

# Investing in Summer Learning: Stories from the Field

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Partnership for Children and Youth  
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**SUMMER**MATTERS



## Executive Summary

In most low income communities, learning opportunities are scarce in the summer months. As a result, students who keep pace and succeed during the school year often end up losing ground in the summer.

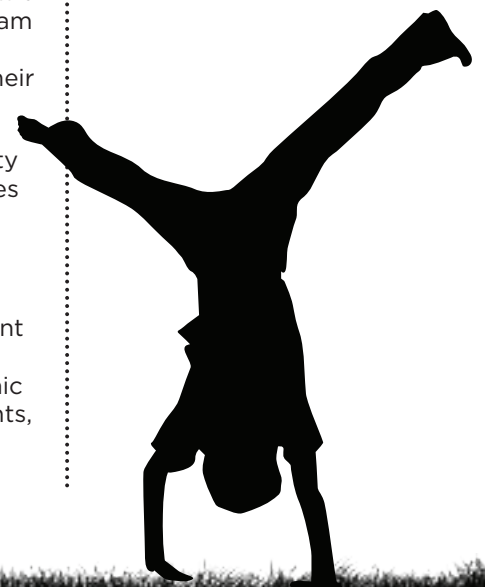
In select communities throughout California, however, districts are taking a proactive approach by using the funds provided by the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) to support summer learning programs. Unlike traditional summer school, these programs combine much-needed academic content with fun, engaging activities. They look and feel like summer camp, but they incorporate intentional learning goals aligned with school priorities.

Beyond this commonality, these summer learning programs take many different forms, shaped by the needs, resources, experiences, and systems of the local community and school districts. This brief describes examples from several different districts across California.

- In Fresno County, Kerman and Fowler Unified School districts adopted a new summer learning program for the middle grades that kept kids engaged and learning. They tapped into their existing after-school partnerships with the local county office and a non-profit that had a proven model for summer learning.
- In rural Northern California, the Tehama and Glenn County Offices of Education brought their programs to many very small school districts spread throughout their sparsely populated region. They created important synergy among local governments and community organizations, while also providing crucial economies of scale to keep the programs affordable.
- In Los Angeles County, Mountain View School District officials worked closely with their partner organization, THINK Together, to create a summer learning program that did double duty. Students enjoyed a camp-like summer experience while teachers participated in the program part-time as a hands-on component of their own professional learning.

These and many other school communities in California are using their new flexibility under LCFF to offer low income students a variety of summer learning opportunities by combining their resources with others in the community and building on both established and new partnerships.

Behind the camp songs, games, and field trips that students experience in these summer learning programs, there is a serious and systematic commitment to student learning goals. Evaluations show that these programs not only help erase summer learning loss, but that the young people who participate often gain in their academic abilities and return to school in the fall more enthusiastic, more confident as students, and more engaged in learning.



# Investing in Summer Learning: Stories from the Field

In some California communities, a wealth of learning opportunities are available during the summer. Children from these communities do not just sit at home between June and August. They attend theatre camps, science camps, nature camps, and space camps—learning opportunities their parents can and do pay for.

In most low income communities, however, learning opportunities are scarce in the summer months. As a result, students who keep pace and succeed during the school year often end up losing ground in the summer. When that goes on year after year, students can fall as much as two years behind by the time they are in fifth grade.

*“It’s not enough to do a great job nine months out of the year. We really have to think about how we can make sure that our students have incredible, rich, fun, exploratory opportunities during the summer as well.”*

Lillian Maldonado-French, Superintendent,  
Mountain View School District, El Monte

## Summer Learning Investments Yield Substantial Return

Summer learning loss contributes to the achievement gap between low income students and their more fortunate peers. Thus, investing in summer learning programs is an impactful and appropriate use of the supplemental and concentration grant funding school districts in California receive for low-income students and English learners. Throughout the state, these funds provided by the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) are supporting programs that combine much-needed academic content with fun, engaging activities. Unlike traditional summer school, they look and feel like summer camp while incorporating intentional learning goals aligned with school priorities.

During the summer of 2015, school districts, county offices of education, and community based organizations throughout California worked together to provide productive summer learning experiences to young people of all ages. They built on innovations and infrastructure developed between 2009 and 2014 in 12 different communities as part of the Summer Matters Campaign.

Whether located in Red Bluff or Los Angeles, summer learning programs provide low-income children with learning experiences that look distinctly different from the school year and traditional summer school. They also take many different forms, shaped by the needs, resources, experiences, and systems of the local community and school districts.

This report describes how the decision to invest in summer in 2015 played out in three different communities faced with different challenges and focused on different opportunities.



# Mid-size Fresno Districts Wanted Better Results from Their Investments in Summer

## Kerman Unified School District—KESA Program

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>Students enrolled:</b>     | 100 6-8th grade students at one site  |
| <b>Length of program:</b>     | 5 weeks (24 days) at 6 hours per day  |
| <b>District contribution:</b> | LCFF funds—\$42,000 in program fees (to California Teaching Fellows Foundation), a separate activities budget, plus the cost of a site administrator and transportation which were shared with high school program. Miscellaneous facility costs. |

## Fowler Unified School District—FUSE Program

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Students enrolled:</b>     | 100 6-8th grade students at one site   |
| <b>Length of program:</b>     | 5 weeks (24 days) at 6 hours per day   |
| <b>District contribution:</b> | LCFF funds—total of approximately \$70,000 which covered program fees of \$42,000, plus transportation, on-site support staff, and facility costs. |

Summer school is certainly not a new idea for the Kerman and Fowler Unified School Districts in Fresno County. In both of these moderately-sized districts, leaders knew they should use some of the increase in state funding they received starting in 2014 to ramp up summer learning opportunities. Middle grade students were the primary target of those opportunities.

## Middle school students needed a more engaging summer experience

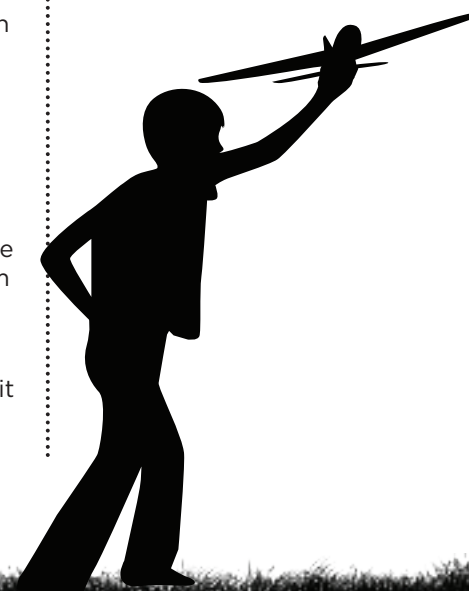
“In 2014 we took a ‘credit recovery’ approach to our summer program,” said Robert Frausto, superintendent of the 4,750 student Kerman district. “Part of the problem was that it was set up like the high school program but the middle school kids didn’t want to be there.” Fowler USD faced a similar problem, according to Superintendent Eric Cederquist.

Thanks to the new flexibility provided under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), leaders from both districts could think creatively about their middle grades summer program. They had no further to look for a workable model than Central Unified School District, just up the highway in Fresno.

Since 2009, Central Unified has operated Central Enrichment Summer Adventures (CESA) for middle grade students, working with the Fresno County Office of Education (FCOE) and a local non-profit, the California Teaching Fellows Foundation. The same partners also support the district’s after-school programs and FCOE is the fiscal agent for After School Education and Safety (ASES) grants throughout Fresno County.

During the summer of 2014, Superintendents Cederquist and Frausto both visited the CESA program. They saw a program that met the dual goals of providing high quality summer learning aligned with district standards and making adolescents active participants in them. They also saw the advantage of not having to reinvent the wheel. Instead, they could leverage an established infrastructure related to curriculum and staffing. Both recommended that their districts use some of their LCFF funds to support pilot programs in the summer of 2015.

Cederquist said his board had just three questions: “Is it good for kids? How much is it going to cost? How will we pay for it?”





## A modest investment yields year-round benefits

Each district paid \$17.50 per student, per day, to the California Teaching Fellows to cover instructional materials and staffing costs. The county office provided staff development, training, and covered some extra material costs.

The district estimated that Fowler USD's total investment in the program, which served about 100 students for five weeks in 2015, would be \$60,000 to \$70,000. The district paid for transportation, on site supports such as a library aide, and provided the facility, covering the maintenance and utility expenses.

At Kerman, the district realized some economies by operating both KESA and a high school summer program at the same site. The site administration and transportation costs were shared over two programs and more students. Marlen Sanchez, the KESA program coordinator, said that the district also gave her a budget of \$22,000 to cover supplies and field trip expenses for the summer program. With almost 90% of their students identified as low income, the district was also eligible for a subsidized summer food program that served all the program participants.

At Fowler Unified, Superintendent Cederquist said he expects the summer investment will pay off even more as teachers implement the Common Core State Standards during the school year. Their teachers have been working together to build units based on the new standards and summer provided the chance to experiment with the new approaches. "We have to take this opportunity in the summer to try non-traditional methods tied into the new state standards to see how we can enhance student learning."

Likewise, Superintendent Frausto describes how the summer learning program fits into larger district goals at Kerman USD. He notes that the district is still doing direct academic interventions for students who fall behind. However, instead of using summer for that, the interventions now happen during the school year when the help is more timely.

Frausto is confident that the district will not only continue the KESA program next year, but expand it. "I think we'll double our numbers next year. Kids lose information over the summer and here I have a program that helps them retain knowledge. I think traditional summer school is not working, particularly for middle school. You get kids in a summer program if they want to be there. They're learning but they're also having fun. I heard nothing but really positive comments from students and parents."

*"I cannot say enough about this program. I think it's a model you're going to see happening in more and more places."*

Robert Frausto, Superintendent, Kerman Unified School District, Fresno County

# Small, Rural County Offices Use Summer to Build and Strengthen Partnerships with Districts and Communities

## Tehama County Office of Education—Summer Learning Program

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>Students enrolled:</b>      | 800 K-8 students at seven sites, serving students from 13 districts   |
| <b>Length of program:</b>      | 5 weeks   |
| <b>District contributions:</b> | About half of districts allocated LCFF funds. Districts (along with Migrant Ed program) supplemented ASES grant funds to make sure program costs were covered. Facility costs. Scholarships to cover some students' program fees. |

## Glenn County Office of Education—Summer Learning Program

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>Students enrolled:</b>      | 340 K-8 students at 2 sites, serving six school districts   |
| <b>Length of program:</b>      | Four weeks  |
| <b>District contributions:</b> | Districts match COE contribution of \$12,500 total (\$36 per student to include transportation and facility costs). |

Summer learning programs have become a unifying force in Glenn and Tehama Counties, in North Central California. The programs are organized and managed by the two County Offices of Education, which are creating summer learning programs that unite their far-flung communities on behalf of young people.

Between the two counties, about 15,000 students attend school in 23 different school districts spread over about 4,000 square miles. That's an area the size of Los Angeles County, which serves 100 times more students, about 1.5 million. The largest city in the region is Red Bluff, with a population of 14,000. The cities of Corning, Orland, and Willows are each about half the size of Red Bluff.

Organizing a summer learning program here is challenging because of the long distances between communities and the small number of students. As lead agencies, the COEs need to create synergy and economies of scale.

### Pulling together resources throughout the community is essential

Both the Glenn and Tehama County Offices operate as the fiscal agents for ASES grants and were able to use some of that funding for their summer learning programs in 2015. In neither case was the money sufficient to run the program however. In Tehama, some school districts allocated a small portion of their LCFF funding to the program; and in both counties the districts provide valuable in-kind support by making their facilities available free of charge and providing some transportation.

Another crucial source of support in both of these rural counties is the federally funded Migrant Education program. The program provides funds for summer meals and also helps with transportation.

The programs also depend heavily on outside partnerships, including parks and recreation departments, other city agencies, community-based organizations, and local businesses. All of these organizations work with COE officials to provide the resources and activities essential to their programs' success. They also tap into a generalized desire in these communities to support student learning and strengthen outcomes.



“We have an initiative here called ‘Expect More Tehama,’” explained Karla Stroman, the administrator in charge of after-school and summer programs for the Tehama County Office of Education. “Community organizations and business are all coming together and expecting more for our kids. There’s been such a strong push here to keep our kids learning, starting when they’re young, and getting them heading in the right direction toward being college and career ready. A lot of that energy has been devoted to making summer programs available.”

Stroman says that the community’s specific interest in summer made it easier for her to get the partnerships and resources needed for programs that enrolled about 800 elementary and middle grades students at seven school sites in 2015. Local churches pitched in, providing extended hours for those who needed them.

An important aspect of these programs is their alignment with local school districts’ academic goals. That requires careful coordination and an investment of time. Program planning starts early and involves county office staff, educators from local schools, and the site coordinators who will manage the summer workforce.

The Tehama COE plays a central role in professional development for teachers from local districts and for after-school and summer staff members. Officials there see summer learning as related to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. That work comes together in an innovative way at the “Maker Space” created at the county office. Stroman said that during the summer, every student had the opportunity to visit the facility; use critical thinking and problem-solving skills to build such things as circuits, wind-tunnels, and other construction projects; and then develop their communication skills by presenting their work.

Philip James, coordinator of expanded learning programs for Glenn COE, says he works with school and district administrators to identify the learning needs they hope are addressed during summer, which can be as specific as multiplication facts or as general as literacy. Credentialed teachers from the participating school districts provide subject matter lessons. The program operated at two sites but served six of the county’s eight school districts. The school sites, in Orland and Willows, each served about 170 students. The smaller districts sent between 40 and 60 participants per site, depending on the location and need.

## The programs must be able to attract enough students

Getting enough students to attend the summer learning program, and getting the right students, can be a particular challenge in these sparsely populated communities. In Glenn COE, teachers refer the students who will benefit the most from the summer program. After those students have been enrolled, the program is opened up and campers are picked on a first-come first-served basis. When families can afford it they are asked to pay a \$35 fee which covers the cost of supplies.

In Tehama County, the base funding for the program comes from the ASES grant. Three districts also have federal 21st Century Learning Center grants. The school districts and Migrant Ed program pitch in to cover the rest of the program costs, which Stroman estimates are about \$10 per student per day. There is also a \$60 program fee charged to families. Some of the local school districts provide “scholarships” to help encourage and support participation among high-priority students.

Even though not every school site receives ASES funds, the programs are open to kids throughout Tehama County. It’s another way the program there works to help fulfill the community’s commitment to all their young people.

“We have an agreement,” Stroman said, “that the county office will provide what it gets from the ASES grant and then everyone will pitch in to make up the difference.”

Stroman reports that student demand for the program is continuing to grow as more families hear about it from their neighbors. They are starting to get calls in January from parents who are ready to sign their children up for the following summer.

*“This summer, we had kids reading, writing, and tinkering. It was an opportunity for them to learn in a new and different way. Their projects were collaborations that had them working together and problem solving.”*

Karla Stroman, Administrator for After School Programs,  
Tehama County Office of Education

# The Summer Program Supports Student and Teacher Learning In an Urban District

## Mountain View School District—Summer Learning Program

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Students enrolled:</b>     | 2,300 K-8th grade students at 12 sites   |
| <b>Length of program:</b>     | 5 weeks  |
| <b>District contribution:</b> | LCFF funds—approximately \$475,000, plus other sources, to cover total estimated per-student cost of \$220. Transportation, on-site support staff, and facility costs. |

In Mountain View School District, in the city of El Monte, officials work closely with partner organization THINK Together to create a summer learning program that does double duty, providing a rich summer learning experience for both teachers and students. Students experience a wealth of camp-style activities plus instruction from certificated teachers. Teachers participating in a summer professional development program get an immediate, hands-on chance to work with students, apply what they have learned, and do peer coaching that strengthens their training experience.

### A strong partnership makes the integration of teacher and student learning possible

Raymond Andry, assistant superintendent for educational services in this 7,500-student district, notes that the approach makes financial sense by helping the district meet two of its goals with a single program. With 95% low income students, Mountain View SD receives both supplemental and concentration grant funding under LCFF, and its LCAP specifies that some of these resources will be used to provide a summer learning program.

The professional development component represents a unique approach, says Andry. Teachers attend an afternoon professional development session and then practice those skills with students the next morning. “Professional development does not usually have a training format so you often lose traction. Using summer as a practicum experience—it’s just smart.”

The district’s long-standing partnership with THINK Together helps make this integrated approach work seamlessly, according to Angelica Sifuentes-Donoso, the district’s director of family engagement and after-school programs. The teachers just focus on the academic component of the program. The THINK Together staff provides a wrap-around program that includes physical fitness and enrichment activities, plus other group activities that create a “summer spirit” for students. As one of the state’s largest providers of expanded learning programs, THINK Together contributes multiple resources, such as the curriculum from NASA that was used in 2015 to provide STEM activities in Mountain View. Field trips, including an overnight camping experience, also set the program apart from “school as usual.”

Andry sees another benefit in the Mountain View program, particularly for his teaching staff who seem invigorated by their summer experiences. He says both students and teachers are ready and excited to be back in school at the end of the summer. That contrasts with traditional summer school programs, which often left teachers feeling burned out.





## Summer learning is shaped around a growth model

Mountain View superintendent Lillian Maldonado-French underscores the difference for students who attend a summer learning program instead of a traditional summer school aimed at remediation.

“When I think about traditional summer school I always think of it as a deficit model. It’s mandatory, the kids have to be there. They don’t have a lot of fun. Summer learning is really a growth model. Rather than just remediating or plugging holes and deficits, we take what the student already has and we build on that. We find that the students learn even more. They’re so excited and engaged and happy to be here. It’s wonderful.”

That differentiation between summer learning and summer school shows up in the district’s LCAP language, which calls out summer learning explicitly. That term carries with it the expectation that the district will use its LCFF dollars in less traditional ways. It also means the program is likely to draw on multiple funding sources rather than just using a district’s LCFF monies. In Mountain View, a Walmart grant, a Weingart Foundation grant, a 21st Century Learning Center grant, and other smaller grants were all important sources of funding in past years. The influx of LCFF dollars has helped make it possible to expand the summer program to serve more students. In 2015 there were 2,300 students participating and Andry says the goal is to increase that to at least 2,700 in 2016.

The phrase summer learning also signals that there will be collaboration with other organizations and programs. The partnership with THINK Together is central to the operation of the 5-week summer learning program, but the district extends its summer activities further. An example is the Extended Library Program, which begins when the main summer program ends and provides young people with breakfast, a morning filled with various activities and games, then lunch.

In essence, the schools in Mountain View SD are open all summer. That does create some challenges around facilities maintenance, Andry concedes. However, it also serves the community well as families can register students and attend to other school-related business year round.

“There are many ways of turning a regular, traditional summer school into summer learning without a lot of extra resources,” says Superintendent Maldonado-French. “It just takes a little bit of imagination and a lot of willingness to look at what you can do. Maybe you don’t have the resources to have recreational programs but maybe parks and rec in your city does. So why not partner with them? Maybe there are clubs and groups willing to work with you. It’s about being open to other ideas and then saying, ‘We can do it!’”

*“We’ve linked our summer learning program to... our summer meals program, parent opportunities and our migrant ed program. Wherever possible we’ve created partnerships so we can build a truly robust and rich set of summer opportunities for our students.”*

Lillian Maldonado-French, Superintendent,  
Mountain View School District



## Programs Consistently Produce a Strong Return on the Investment in Summer Learning

Behind the camp songs, games, and field trips students experience in all of these summer learning programs, there is a serious and systematic commitment to student learning goals and to program improvement. The programs all use multiple assessment methods to gauge how much their investment in summer delivers in terms of learning. Scores from pre- and post-tests for students show that not only has summer learning loss been erased, but that many of the young people who come to these summer programs gain in their academic abilities. Their engagement with school during the year often increases as well.

The evaluation data the programs collect—which includes teacher, staff, and parent surveys—guides the planning for the next year and informs the ongoing commitment to do more and do better. It can also be an important part of making the case for summer learning to school district leaders. In Glenn County, for example, Phillip James is using the outcome data to convince more local school districts that investing in summer learning programs is an appropriate and smart use of their LCFF funds.

Of course another test of the effectiveness of summer learning programs is consumer demand, and it grows every year in every community. Perhaps the biggest challenge is providing enough slots so that no children are left on a waiting list and all who will benefit can join the fun at their local schools.

## Every District Can and Should Write its Own Summer Story

Summer learning programs look different in every community, depending on a multitude of factors.

Step one, as Maldonado French explains, is to “take a really good look at what your assets are as a school district. Every district has perhaps a summer meals program or a library program. Perhaps there are partnerships out there with the local colleges or other groups. You have to build on what is there. Think about the partners you can work with. There’s lots of opportunities out there if we’re willing to take a look and see what’s possible for our kids.”

Research on summer learning loss makes it clear that low-income students need positive learning experiences during the summer if they are to have a fair chance in school. Those experiences need to be challenging and engaging, and they need to be fun. Throughout California, districts are finding innovative ways to put summer learning programs together by combining their own resources with others in their community and building on both established and new partnerships. And they are finding that their investments are paying off in a multitude of ways.



# Learn More About Summer Learning

A wealth of information is available describing the options for funding, organizing and operating a summer learning program that students will love.

## Resources

LCFF: Leveraging Summer for Student Success

<http://summermatters2you.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Leveraging-Summer-for-Student-Success.pdf>

Putting Summer To Work: A series of reports on the development of high-quality summer learning programs in California.

<http://summermatters2you.net/putting-summer-to-work/>

VIDEO: Getting a Head Start on the Common Core

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agfpN8hEak0&feature=youtu.be>

VIDEO: Teaching Kids How to Succeed in School

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofCGPeP7Hk0&feature=youtu.be>

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Mountain View School District, El Monte

Kerman Unified School District

Fowler Unified School District



Summer Matters is an initiative of the Partnership for Children & Youth (PCY). Learn more about Summer Matters and the many educators, policymakers, school district leaders, organizations, and parents working collaboratively to promote summer learning in California at [www.summermatters.net](http://www.summermatters.net).

For more information on PCY, and to learn about all our initiatives, visit [www.partnerforchildren.org](http://www.partnerforchildren.org).