salvation Army programs are looking to expand in the coming years to be able to offer a more robust program that would also increase student participation and support retention of academic skills. But for now, this lack of comprehensive program offerings leaves working parents in the lurch and youth largely either unsupervised or with a relative in place of taking part in a summer program.*



# Connecticut Parent Voices



***“I work full time, but during the summer my 14 year old watches my 5 year old because we can’t afford to pay for summer programs for both kids.”***

***“I can’t afford more than two weeks of summer camp for my daughter, so instead she spends most of her summer watching television.”***

***“My son was home alone most afternoons after the half-day of summer school because there was nothing available in the afternoons.”***

***“Summer care for my kids is really a patchwork because the local camp doesn’t open right away and then closes mid-August.”***

***“It’s impossible to find a place for my son with special needs during the summer.”***



## WHY DON'T CHILDREN ATTEND PROGRAMS ?

**Cost is the primary barrier for participation in summer programs.** The cost of summer programs varies depending on several factors including provider, location, and focus. For the most part, municipal Parks & Recreation programs typically have the lowest fees (ranging from free to \$200 per week in the Network's survey) and often enroll hundreds of children. Most cities and towns understand that children need to be kept busy during the summer, but the amount of funding invested varies greatly by town. While some youth camps with extensive private and charitable funding can offer scholarships, this is rarely the case. Some camps, such as some on college campuses that offer advanced robotics classes, can cost thousands of dollars for a single week. According to the National Summer Learning Association (2018), **the average cost for summer programming in Connecticut is \$335 per week** or roughly \$6,700 per summer for a family with two children.

Given that median income for a family of four in Connecticut is \$55,075, one can easily see that cost is a huge barrier to participation. Because many families struggle with the cost of child care

in order to balance their home budget, they often rely on a patchwork of informal arrangements with friends and relatives, or instead leave children with siblings, or in many cases home alone, while they work during the summer months.

**Most summer school programs are not a full day, and often have no wrap around services** provided to help support working families. School budgets are very tight, and priority is given to operations during the regular school year. Some districts charge a fee for summer school programs, but offer scholarships to students in need. For students required to attend half-day summer school programs can cause a significant hardship for families unable to find afternoon programs that run until the end of the work day.

Even if cost is not a barrier, **summer programs rarely run for the entire summer.** One Windsor parent explained it this way: "Both my husband and I work full time. Neither of us has the summer off, nor do we have family in the state that we can lean upon to care for our children while we're working. So, just as it is important that we have high quality, reliable before and after school care, it's critical that we have access to summer



**\$335/week**  
**AVERAGE AMOUNT SPENT ON**  
**A SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAM**

( ONLY INCLUDES THOSE WHO REPORT PAYING A FEE )





camps to cover the long summer breaks. In the past, we've been able to find good camps that interest our children and also cover most of the summer, but this year for some reason there is a significant gap in the

weeks that many camps will cover before school starts again. In fact, of the three camps we typically attend (to cover the whole summer) each ends early/mid August this year while the 2018-19 school year doesn't start until after labor day. That is a 3 week gap. We can't take vacation to fill the whole gap. I am hopeful that there's an option out there that we haven't discovered yet as we look for alternatives."

Rachel Gwaltney from the National Summer Learning Association expanded on this point, "Anecdotally I think the other top reasons that children don't attend programs are lack of awareness of opportunities and transportation issues. For older youth, competing priorities like caring for younger siblings and needing to earn money at summer jobs are also a factor."

The difficulties in patching together all-day, all-summer options for children with any type of special need can be dramatic. While school districts are required to provide summer school if a child with a disability is expected to regress substantially with lack of support during the summer, families needs for wraparound child care are an entirely separate issue and **programs able to provide the staffing and expertise to support special needs are few and far between.** Yet the needs for children to have social interactions to maintain social skills during the summer are frequently cited by parents as just as important and are often missed most when school is out for the summer.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE: MANCHESTER

*The Manchester Early Learning Center (MELC) operates two summer camps for six weeks during the summer, one at Kenney Elementary School and the other at Buckley Elementary School, serving a total of 250 children. The cost of the program is \$130 per week which includes breakfast, lunch, snack, trips and activities. Annually, MELC staff and board members work together to set aside funds for scholarships to the program and in 2017, 19% of children attending the program received a scholarship, ranging from 25% to 100% off of the weekly tuition.*

*Activities were planned around weekly themes and focused on improving academic success, character and leadership education and healthy lifestyles. The summer also included enrichment through many community partnerships including a local dietician, the public library, a martial arts studio, and an artist.*

*The program is open from 7am - 6pm to support working families, but is only able to run for 6 weeks due to facility issues with sharing space in the school buildings. By offering a shortened program, families are left with 3 weeks to find other care arrangements before school starts. This is a common issue for summer programs using shared space experience and contributes to the patchwork of options families face as they try to cobble together adequate care for their children during the summer months.*

## **COMMUNITY PROFILE: NORWALK**

*The mission of Norwalk ACTS TEAM Summer is to promote a summer learning community that ensures that an increasing number of youth are provided with high-quality summer fun and learning opportunities that meet academic, social/emotional and health/wellness needs, sustainably over time.*

*Through collaborative action and community assessment they have identified several gaps in terms of summer programming within Norwalk. These include a lack of opportunities for middle school youth, a majority of programs that only run for half a day, and a need for transportation between programs and providers.*

*For Summer 2018, the TEAM aims to address these community needs in several critical ways. Some of these strategies are refining and publicizing the TEAM Summer Online Portal as a centralized resource for families to identify and enroll in opportunities for summer programming and altering and extending program timing and locations to better accommodate children who are being dismissed from mandated summer school in the early afternoon. Norwalk Public Schools will be providing extended day programming again this summer*

*Community-based TEAM Summer members are considering hosting afternoon programming at school sites where children will be released from mandated summer school, in order to alleviate transportation barriers and to provide full day coverage for this cohort of children. TEAM Summer also plans to work with existing providers to create new opportunities directed specifically at middle school youth.*

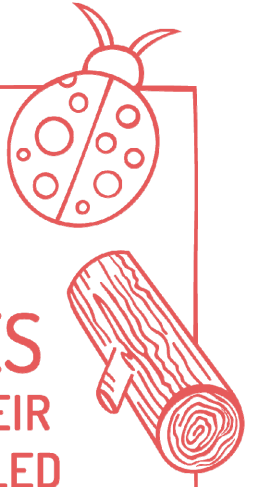




## DOES THE CURRENT SUPPLY MEET THE DEMAND?

The short answer is **No, it does not**. No city or town in Connecticut has an adequate number of summer programs that are affordable, accessible, and available all day, all summer long to meet families needs. While 38% of families have at least one child in a summer learning program, when the Afterschool Alliance asked those parents who did not, they found that **55% of parents would put their child in a program if one were available** (Afterschool Alliance, 2015).

There is also a "kids need to be kids" mindset, and an idealized image of lazy, unstructured time that leads some to overlook the value of summer programs. No matter one's opinions about the way summer "should be," what is clear is that Connecticut's current structure of taxpayer supported education is not aligned with parents' work schedules, and that **there is a tremendous mis-**



**55%**  
**OF FAMILIES**  
**SAY THEY WANT THEIR**  
**CHILDREN ENROLLED**  
**IN A SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAM**

***match between the supply of affordable, accessible programs for children and youth when school is not in session.***

Not only is this a wasted opportunity to further students academic, physical and social-emotional skills, it is a waste of existing investment in school programs when teachers need to spend the first three weeks on average to re-teach what was lost over the summer. Researchers with the National Summer Learning Association estimate that two-thirds of the ninth grade achievement gap in reading is due to summer learning loss.



**84%**  
**OF PARENTS SUPPORT**  
**PUBLIC FUNDING**  
**FOR SUMMER**  
**LEARNING PROGRAMS**



# WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

## Coordinated Outreach

- Create a centralized database of summer programs with up-to-date program information
- Improve communication with families about programs currently available
- Match families needs with existing programs and transportation
- Build off of existing school-community partnerships to reimagine summer school and align learning experiences for children

## Increase State Investment

- Increase access to summer programs by creating a dedicated summer learning grant program
- Obtain stable funding to allow long-term planning and coordination
- Invest in infrastructure to support coordination of services and professional development for providers
- Increase alignment between different systems and funding sources

## Continuous Program Improvement

- Ensure that expansion of current programs or creation of new ones results in high quality programs
- Provide intermediary support to convene summer programs in an effort to share best practices and develop programs based on current research and findings in the larger field
- Strengthen statewide systems of accountability by having all summer programs track attendance data

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Connecticut After School Network is a non-profit, statewide intermediary organization that provides leadership, advocacy, and training for afterschool and summer programs for children and youth. We launched this study in May 2017 to better understand the extent of summer programs in the state of Connecticut. *Why Summer Matters: Summer Programs in Connecticut*, released on February 28, 2018, is the result of this effort.

Much appreciation is due to the Connecticut After School Network staff who put long hours into collecting and analyzing the data for this report: Kenneth A. Anthony, II Ed. D. and Rose-Marie Dugas. Many thanks also to our colleagues that make up the 50 State Network for their help in this effort, particularly: School's Out Washington, OregonASK, Iowa Afterschool Alliance, Rhode Island Afterschool Leadership Circle, Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership, Texas Partnership for Out-of-

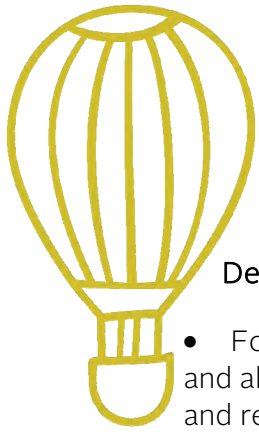
School Time, Vermont Afterschool, Inc., Beyond School Bells as well as our national partners: Afterschool Alliance, National Summer Learning Association, and The Center for Education Policy and Leadership, part of the Riley Institute at Furman University.

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## Deeper Collaboration

- Form partnerships and alliances on a local and regional level to conduct thorough planning so investments have maximum benefits for the children and youth with the most need
- Create local capacity that promotes cross sector program development to support the holistic development of children during the summer months
- Build local capacity to look at the needs of children and families beyond the school-day throughout the year



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