

Investments in Summer Learning Programs:

A Scan of Resources for Summer Programming in Indianapolis and Marion County, 2008



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Expanding time for learning has recently emerged as a national policy priority. Research from Johns Hopkins University underscores the importance of summer learning for school-age children. Differences in children's academic success can be explained largely by their summer experiences. In fact, a study by Alexander and colleagues found that two-thirds of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities during the elementary school years.¹ "The (summer learning) gap accumulates over the years and, once students get to high school, it results in unequal placements in college preparatory tracks and increases the chance that children from low socio-economic families will drop out."²

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¹ L. Alexander, K. Entwisle, and L. S. Olson, "Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap," *American Sociological Review* 72 (2007).

² Ibid.



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Summer programs afford a critical opportunity to level the playing field. Little is known, however, about the kinds of programs that are available to lower-income children during the summer months, what these programs cost, and how they are funded. Given the growing recognition of the importance of summertime activities, the National Summer Learning Association is working in partnership with the Summer Youth Program Fund (SYPF), a collaborative effort of 10 foundations and the City of Indianapolis, to track resources and funding for summer programs in Marion County, to strengthen the quality of summer learning programs available to low and moderate income families in Indianapolis, Indiana, and to increase knowledge about effective practices and available resources. As part of the overall effort, the National Summer Learning Association and Cross & Jofstus partnered to conduct a countywide resource scan on summer programming. The scan gathered and analyzed information about a wide set of available resources for summer programs in Marion County, the nucleus of the Indianapolis metropolitan area, to provide a better understanding of the magnitude and nature of investments with the goal of improving policies and making better use of summer learning resources.

This resource scan aims to provide a first look at resources devoted to summer program opportunities for school-age, low-income children and youth in Marion County, Indiana, and to provide basic information for comparison across programs. The ultimate goal is to repeat this type of data collection across multiple summers to understand how resources fluctuate from one year to the next. For summer 2008, we collected information on the types of programs offered across Marion County, demographic data on who is served, characteristics and operating schedules of programs, and information on program funding and the types of resources used to support those programs (including public and private sources). ■



PURPOSE AND METHODS

This resource scan focuses on examining a broad range of program opportunities for low-income, school-age children in the summer months when school is not in session. For purposes of this study, we defined a summer program as a set of organized activities for school-age children that take place during the summer months. The program is designed to meet a specific need or offer participants the opportunity to attain a defined goal. It has a specific schedule, requires that participants be enrolled in the program (i.e. not a “drop-in” program), and operates a minimum of ten hours over the course of the summer.³

The study team identified six types of program sponsors that typically offer summer programs to low-income children and youth:

1. Local school districts
2. City/county parks and recreation departments
3. Childcare centers and registered ministries receiving government subsidies
4. Local workforce agencies
5. Affiliates of national nonprofits
6. Locally-based, nonprofit providers

With the exception of the information on the public schools and the small, nonprofit providers, we gathered most of the data via conference call and/or in-person meetings, and through follow-up emails. An online survey was used to gather data from the eleven school districts. For the data on small nonprofit providers, the research team relied on information provided by the Summer Youth Program Fund. The chart on page four outlines the degree to which program sponsors responded to data requests.

³ This threshold is not based in research on what constitutes an appropriate “dosage” to be an effective program. It is merely an attempt to eliminate activities with very limited duration.

PROGRAMMATIC FUNDING: DATA SOURCES, INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS, LOW-INCOME

Program Sponsor	Data Source/Notes

Within the offerings of these sponsors, the scan attempted to identify those programs that served large segments of low-income youth or were accessible to low-income youth (i.e. programs that were free or low-cost or were otherwise specifically designed to serve low-income youth).⁴ Summer programs without a clear focus on serving low-income youth were not examined. Also excluded from the study were “enhancement” programs that provide specialized content to other summer programs, in order to avoid double-counting participants. Programs offered for a very short amount of time (less than 10 hours) and programs offered on a drop-in basis were not included. Finally, residential camps were excluded due to their different program schedule and cost structure.

Summary level information about investment and reach

The table on page six shows program enrollment and funding for each of the six sponsor groups. In terms of scope and scale of summer programming, the public schools and the diverse pool of small, mainly nonprofit and faith-based providers receiving grant funds through the Summer Youth Program Fund reach the largest numbers of low-income youth. The table shows a total investment of approximately \$18 million for approximately 39,000 participants. The number of children served in programs that met the scan’s criteria (outlined above) varies from 14,000 in programs sponsored by the public schools to 600 served by the parks and recreation department. (The latter number reflects only the programs targeting low-income youth.) The table also shows that program funding per participant varies significantly among the sponsors from \$320 per participant in programs offered by the public schools, to the \$880 per participant received as reimbursement by childcare providers for children receiving childcare subsidies. Some of this variation is due to differences in program schedule. The average program length varied from 96 hours for school programs (the shortest of all the programs listed) to 435 hours for subsidized childcare⁵ programs. However, funding per participant per hour of programming

also varies widely, from \$3.49 spent on average in public school programs to \$1.08 spent on average in programs operated by the national, nonprofit providers. The wide difference in funding is likely due to several factors, including the costs associated with staff, facilities, adult/student ratios and activities. To some extent, it may also be due to differences in how information was calculated and reported.

COMPARISON TO NATIONAL ESTIMATES: COST OF QUALITY OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS

A recent study commissioned by the Wallace Foundation provides an in-depth look at the cost of quality out-of-school-time programs, including a subset of programs that operate in the summer. This study looked both at out-of-pocket expenses (goods or services purchased with cash) as well as the full costs of programming (including non-cash contributions). Findings from the study indicate that out-of-pocket expenses for summer programs for elementary and middle school students are about \$3.50 per hour, significantly higher than the \$2.08 average (\$2.22 weighted average) found in the scan. The national numbers are likely higher for several reasons: the study included only higher quality programs that may have had higher costs; estimates were “culled out” of year-round program data; the study included programs for older youth that offered stipends for summer jobs; and costs were calculated on a per slot basis rather than a per participant basis.

Source: J. Grossman, et. al. *The Cost of Quality Out-of-School Time Programs: Executive Summary, Table 1 page iv.* Retrieved from: <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/AreasOfContinuingInterest/PhilanthropicIssues/Documents/The-Cost-of-Quality-OST-Programs.pdf>

⁴ It is important to reiterate that the scan did not attempt to examine the wide variety of fee-based programs without a clear focus on serving low-income children.

⁵ For comparison purposes, a program offered each day of the summer break for a full day would have an estimated program length of 550 hours (11 weeks, 5 days per week, 10 hours per day).

SUMMER 2008 PROGRAM ENROLLMENT AND FUNDING BY SPONSOR

Program Provider	Reported Summer Program Enrollment	Program Enrollment as % of county school enrollment	Total Reported Funding	Average Program Length (hours)	Reported Funding per participant	Reported Funding per participant per hour
Public Schools	14,000	8.2%	\$4.2 million	96	\$320	\$3.49
Parks & Recreation	600	0.3%	\$505,000	415	\$870	\$2.09
Subsidized Childcare	2300	1.4%	\$2.04 million	435	\$880	\$2.01
Large/National Nonprofit Providers	9700	5.6%	\$3.93 million	379	\$410	\$1.08
Small, Nonprofit Providers	12,100	7.1%	\$7.00 million	341	\$580	\$1.71
TOTALS/AVERAGES	38,700	22.6%	\$17.68 million	\$333 (avg) \$269 (weighted for program size)	\$585 (avg) \$460 (weighted for program size)	\$2.08 (avg) \$2.22 (weighted for program size)

All figures are rounded.

* See full report at www.summerlearning.org for a complete explanation of this table.

In addition to the types of programs highlighted above, there are other substantial summer investments made by program sponsors included in the scan that did not meet the criteria outlined earlier for inclusion in the programmatic analysis, including the Summer Food Service Program; residential camps, enhancements and special projects funded by the Summer Youth Program Fund; and supervised play offerings through the parks and recreation department. The table below shows the estimated total investment in programmatic funding and then shows the additional investments highlighted in this section. When adding the “other investments” the estimated total spending is increased by more than \$9 million for a total of more than \$27 million.⁶ ■

TOTAL SUMMER INVESTMENT IN INDIANAPOLIS AND MARION COUNTY, 2008	
SPONSOR PROGRAM	TOTAL DOLLARS (IN MILLIONS)
Programmatic Funding	\$4.2
Public Schools	\$0.505
Parks and Recreation	\$2.04
Subsidized Childcare	\$3.9
National nonprofit providers	\$7.0
Small nonprofit providers	
Estimated total investment in daily programs available to low income youth	\$17.68
Other programs and supports	
Summer Food Service Program	\$2.02
Other SYPF-funded programs (including enhancements and residential camps) ⁷	\$7.4
IndyParks Supervised Play	n/a
Total additional summer investment	\$9.42
ESTIMATED GRAND TOTAL	\$27.10

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The resource scan found that children and youth in Marion County benefit from a diverse set of summer programs that are funded by a variety of public and private organizations. Overall investments in summer programs in the metro area top \$27 million. The scan also highlighted the following findings:

- **Public funding for summer programs comes largely from state and local sources.** In Marion County, as in many other jurisdictions, public investments for summer programs come in large part from state and local funding. Of the programs included in this scan, the largest investments in structured summer programming came from the public schools (approximately \$4.4 million), childcare subsidies, (approximately \$2 million), and the parks and recreation department (approximately \$570,000). Local public funds provide a large share of these investments. State education funds help support remedial programs for students at risk of educational failure. In addition, federal dollars provide some of the funding for childcare subsidies, and other federal education sources, like Title I, are used for a very small portion of the overall funding for summer programs
- **SYPF and its grantees collectively devote the largest amount resources to summer programs.** In 2008, the SYPF invested \$2.2 million, and its grantees spent approximately \$14 million on summer programs in Marion County. The SYPF provides crucial financial support to many local nonprofit organizations, expanding the capacity of these organizations to provide summer programming.
- **The supply of low-cost summer programs is limited relative to the number of low-income children.** There are approximately 89,000 children receiving free and reduced-price meals in Marion County. This scan tallied approximately 38,700 children served in the summer months by the main public and private providers—a figure which is known to include a sizable number of children and youth who are not low income. Even with the significant investments being made by these providers, our rough estimates indicate that there is still a sizable gap between the number of low-income children in the county, and the opportunities provided by the largest public and private providers seeking to serve low-income youth. While this count is not fully inclusive of summer opportunities in Indianapolis, it is likely that many low-income children are not participating in regular, organized activities during the summer—a chunk of time that represents about 20 percent of the year. Furthermore, with only a few exceptions, a single slot does not provide programming for the entire summer—

⁶ Bear in mind that, as stated above, the estimates for programmatic spending do not include all programs targeted for inclusion in this scan—for example, two out of eleven school districts did not submit data and in other cases programs were excluded because staff did not submit key information. Thus, the totals here underestimate the total investment to some degree.

⁷ In addition to these program expenditures, the Lilly Endowment provided \$400,000 in funding to summer programs for modest capital expenditures on items like vans, computers, and kitchen upgrades. This represents a critical investment for individual programs, but the figure was not included in the scan because other sponsors were not asked to report information on capital expenditures for their summer programs.

or even most weeks—with many programs operating on a limited schedule. This means that families seeking programs for more than a couple of weeks must patch together offerings from various agencies and providers, taking up multiple slots.

- **Program funding varied significantly across the various types of providers.** The analysis of reported funding per participant on an hourly basis showed that school programs are the most costly, at approximately \$3.49, followed by parks and recreation at \$2.09, subsidized childcare at \$2.01, smaller nonprofits at \$1.71 and the affiliates of national nonprofits at \$1.08. This is likely due to differences in staffing structure and costs among programs, as well as differences in how program sponsors calculated and reported costs.
- **Most summer programs, even those sponsored by public agencies, charge fees.** With the exception of summer school programs receiving state funding that

are prohibited from charging fees, the large majority of programs in the scan charged fees. In some of these programs, the fees cover only a small portion of program expenses. However, in many programs, fees make up a large percentage of program funding.

- **There are few options for older children and youth.** In Marion County, outside of summer school for those who are at risk of failure, options for summer programs for older youth are limited—especially those designed to serve low-income youth.
- **Coordination of summer programming in Marion County presents a significant challenge.** Summer programs are run by multiple entities in the county, including the school system, the parks and recreation department, and a variety of large and small nonprofit agencies. Yet there is no group, organization or agency that works specifically to coordinate summer programs across these various groups. ■

FUNDING AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Considering the findings above and the suggestions the research team heard from those in the field, this scan points to several ways that advocates of expanded and improved summer programs in Marion County can use the information gathered in the scan to take better advantage of current investments and to leverage new resources.



1. Make better use of federal funds. Increased federal funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 presents several options for tapping new resources that can be used to support summer learning opportunities. Over \$30 billion dollars in stimulus funds can be used to support summer learning programs, including the following streams: Title I School Improvement Grants; Title I, Part A; the Workforce Investment Act; Race to the Top, and the Investing in Innovation Fund.

2. Leverage private investments. When it comes to improving the coordination of resources and expanding public support for programming, SYPF funders can speak with a powerful voice because of their significant investment in the overall summer landscape. With improved coordination, program sponsors could be more responsive to the needs of families by adapting schedules (covering more hours per day or weeks over the summer), coordinating program offerings (for example, offering an afternoon enrichment program as a complement to morning summer school) and presenting parents with a consolidated single listing of program offerings facilitating planning for the summer.

3. Expand summer jobs programs for older youth.

A missing piece from the array of summer program offerings in Marion County is a strong and consistent summer jobs program, which could be a key target for Marion County leaders seeking to expand services for older youth.

4. Improve data to inform policies and program strategies.

This scan brought to light the fact many of the organizations included in the research—particularly those that rely on fees to help defray the costs of a program—do not have a good understanding of the costs of the services they provide. In fact, several organizations indicated that data were not kept in a way that allowed summer costs to be isolated. Better data on the costs (revenues and expenditure) for summer programs could help with coordinating existing funds, leveraging new funds and making strategic investments.



Marion County can use the information gathered in the scan to take better advantage of current investments and to leverage new resources.

In addition, better data systems would allow programs to collect and coordinate important youth data across programs. For example, shared youth demographic and outcome data would not only provide a baseline and method by which programs could assess individual growth, but would also allow summer providers, in particular, to better understand the youth they serve outside of the short time they spend with them over the summer months.

5. Invest in infrastructure, as well as programs. Few of the public and private entities currently providing services have the capacity (space, qualified personnel, and content knowledge) to expand programming, especially high-quality opportunities, to larger numbers of students or to different age groups. Any significant expansion will require additional investments in program infrastructure and capacity, as well as funding for additional slots. Because of the variety of providers and funding sources supporting summer programming, infrastructure investments should be targeted to both programs and interagency coordination. Investments in interagency coordination might focus on aligning data collection systems, supporting a dedicated staff member or organization to regularly convene, coordinate, and advocate on behalf of summer providers, or piloting new partnership models that make better use of existing funds. ■

For more details on the research methods and findings and further discussion of the lessons learned and their implications, see *Funding Summer Learning Programs: A Scan of Resources for Summer Programming in Indianapolis and Marion County, 2008*. The full report is available from the National Summer Learning Association by visiting www.summerlearning.org.

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The National Summer Learning Association's mission is to connect and equip schools and community organizations to deliver quality summer learning programs to our nation's youth to help close the achievement gap and support healthy development.

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