

# Summer Programs That Reflect the *Learning in* *Afterschool & Summer* Learning Principles

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With an Introduction by Katie Brackenridge,  
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## Introduction

A child's need for meaningful learning and enrichment experiences does not end in June when the school doors close for summer vacation. All children need to be engaged and active during the summer months in order to be on track when they return to school in the fall. Whether these needs are being met may boil down to a child's neighborhood or family income level. Without summer learning opportunities, children—especially children in low-income communities—can fall dramatically behind academically.

More than 100 years of research about this phenomenon – known as summer learning loss – paints a clear and compelling picture. A longitudinal study from Johns Hopkins University found that low-income children lose about 2 months in their reading levels each summer. By 5<sup>th</sup> grade, the cumulative learning loss puts them nearly three grade level equivalents behind their more affluent peers.<sup>1</sup>

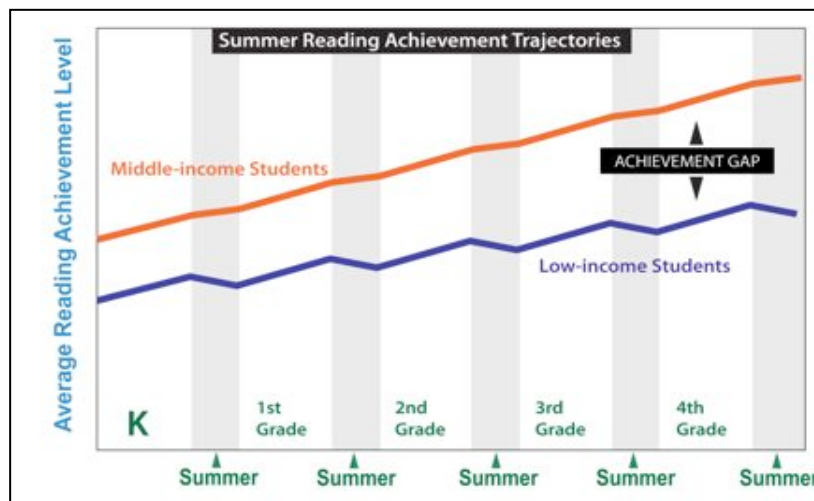
Unequal summer learning opportunities during elementary school years are responsible for about two-thirds of the ninth-grade achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth. As a result, low-income youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enter college.<sup>2</sup>

Given this data, communities across the country are working hard to build high quality summer learning opportunities. They are quickly discovering that summer is the perfect time to put the Learning in Afterschool and Summer principles into action. Children don't need or want more traditional school time during the summer. In fact, because summer programming is often voluntary, many children and youth won't participate unless their experience is fun and engaging. In Making

Summer Count, researchers from the RAND Corporation found – not surprisingly – that consistent attendance is a key indicator of a program's ability to impact participant learning.<sup>3</sup> Summer learning programs have to inspire and motivate in order to succeed.

Besides the imperative around attendance, the time and flexibility in summer programming also lends itself well to the LIAS principles.

This paper highlights the wide variety of ways in which California summer learning programs are using the LIAS principles to engage and inspire learning in young people. The intention is to spark ideas about how you could use the LIAS principles in your program.



<sup>1</sup> National Summer Learning Association, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander, et al, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Sloan, Jennifer McComb, *Making Summer Count*, RAND Corporation, 2010

## About the Learning in Afterschool & Summer (LIAS) Project

The Learning in Afterschool & Summer Project is an effort by afterschool advocates and leaders to unify the field of afterschool and focus the movement on promoting young people's learning. This means offering opportunities not found at home or in school and applying the most recent knowledge on learning to our afterschool practices. The idea of promoting young people's learning and broader development after the classroom day is not new. What is new is the vast number of children who are now able to access afterschool programs. We believe that afterschool programming is a unique institution that must offer more than safe havens or homework help after school. If afterschool programs are to achieve their true potential, they must become known as important places of learning – learning that complements, but is distinguished from, the learning that happens at school or home.

The goal of the Learning in Afterschool & Summer (LIAS) project is to position afterschool programs as places for learning. The project draws upon an extensive and growing body of research and is informed by the national discussions on education reform and youth development. Achieving this goal

will require the incorporation of specific learning principles and approaches in the definition and expectations of afterschool programs, and acceptance by a broad array of stakeholders.

## About Summer Matters

Summer Matters is a statewide initiative to expand and improve summer-learning opportunities for children across California. This work is based on a vision of quality summer learning that seeks to reduce the achievement gap by inspiring young people's learning through fun, experiential and relevant programming that includes a mix of academics and enrichment.

## About the LIAS Learning Principles

Below we detail each of the LIAS learning principles. We follow this by sharing program examples that demonstrate this principle. It is important to note that many of these examples demonstrate other LIAS principles as well. These principles did not happen accidentally. Instead, they are intentionally built into the design of these youth programs.



## Learning that is Active:

Learning and memory recall of new knowledge is strengthened through different exposures – seeing, hearing, touching, and doing. Afterschool and summer learning should be the result of activities that involve young people in “doing” – activities that allow them to be physically active, stimulate their innate curiosity, and that are hands-on and project-based. Hands-on learning involves the young person in a total learning experience, which enhances his/her ability to think critically.



Summer curriculum can involve long-term projects that allow students to experiment, explore and discover.

Projects that might take too much time or are too complicated for the school year become possible during the summer.

**Ruby Bridges Academy, Haight Elementary, and Washington Elementary (Grades K-5); Alameda Unified School District; Operated by Bay Area Community Resources**

The summer program offers STEM activities that focus on project-based learning that runs 6 hours a day for 8 weeks. The program also offers enrichment activities that are focused on physical fitness, such as dance and recreational activities. KidzScience, KidzMath and Techbridge curriculum are provided. Staff development opportunities are provided in late May to early June to prepare the staff. Staff from the program’s management team begin planning the summer programming in February. Below are examples of STEM units.

### Sound Unit:

Code Name: "Sounds Good To Me"

- Investigate the strange properties of sound
- Tinker with tubes and strings to make musical instruments
- Use the science of sound to build and optimize a working, paper cup speaker
- Visit the Sound Exhibits at the Exploratorium and the Wave Organ

### Climate Change Unit:

Code Name: "It's Getting Hot Out There"

- Explore the current and future effects of global warming
- Challenge your own role in Global Warming and become an advocate for reversing climate change
- Use the science of heat transfer to build and optimize a working solar oven to make s'mores
- Visit the Bill Nye's Climate Lab at the Chabot Space and Science Center

### Netwon's Laws Unit:

Code Name: "Adrenaline Science"

- Discover the physics behind roller coasters and theme park rides
- Check out the science of spinning
- Build a marble roller coaster with unimaginable twists and turns
- Visit the Tony Hawk Rad Science exhibit at the Lawrence Hall of Science

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***TECHBRIDGE (Grades 6 – 8); Oakland, San Lorenzo, Fremont, and Concord School Districts***

Techbridge offers hands-on summer academies that inspire middle school youth (particularly girls and those underrepresented in STEM) a chance to explore science, technology, and engineering. The curriculum is developed with girls in mind, and includes projects like remotely operated vehicles, where girls design and construct their own remotely operated boats and test them out on water; Electrical Engineering, where girls build solar night lights and learn to solder; Cleantech, where girls build solar cells and learn about renewable energy; and AppInventor, where students use creativity and technology to create their own Android app. In addition to the learning being very active, the youth also expand their horizons as staff members provide career exploration activities to help students make the connection between STEM projects and careers. Role models and field trips are key to the program's success. The summer academies run for one week and then are repeated for new participants.

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***CENTRAL ENRICHMENT SUMMER ADVENTURES (Grades 6 -8); Fresno County Office of Education***

Central Enrichment Summer Adventures (CESA) has a literacy foundation. Each summer the literature drives the program theme. Last year they delivered The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins. Throughout the summer, participants did a variety of activities based on the themes, characters and actions of the books. These activities culminated in a field day of challenges and competitions similar (but not the same!!) as in the book. By the end of the summer, all students had read The Hunger Games and most had continued on their own to read the remaining two books in the series. This summer they will introduce a new book series - Red Pyramid, by Rick Riordan – and will build program activities and events around the book's themes. Staff expect that, as with last summer, the program will spark participants' desire to keep reading throughout the summer.

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***Central Elementary School (Grades K – 8);  
Banning Unified School District; Operated  
by The Boys & Girls Clubs of the San  
Geronimo Pass***

The program runs from 7:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. for 8 weeks during the summer. Junior staff and youth volunteers assist with summer programming for younger children. Staff members begin working on summer programming long before summer arrives. The Site Supervisors from all ten Club locations work together to develop the themes for the summer and then develop activities that correspond with the themes. The themes for Summer 2012 include *Wild West Week*, *the Great Outdoors*, *Iron Chef Week*, *Ocean Commotion*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Olympic Week* and *Art Week*.

During *Wild West Week*, the youth make sheriff's badges and "Wanted" posters and discuss the history of "Wanted" posters. They create a western scene in the classroom and go on a treasure hunt to find gold. The children also go on a field trip to Riley's Farm, originally constructed and homesteaded in the 1880s. A 55-acre portion

of the farm is devoted to both agriculture and living history interpretation. The children have the opportunity to see how to churn butter and observe a blacksmith.

Another theme is *Iron Chef Week*, which consists of hands-on cooking activities and an Iron Chef competition at the culmination of the week. The children also have the opportunity to plant their own vegetables, make aprons, and of course, learn portions, measurement and math.

Each week includes hourly activities based on the theme for the week. Most are learning-based enrichment activities. The program includes educational field trips whenever possible. As mentioned above, the children attend Riley's Farm during *Wild West Week*, go to Yucaipa Regional Park during the *Great Outdoors Week*, visit the San Diego Zoo during *Where the Wild Things Are Week*, and spend the day at the beach during *Ocean Commotion Week*.

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### **Learning that is Collaborative:**

*Knowledge should be socially centered, as collaborative learning provides the best means to explore new information. Afterschool and summer programs are well positioned to build skills that allow young people to learn as a team. This includes listening to others, supporting group learning goals, resolving differences and conflicts, and making room for each member to contribute his or her individual talents. Collaborative learning happens when learners engage in a common task where each individual depends on and is accountable to each other.*



**Quality summer** learning programs encourage participants to experiment, explore and discover together.

*Throughout a summer, participants can be placed in a whole variety of different groupings that allow them to learn from each other, practice communication and negotiation skills and feel ownership for their work.*

### **SPARK (Grades K – 5); Yucca Loma Elementary; Apple Valley Unified School District**

The program's Summer 2012 theme is the Galactic Games, a learning adventure through the solar system. Young people tour the "Sky Lab" mobile lab as part of a series of lessons related to the solar system. They then work in teams to re-create their own mini sky lab using lessons available through the NASA website. These lessons are hands-on as youth experience the sky lab and create their own constellations. The program expands horizons for all youth as they explore the world of space science and learn about their place within the solar system.

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### **SUMMER OF SERVICE (Grades 6 – 8); 8 Middle School Sites Sacramento City School District**

In the Sacramento's Summer of Service (SOS), 800 middle school youth work together to understand and address social problems that impact their immediate communities. This practice is a good example of learning that is both collaborative and meaningful to the youth participants. Youth work with adult leaders to explore a range of issues in their communities and select one challenge to research in depth. Based on their research, youth work collaboratively to develop an action plan. They spend the rest of the summer implementing the strategies they've developed. In the summer of 2011, SOS youth built gardens to create community spaces in their school sites, provided toiletry kits for the homeless, and developed scholarship funds to address educational inequities. Through these projects, youth not only learn about civic responsibility, they also experience the power of working together to address issues that they find important and compelling.

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### ***Learning that is Meaningful:***

*Young people are intrinsically motivated when they find their learning meaningful. This means having ownership over the learning topic and the means to assess their own progress. Motivation is increased when the learning is relevant to their own interests, experiences, and the real world in which they live. Community and cultural relevance is especially important to new immigrant youth and those from minority cultures. Rather than learning that is focused on academic subjects, young people in afterschool and summer learning programs can be helped to apply their academic skills to their areas of interest and real world problems. Also, when learning involves responsibility, leadership, and service to others, it is experienced as more meaningful.*



*While summer quality programs plan their schedule and curriculum before summer begins, well-trained staff know how and when to adjust lessons and schedules to respond to participants' interests and to allow deeper inquiry and the expression of youth voice. This flexibility ensures that activities and projects are meaningful to participants.*

### ***CENTRAL ENRICHMENT SUMMER ADVENTURES (Grades 6 -8); Fresno County Office of Education***

This program provides youth with choices about their curriculum. Much like college, they choose a dimension (sports, arts, technology etc.) for the first half of their day. Youth are grouped by areas of interest versus grade level or skill level. In the second half of the day, youth participate in enrichment clubs of their choosing. The clubs are developed based on youth interest. If, for example, a club does not attract enough participants, it is dropped from the roster. The range of offerings is extremely diverse – from yoga to robotics, DJing to outdoor adventure. Youth are intensely engaged in the clubs because they have specifically chosen that activity, and because the instructors are well-trained to respond to youth interests and ideas. Every activity has an end product that is celebrated at the concluding culminating event.

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***ACE (ACHIEVEMENT AND COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE) PROGRAM (Grade 9); Operated by EduCare Foundation***

The ACE Program is an interactive, 3-day program designed specifically for summer transition or orientation for incoming high school freshman. The "retreat" format involves between 100-150 young people. This larger group is divided into "resource groups" of 7-10 youth and one adult for structured teambuilding and experiential activities. There are also whole group activities.

The ACE program is a comprehensive student success, youth empowerment, and character-building program focusing on character development, personal management, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal skills. Program activities help participants identify and enhance their unique talents; develop skills for decision making and problem-solving as it relates to both school and personal life; gain awareness in

understanding mistakes as learning opportunities; recognize and reform negative attitudes that often interfere with creating academic and personal success; develop greater empathy and understanding for others; and bridge the gap between diverse groups of people. The ACE Program concludes with a Family Evening event on day three of the retreat.

Prior to the 3-day event, program leaders plan how to connect youth who will complete the program with follow-up activities: pre-existing site or local youth development organizations, afterschool programs, or other youth leadership opportunities. These "next steps" are introduced to the youth on the last day of ACE and youth are given the opportunity to sign up.

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**SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAM (Grades 9 – 12); Valley High School Santa Ana School District; Operated by THINK Together**

This Summer Bridge program targets incoming high school freshmen and operates 5 hours a day for 4 weeks. Participants choose their first activity in their high school enrichment class. A goal of the program is to give freshman information and skills that prepare them to manage their first year in high school. The youth participants are particularly engaged when they learn that the High School Life Lessons component is designed and led by high school age Youth Leaders.

Youth Leaders are trained prior to the start of the Summer Bridge program. They learn how their participation in the program will impact incoming freshmen, and participate in trainings on class management, lesson planning and relationship building. In the summer, Youth Leaders are responsible for choosing the information and lesson plans they believe will best prepare incoming freshmen for high school life.

They also choose the themes and fieldtrips for the program, with their students' best interest in mind. Other Youth Leaders may also choose to serve as student teachers, teacher's aides, tardy sweepers, and lesson planners. They also serve as mentors to the incoming freshmen.

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**YOUTH INSTITUTE (Grades 8 – 10, community-based); YMCA of Greater Long Beach**

In the Summer Youth Institute, older youth participants have the opportunity to work toward becoming group leaders. After graduation, older youth can return as alumni leaders, and can eventually become employed as Youth Institute staff. This includes teaching at elementary afterschool ASES programs, where they may teach elementary age children creative content for digital media arts as part of their service learning component.

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## Learning that Supports Mastery:

*Young people tell us they are most engaged when they are given opportunities to learn new skills. If young people are to learn the importance and joy of mastery, they need the opportunity to learn and practice a full sequence of skills that will allow them to become “really good at something.” Afterschool and summer activities should not promote the gathering of random knowledge and skills.*

*Rather, afterschool and summer learning activities should be explicitly sequenced and designed to promote the layering of skills that allows participants to create a product or demonstrate mastery in a way they couldn't do before. Programs often achieve this by designing activities that lead to a culminating event or product that can be viewed and celebrated by peers and family members. For older youth, many programs are depending on apprenticeship models to assist youth in achieving a sense of mastery.*



**More summer time** means more opportunity to support participants in building skills, particularly around projects that they want to be doing. Quality programs provide opportunities for participants to showcase their skills and accomplishments.

## **YOUTH INSTITUTE (Grades 8 – 10, community-based); YMCA of Greater Long Beach**

The Summer Youth Institute is focused on the process of digital movie-making, which requires pre-production, production and post production work. The Youth Institute operates 8 hours a day, Monday through Friday for eight weeks. The youth are placed in production groups and operate in a collaborative learning environment throughout the summer. These groups are very diverse with no majority - gender, ethnic/race, age, or grade level. They have had executive briefings at Apple, Pixar, Google and EA Sports. According to Youth Institute leaders, executives at these companies say the same thing, "We want employees who CAN work in DIVERSE groups. If you can't work in a diverse group, you will not work here long."

Each production group in the Youth Institute creates a short film, teen magazine, and website. This work teaches youth critical, sequential, spatial, and analytical thinking, along with group work and problem solving skills. The process of making a movie is also project-and product-based. Digital movie-making, if done right and well, demonstrates all of the Learning in Afterschool and Summer Learning Principles.

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### ***MOUSE SQUAD (Grades 6 – 8); Sunset Neighborhood Beacon Center***

In this program, middle school youth become more technology-literate by completing an online training program. Once young people complete the multiple MOUSE Squad training modules, they must pass both online and performance-based testing in order to reach basic-level certification. Upon certification, young people can implement a youth-run help desk, which provides technical support for their school. Young people also learn basic business planning and marketing strategies for their help desk, and become more familiar with Java computer programming and other software programs. Eighth graders who are with the group for three years may have administrative passwords to the computers, work on special projects in the lab, and lead technology help expeditions to teachers' classrooms. The program runs 2-3 hours a day, Monday through Thursday for four weeks during the summer.

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## ***Learning that Expands Horizons:***

*Young people benefit by learning opportunities that take them beyond their current experience and expand their horizons. Learning about new things and new places promotes a greater sense of potential of what they can achieve and brings a sense of excitement and discovery to the learning environment. Meeting new people can expand social networks in ways that create new opportunities.*

*Afterschool and summer programs have the flexibility to go beyond the walls of their facilities. They can use the surrounding community as a classroom and bring in individuals and businesses that young people may not otherwise come into contact with.*

*Expanding young people's horizons also includes helping them to develop a global awareness. This includes increasing their knowledge of other cultures and places and their understanding of the issues and problems they have in common across cultural and political divides.*



***Summer** is also a natural time for programs to expose participants to new people and places. Visiting artists, lecturers and teachers offer different perspectives, ideas and experiences. Field trips allow participants to visit places – even in their own communities – that they may never have seen and where they are able to return after the program ends. Many summer programs take young people on their first overnight camping trip, which is invariably an awe-inspiring, bonding experience for participants.*

***YOUTH INSTITUTE (Grades 8 – 10, community-based); YMCA of Greater Long Beach***

The Youth Institute involves over 300 youth across nine program sites. It launches its summer program with an Outward Bound-type, five-day Wilderness Retreat, focusing on teaching high school youth leadership, team building and diversity, and inclusion skills. Youth are divided into production teams and participate in activities that range from setting up and managing camp, cooking, rock climbing, orienteering, hiking, low ropes courses, and oral storytelling. These activities are active, meaningful, support mastery, and expand horizons in a wilderness setting. Youth Institute participants also attend conferences and travel to other cities and countries to work as paid interns, which also expands their horizons.

During the Summer Youth Institute (after the Wilderness Retreat), older youth also take part in paid internships as digital media interns for real corporate clients through the non-profit production studio *Change Agent Productions*. This social enterprise exists to give high school youth real world job skills in high-end technology skill areas. With *Change Agent Productions*, youth are learning in ways that are active and meaningful. The program expands young people's horizons by connecting the dots of what they are learning in the summer to possible careers. In the words of one participant, "I can make money with these new skills." As a result, Youth Institute participants often show increased commitment to their high school education and an increased interest in improving their grades.

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***HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION PROGRAM (Grades 6 -8); Alum Rock, Campbell Union, Newark, San Jose, and West Contra Costa Unified School Districts; Operated by The Bay Area After-School All-Stars***

The High School Transition Program provides youth with resources, hands-on learning experiences, and critical information for making the transition from middle school to high school. This week-long camp expands student horizons through a range of activities that assist them and their families in making critical decisions for mapping a plan for the future. The program operates for 8 hours per day for one week.

The program serves as a culminating experience that stems from the afterschool program curriculum used during the school year. Staff instructors are trained in high school drop-out curriculum throughout the year with support from the central office, ASAS National Office, and state and local graduation success resources.

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***SUMMER VOYAGE PROGRAM (Grades K-8); Implemented at James Lick Middle School & Buena Vista Horace Mann; San Francisco Unified School District; Operated by Jamestown Community Center***

Middle school youth participate in this five-week program that provides team-building and real world decision-making opportunities. A total of 120 participants are grouped into eight teams that are responsible for managing their own budget and planning weekly activities, which are focused around the program's chosen theme. Each year, the organization's youth leadership group chooses the theme. Last year, the theme was "Jamestown Explorers," which had youth

examine and compare different neighborhoods and aspects of San Francisco through field trips, interviews, and research. The core goals of the program are to develop young people's project management skills and to foster leadership. Adult Advisors guide youth in managing weekly activities and budgets, all while training youth to facilitate conversations among their peers in rotated leadership roles. By the end of the program, youth are expected to be able to independently develop a budget, craft a proposal to explain their budget priorities, and present to the Summer Program Director for approval. The Jamestown Community Center hires high school youth as Assistant Advisors to work closely with the Adult Advisors.

The youth enjoy two culminating events: a final presentation of their learning, spearheaded by the youth, and a three-day camping trip. For many youth, this is the first time they have left their urban environment to explore the outdoors.

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# About Temescal Associates

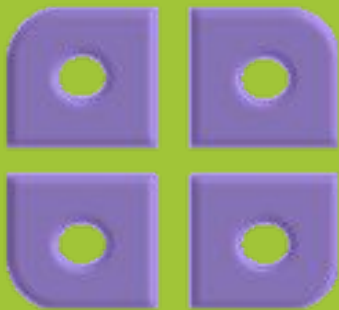
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**Temescal Associates** is dedicated to building the capacity of leaders and organizations in education and youth development who are serious about improving the lives of young people. Temescal Associates clients include leaders of youth serving institutions and organizations, school and youth program practitioners, public and private funders, intermediary organizations, and policy makers. Temescal's work ranges from helping clients build large-scale youth and community initiatives to supporting those who provide services to young people on a day-to-day basis. To accomplish this, Temescal Associates draws on a pool of gifted and highly experienced consultants who excel at eliciting the internal knowledge and wisdom of those we work with while introducing new knowledge and strategies that can transform the day-to-day practices that lead to improved youth outcomes.



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## References

- <sup>1</sup> National Summer Learning Association, 2009.
- <sup>2</sup> Alexander, et al, 2007.
- <sup>3</sup> Sloan, Jennifer McComb, *Making Summer Count*, RAND Corporation, 2010