



Summer Programs for Kindergarten and Sixth Grade Readiness

District Leadership Forum

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Consider research-based best practice on summer program instructional length to maximize student learning. RAND Corporation recommends a minimum duration of five to six weeks (i.e., 25 to 30 days) and at least 90 minutes of math and 120 minutes of English Language Arts (ELA) each day for effective summer programs.¹ In response, administrators at **District A** structure all K-8 academic summer programs to comprise a minimum of 25 days, six hours per day, for a total of 150 instructional hours. Teachers dedicate at least 75 hours to math and/or ELA.

Profiled districts leverage state funding, central district funding, revenue from tuition-based programs, and/or community partnerships to cover costs of summer programming. At **District D**, state funding covers part of the cost of the tuition-free kindergarten and sixth-grade readiness programs. Administrators at the district use revenue generated from enrichment-focused, tuition-based summer camps to cover approximately 40 percent of all summer programming costs, and central district funds finance remaining costs. Administrators at **District A** leverage partnerships with intermediaries and community-based organizations to help fund some of the costs of summer programming. At both **District E** and **District C**, contacts note that tuition revenue for the sixth-grade readiness program fully covers program costs.

Embed enrichment activities into summer programming to boost student engagement. To blend academic and enrichment curriculum, **District G** administrators offer a K-8 summer arts camp in which students conduct hands-on, art-based projects focused on literacy and math. Administrators at **District B** increased their enrichment camp offerings to boost student enrollment, attendance, and engagement in summer programming. For example, the district's Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools offer career-oriented camps, such as in culinary arts and coding. Similarly, at **District D**, students can enroll in afternoon, themed enrichment camps (e.g., climate and geology) after morning academic summer courses.

Focus on teaching classroom expectations and building routines for both students and parents in kindergarten readiness programs. At both **District A** and **District D**, incoming kindergarten students learn classroom expectations and routines, such as how to follow rules and how to walk in a line. Administrators at **District F** also educate parents of incoming kindergarten students on building expectations and routines during the first day of the program. They discuss how parents can support their children socially, emotionally, and academically to ease the transition.

Integrate community-building activities and academic and social-emotional learning (SEL) skills into sixth-grade readiness programs. At **District D**, students acclimate themselves to a new school setting by establishing relationships with future teachers and classmates and connecting with current middle school students. Similarly, administrators at **District C** invite high school students to share their middle school experiences with incoming sixth grade students. Contacts at profiled districts also cite the importance of equipping students with academic (e.g., note-taking, organization) and SEL (e.g., problem-solving, teamwork, learning styles) skills, to set them up for success in middle school.

1) "Getting to Work on Summer Learning." RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR366.html.

2) Program Operation

Design

Consider Research-Based Best Practice on Summer Program Instructional Length to Maximize Student Learning

Research demonstrates that summer learning programs offer an effective opportunity to reduce the achievement gap between children from low- and high-income backgrounds. For summer program structure, RAND Corporation recommends establishing a minimum of five to six weeks (i.e., 25 to 30 days). In the largest study conducted on district-based summer learning, students who received a minimum of 25 hours of math and 34 hours of ELA instruction outperformed their peers on state exams.²

In response, administrators at **District A** structure all K-8 academic programs to comprise a minimum of 25 days, six hours per day, for a total of 150 instructional hours. Of 150 instructional hours, administrators dedicate a minimum of half (i.e., 75 hours) to ELA and/or math.

For kindergarten and sixth grade readiness summer programs specifically, all other profiled districts schedule less time than RAND Corporation recommends. Instructional length for kindergarten and sixth-grade readiness programs at each profiled district can be found on **pages 13** and **19**, respectively.

Adapt School Year Curriculum for Summer Programming to Ensure Content Alignment

Contacts at **District C**, **District D**, **District E**, and **District F** note that teachers use curriculum and materials from the school year for summer programming. By using an internal curriculum, teachers ensure content alignment and continuity for students. For example, an external curriculum might teach kindergarten students a different approach to letter recognition than during the school year. As a result, teachers might unintentionally create misconceptions for their kindergarten students or would have to actively anticipate and mitigate curriculum discrepancies.

At District E, counselors teach a social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum during sixth grade and preview that curriculum during the sixth-grade readiness program. Similarly, at District C, incoming sixth grade students learn SEL skills that they will also practice in the nine-week-long transitions course that all sixth grade students take at the beginning of the school year.

Funding

Profiled Districts Leverage Multiple Funding Sources to Cover Costs of Summer Programming

Administrators at profiled districts combine sources such as state funding, central district funds, tuition revenue, and community-based partnerships to cover the costs of summer programming. For example, contacts at **District D** report that state funding, based on average daily summer program attendance, covers part of the cost of the tuition-free kindergarten and sixth-grade readiness programs. The state reimburses approximately \$1000 per student because the district's average summer program attendance rate is about 87 percent. Administrators at District D also use revenue generated from enrichment-focused, tuition-based summer camps to cover

2) "Getting to Work on Summer Learning." RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR366.html.

approximately 40 percent of all summer programming costs. Central district funds finance remaining costs.

Administrators at **District A** allocate a maximum of \$1,000 in central district funds per student enrolled and use a cost-sharing model to account for cost variation across different program types. The district also partners with several intermediaries and community-based organizations that help fund and administer summer programs.

Example Funding Sources for Summer Programming at Profiled Districts



District A

- Central district funds
- Funding from intermediaries and community-based organizations



District F

- Central district funds
- State funding



District D

- Central district funds
- State funding
- Tuition revenue from enrichment-based camps



District G

- Central district funds
- State grants (i.e., turnaround grants, grants to support out-of-school time)
- Funding from community-based organizations and local foundations (i.e., United Way)

Some Profiled Districts Charge Enrollment Tuition to Cover Costs of Summer Programming

Three of six profiled districts that operate readiness programs (i.e., kindergarten and/or sixth-grade readiness) charge tuition, which covers some or all of summer programming costs. At **District B**, students pay \$180 for the kindergarten readiness program. Students from Title I schools attend the program at no cost. The district finances remaining costs with central district funds. At both **District C** and **District E**, contacts note that tuition revenue from the sixth-grade readiness program covers all costs.

Summer Program Tuition Price at Profiled Districts		
\$180	\$125	\$160
Kindergarten readiness program at District B	Sixth-grade readiness program at District E	Sixth-grade readiness program at District C

Prioritize Recruiting Internal District Teachers and Administrators to Staff Summer Programs

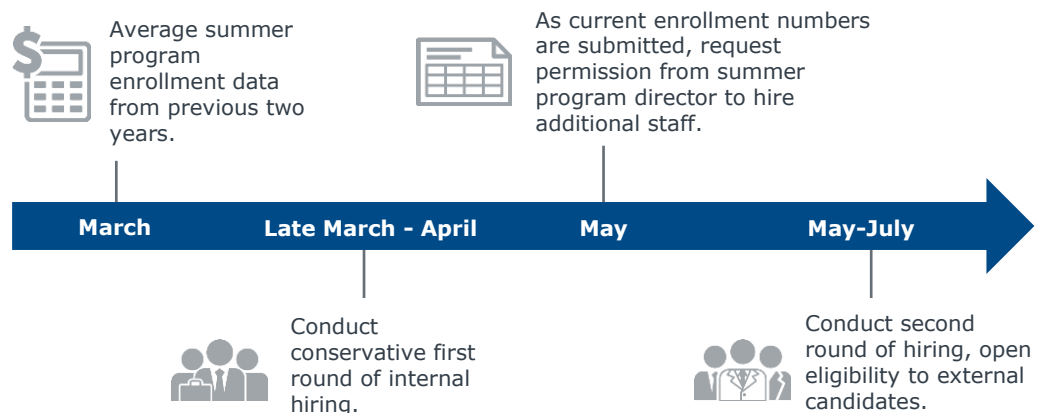
Given that teacher quality is the most important school-based factor in student outcomes, select the most motivated and highest-performing teachers for summer programming to maximize students' summer learning gains.³ Administrators at **District C**, **District D**, **District E**, and **District G** staff summer programs internally to ensure curriculum alignment and a stronger transition between the summer program and school year. For example, social workers and counselors employed by District E visit classrooms and conduct lessons on middle school skillsets, such as study strategies, time management, note-taking, and learning styles during the school year. These social workers and counselors also lead the sixth-grade readiness program in the summer.

When recruiting teachers, promote attractive elements of the summer program, such as small classes, focus on one subject, a half-day commitment, and consistent professional support.⁴ In addition, administrators at District E compensate summer program teachers similarly as during the school year to encourage participation.

Contacts at the district note that because most social workers and counselors do not have teaching certification, they cannot teach traditional summer school courses. Thus, by teaching the sixth-grade readiness program, which does not require teacher certification, social workers and counselors gain the opportunity to work during the summer.

At **District B**, each school site coordinator (i.e., summer school principal) manages their own hiring process for internal and external applicants.

Hiring Timeline for Summer Staff at *District B*



Designate One Point of Contact at the District to Launch and Oversee Summer Programming

RAND Corporation recommends identifying a district employee with strong project management experience to lead the summer program launch.⁵ At most profiled districts, administrators dedicate a staff member to oversee summer programming. For example, at **District A**, a director centrally oversees all summer programs and provides operational support.

3) "Getting to Work on Summer Learning." RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR366.html.

4) Ibid.

5) Ibid.

According to RAND Corporation, the summer program director should ideally dedicate half or more of their time to planning and management. For example, the director should decide student eligibility for the summer program, identify funding, oversee teacher hiring, plan teacher training sessions, and work with community partners. In addition, the director should collaborate with staff across departments to select the curriculum, identify appropriate facilities, and manage additional program logistics (e.g., recruiting, IT, transportation). By centralizing decision-making, districts can ensure a baseline quality across summer program sites.⁶

Identify Curriculum Experts and Building Administrators to Support Teachers Before and During Summer Programming

Contacts at profiled school districts note varying levels of training and preparation prior to the start of summer programming. At **District A**, **District B**, **District D**, and **District E**, teachers receive the curriculum before the start of the program. Administrators at District D identify teachers at the district with grade-specific content knowledge to serve as course designers and curriculum coordinators.

Support Staff for Summer Program Teachers at Profiled Districts



Course Designers

Assist teachers with general curriculum questions prior to the start of summer programming.



Curriculum Specialists

Provide teachers with additional support around curriculum implementation during summer programming.



Building Administrators

Examples include site coordinator, principal, and assistant principal. Assist teachers with challenges (e.g., classroom behavior management) during summer programming.

At **District E**, school counselors working on administrative endorsements serve as summer program building administrators.

Program Promotion

Leverage Multiple Communication Streams to Promote Summer Programming to Families

Contacts at profiled districts use tactics such as mailing program guides to families, publishing course offerings online (e.g., district website, school website, social media platform), and incorporating information into regular principal newsletters to promote summer programs. At **District G**, teachers follow up with at-risk students and their parents to recommend summer programming.

In addition, some profiled districts use specific communication strategies to promote the kindergarten readiness program. For example, administrators at **District D** program fliers in every kindergarten packet for new enrollees at **District D**. Administrators at **District F** conduct community outreach to local daycares and discuss the program with parents during kindergarten registration.

6) "Getting to Work on Summer Learning." RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR366.html.

▶ Offer Registration Assistance to Parents to Increase Access to Summer Programming

To accommodate families who do not have access to computers at home or who require other assistance with the registration process, administrators at **District D** invite parents to come to campus on a designated day to use school computers to register their students. For families who do not speak English as their first language and who might encounter language barriers with the registration process, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers reach out specifically to offer assistance.

Provide Enrichment Opportunities to Build Student Engagement During Summer Programming

Districts can offer enrichment opportunities to differentiate their summer program from a typical “summer school” and attract more students to enroll, as well as boost program attendance. For example, students could practice reading and writing in drama, learn about fractions to measure rhythms in music, and explore science concepts in the outdoors.⁷ Many profiled districts integrate enrichment activities into summer programming or offer enrichment camps in order to keep students engaged.

District G offers a K-8 summer arts camp in which students conduct hands-on, art-based projects focused on literacy and math. For example, this summer, students in the K-6 session will learn how to build drones. To cultivate an engaging summer program atmosphere, **District B** increased its number of enrichment camp offerings. Two of the district’s Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools offer career-oriented camps, such as in culinary arts, coding, auto mechanics, and musical theater.

At **District D**, after morning academic programs, students can enroll in afternoon enrichment camps with themes such as climate and geology, STEM, chess, and superheroes and comic books. With enrichment programming, research recommends keeping class sizes small, similar to academic programs, in order to increase student engagement and support effective behavior management.⁸

For strategies on how to improve recruitment and retention of students for summer programming, as well as create an engaging summer camp environment, read our toolkit [Design a Summer Reading Camp](#).

Assessment

Collect More than Academic Metrics to Evaluate Summer Program Effectiveness on Student Outcomes

RAND Corporation, in its six-year study on the effectiveness of summer learning in five urban districts, measured the impact of summer programs on student academic, social-emotional, and behavioral outcomes. In general, researchers found that summer programming led to increased performance in most measurements.⁹

7) “Getting to Work on Summer Learning.” RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR366.html.

8) Ibid.

9) “Learning from Summer: Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Urban Youth.” RAND Corporation. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/learning-from-summer-effects-of-voluntary-summer-learning-programs-on-low-income-urban-youth.aspx>.

Metrics Used by RAND Corporation to Assess Summer Learning Impact on Student Outcomes¹⁰

Academic



- Language Arts test scores (i.e., study-administered assessment, state assessment)
- Language Arts end-of-course grades
- Math test scores (i.e., study-administered assessment, state assessment)
- Math end-of-course grades

Social-Emotional



- RAND-adapted Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA)

Behavioral



- Attendance rates during school year
- Suspension rates during school year

Administrators at profiled districts assess summer program effectiveness by evaluating test scores, conducting program surveys, and noting program enrollment trends. Administrators at both **District G** and **District A** use student test scores to evaluate summer program effectiveness on mitigating summer learning loss.

Contacts at four profiled districts report a process for gathering feedback from stakeholders (e.g., parents, students, teachers) on program effectiveness. For example, administrators at **District D** and **District E** collect post-program feedback from parents and students, respectively.

Administrators at **District F** collect program feedback from teachers, students (for the sixth-grade readiness program), and parents (for the kindergarten readiness program). For the kindergarten readiness program specifically, parents complete a questionnaire before and after the program.



To review **District F's** pre- and post-program questionnaire, see Appendix on **pages 25-26**.

¹⁰ "Learning from Summer: Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Urban Youth." RAND Corporation. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/learning-from-summer-effects-of-voluntary-summer-learning-programs-on-low-income-urban-youth.aspx>.

Online Post-Program Parent/Guardian Survey at *District D*

- In the fall, my child will be entering:
- My child attended the summer program at:
- My child attended the following: summer school, afternoon camp, aftercare (choose one)
- My child enjoyed his/her experience in summer programming (Strongly Disagree → Strongly Agree)
- How likely would you be to recommend summer programming to someone else? (Not at All Likely → Extremely Likely)
- What classes or camps would you like to see added to the summer program?
- Please list suggestions on how to improve the classes/camp/overall summer program.
- If you were to tell your best friend about your child's experience in this summer program, what would you say? (Please include your name at the end so we may use your feedback as a testimonial when promoting future programs.)

Administrators at both District E and District F informally evaluate program effectiveness by observing enrollment trends. Contacts at District F attribute consistently high program turnout to parent satisfaction.

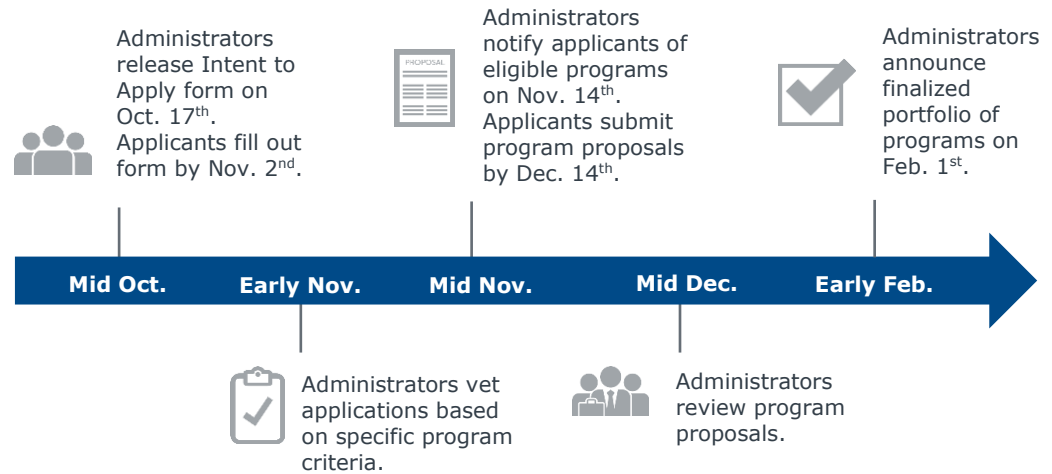
Program Planning

Leverage Community Partners to Expand Summer Learning Opportunities Outside of Readiness Programs

Some profiled districts partner with community-based organizations to develop and operate general summer programming (i.e., not focused on grade readiness). At **District A**, individual schools, departments, non-profit community organizations, and community partners propose programming and submit a budget via an online platform. All proposed academic programs must adhere to a specific set of criteria, such as a minimum number of instructional hours, integration of academic and enrichment activities, and alignment with state standards of learning and district academic standards.

An office of summer programming centrally oversees all summer programs simultaneously run by different hosts and provides operational support (e.g., staff hiring, payroll, facilities). Community partners are eligible for district funding and receive access to curriculum resources, technology assistance, and professional development. This year, the district approved over 70 summer programs.

Timeline of the 2019 Summer Program Proposal Application and Review Process at *District A*



Similarly, **District B** partners with the community to create and staff summer programming. For example, administrators work with the local library to run a program focused on cultural diversity and storytelling. In addition, the district partners with a local university and invites teacher candidates to apply to be instructional aides (i.e., supports a lead teacher in one classroom). The district also partners with Parks and Recreation to implement afternoon enrichment programs held at school-based sites.

Begin Summer Program Planning Process Early to Ensure Successful Program Launch

By starting early with planning processes, districts can effectively allocate time for planning and execution, minimize logistical problems, and maximize instructional time for students. For example, RAND Corporation recommends committing to launching a summer program by January, clearly communicating roles and responsibilities with district and site-level staff and conducting regular meetings prior to program launch.¹¹

Checklist for District-Run Summer Program Launch¹²

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Establish one internal point of contact to oversee programming | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensure appropriate safety and security in building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Decide communication content and timing to families |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Choose accessible site location(s); minimize number of sites to reduce costs | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Establish hiring timeline and process | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Involve teachers in designing summer curriculum |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Assess building needs and capacity | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Determine rate of pay for staff | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Provide training to building administrators prior to programming |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Create bus transportation plan for students | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Use projected daily student attendance to inform staffing | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Provide curriculum plan to teachers prior to programming |

11) "Getting to Work on Summer Learning." RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR366.html

12) Ibid.

3) Kindergarten Readiness Programs

Design

Open Enrollment to All Incoming Kindergarten Students but Target Recruitment to Desired Demographics

Administrators at **District A**, **District B**, **District D**, and **District F** allow any incoming kindergarten student to enroll in the kindergarten readiness program. Contacts at District F note that grouping together students with and without preschool experience provides the opportunity for peer modeling of classroom behaviors.

For incoming kindergarteners who have no preschool or early childhood program experience, administrators at District D may also administer a screening assessment to gauge specific needs that could be addressed during summer school and the school year. Administrators at District B specifically encourage students who score below a certain threshold on a district-created kindergarten readiness assessment (conducted during kindergarten registration) to enroll in the kindergarten readiness program. These students, along with students from Title I schools, are eligible for full tuition vouchers.

Structure of Kindergarten Readiness Programs at Profiled Districts

School District	Program Length	Eligibility
District A	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Five weeks, Monday-Friday• Six hours per day	All incoming kindergarten students can enroll. Encourage students who do not have preschool experience.
District B	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Four weeks, Monday-Thursday• Four hours per day	All incoming kindergarten students can enroll. Some students are eligible for free tuition.
District D	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Three weeks, Monday-Friday• Four hours per day	All incoming kindergarten students can enroll.
District F	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One week, Monday-Friday• Three hours per day	All incoming kindergarten students can enroll.

Group Incoming Kindergarten Students by School Site to Build Community Among Future Classmates

Administrators at both **District D** and **District F** place incoming kindergarten students in classes with their peers who will be attending the same school in the fall. At District F, each school hosts its own summer program site, and incoming kindergarteners attend the program at their respective schools.

Administrators at District D combine sites for summer school in order to minimize operational costs but group students together with their future classmates. For example, one elementary school hosts students from three different schools. Administrators intentionally group together students who will be entering the same school, so that students can meet their future classmates.

Contacts at District D note that, when possible, administrators match kindergarten teachers with the class they will teach during the school year. At some school sites,

kindergarten teachers and administrators visit classrooms to observe student behavior, which will inform class lists for the upcoming school year.

Involve Parents in Programming to Boost Home-School Connections and Ease Transition to Kindergarten

Some profiled districts build parent engagement opportunities at the beginning or throughout the kindergarten readiness program in order to educate parents on school and district resources. For example, at **District F**, parents meet with the building leadership team on the first day and stay on campus in case their child experiences challenges (e.g., separation anxiety). At **District A**, the kindergarten readiness program offers parents workshops on identifying and using district resources.

Checklist for Parent Meeting on the First Day of Kindergarten Readiness Program at *District F*



School Building and Resources

- Building routines (e.g., arrival, dismissal, breakfast/lunch, recess, no nap, transportation, check-in/out, attendance)
- Safety procedures (e.g., checking in, door, badges)
- Supervision times and non-supervision times (morning)
- Need for adult to get student off bus
- Social worker information
- Immunizations



Parent Role and Expectations

- How to help your child socially, emotionally, academically
- Folder checks/backpacks
- How to leave the room when your child is crying
- Communication with school: when, how, what is helpful
- School website information
- Open House invite
- Parent Teacher Organization events and volunteering



Tour and Q&A

Instruction

For curriculum ideas centered on key behavioral and social skills for kindergarten, read our guide [**Building the Social-Emotional Skills of Incoming At-Risk Kindergarteners.**](#)

Blend Academic and Other Readiness Skills in Program Curriculum

At **District A**, **District B**, and **District D**, incoming kindergarten students participate in activities that boost content knowledge in literacy and math, in addition to readiness skills. At District B, students practice with the alphabet, numbers, and shapes. In addition to receiving literacy and math instruction, students at District D practice social and fine motor skills. For example, students learn how to share and take turns, respond to peers, and play cooperatively. They practice controlling their body movements for fine motor activities like coloring, writing, and cutting paper.

Sample Daily Schedule for Kindergarten Readiness Program at District D

Time	Theme	Sample Activities
7:50-8:10 am	Arrival	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morning activities to settle in
8:10-8:40 am	Morning Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Morning song • Calendar • Weather • Share
8:40-9:30 am	Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read book (e.g. nursery rhymes) • Sing ABC song • Read letter chart • Introduce letters • Interactive activity online • Book handling lesson • Name-writing practice with individual students
9:30-10:00 am	Gross Motor Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snack • Recess
10:00-10:30 am	Math (Colors, Shapes, or Numbers/Counting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sing counting song • Read theme book • Lesson and guided practice (e.g., identifying numbers, writing numbers, counting and organizing) • Independent practice
10:30-11:00 am	Fine Motor Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter-of-the-day handwriting practice on sentence strips • Make theme hat (coloring and cutting practice)
11:00-11:30 am	Centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art • Math counters • Computers • Puzzles • Home living/dolls • Blocks
11:30 am-noon	Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean up • Pack up • Prepare for dismissal • Educational video
Noon	Dismissal	

Teach Classroom Expectations and Routines to Build Kindergarten Readiness

Contacts at profiled districts emphasize that teaching classroom expectations and practicing routines prepares incoming kindergarteners for a structured classroom environment. For example, at **District A** and **District D**, incoming kindergartens learn how to follow rules and directions and how to walk in a line. Similarly, at **District F**, incoming kindergarten students practice routines and procedures inside and outside of the classroom, such as walking around the building, moving through a lunch line, and getting on and off a school bus.

Overview of *District F's* Weeklong Kindergarten Readiness Program

Monday

Students participate in activities to get to know each other.

Tuesday

Students practice a typical kindergarten morning schedule. They practice classroom routines and procedures, such as following signals and sitting on the carpet.

Wednesday

Students practice a typical afternoon schedule in kindergarten.

Thursday

Students practice transitions and routines in non-classroom spaces, such as the restroom, hallway, cafeteria, and recess.

Friday

Students tour the building, visit specialist classrooms, and learn about the library.

Consider Integrating Initiatives at the Beginning of the School Year to Boost Kindergarten Readiness

In addition to summer programming, administrators at **District F** incorporate an eight-day program at the beginning of the kindergarten year to identify students' individual social, emotional, and academic needs, and ultimately place them in best-fit classrooms. In the past, administrators at District F randomly established permanent kindergarten class placements before the school year began. Teachers subsequently observed that arbitrary placements often led to unbalanced classrooms.

During the eight-day program, students spend one to two days with each teacher in randomly selected groups that change daily. Students engage in different readiness activities like those they would experience in the summer program. For example, teachers lead academic and social activities, discuss kindergarten expectations, and implement community-building exercises with students. A speech pathologist from the special education department, social worker, and counselor may also participate in the classes. Teachers also conduct different student assessments. Teachers meet daily to discuss students' strengths and areas of growth, and at the end of the program, they finalize permanent classroom placements.

Student Assessment Categories to Gauge Kindergarten Students' Individual Needs at *District F*



Literacy

Identifying letters and sounds, recognizing sight words, rhyming



Numeracy

Counting numbers orally, identifying numbers, making one-to-one correspondence



Social-Emotional (SEL) Skills

Following directions, coping with frustrations



Other Skills

Speech, language, fine motor skills

The districtwide Kindergarten Transition Committee established both the summer readiness program and the school-year program. The committee meets six times a year to discuss how to improve transition readiness initiatives. Currently, the committee is working on establishing a specific classroom for kindergarten students who may need special education or extra supports during the school year (teachers often identify these students during the eight-day program). In the classroom, students will work on readiness skills in a more structured environment, and ultimately transition into their regular classrooms.

Kindergarten Transition Committee Staffing at *District F*



Assistant Superintendent (oversees committee)



Director of Early Childhood



Early Childhood Special Education coordinator



Early childhood teachers



Elementary school principals



Kindergarten teachers from each elementary school building



English Language teacher



Counselor



Parents

Assessment

Profiled Districts Use Academic Outcomes and Anecdotal Evidence to Determine Impact of Summer Programming on Kindergarten Readiness

Profiled districts use different ways to measure the effectiveness of summer programming on kindergarten readiness. For example, at **District A**, administrators compare Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) test scores between students who attend summer programming and those who do not. Contacts at the district note that incoming kindergarten students who participate in summer programming outperform their peers.

At **District B**, contacts cite teacher anecdotal evidence for program effectiveness on student outcomes. For example, when one school in the district switched to a year-

round schedule, incoming kindergarteners could no longer participate in the kindergarten readiness summer program. Teachers subsequently reported that students demonstrated more difficulty with the transition into kindergarten. At **District F**, administrators gauge program effectiveness by collecting feedback from teachers and parents. Parents consistently report positive outcomes of the kindergarten readiness program.

3) Sixth-Grade Readiness Programs

Design

At Profiled Districts, Sixth-Grade Readiness Programs Vary in Length and Eligibility

At profiled districts, sixth-grade readiness range from 17.5 to 30 total instructional hours. Contacts at all three profiled districts with sixth-grade readiness programs note that all incoming sixth grade students can participate in the sixth-grade readiness program. While administrators at **District D** allow all students to participate in the program, administrators prioritize students who qualify for academic intervention summer programs.

Structure of Sixth-Grade Readiness Programs at Profiled Districts

School District	Program Length	Eligibility
District C	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Four weeks, Monday-Thursday• One and a half hour per day	All incoming sixth grade students can enroll.
District D	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Three weeks, Monday-Friday• Two hours per day	All incoming sixth grade students can enroll, but administrators give priority to students who qualify for academic intervention summer programs.
District E	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One week, Monday-Friday• Three and half hours per day	All incoming sixth grade students can enroll.

Instruction

Equip Incoming Sixth Grade Students with Academic and SEL Skills to Increase Middle School Readiness

At **District C**, **District D**, and **District E**, incoming sixth grade students learn and practice academic and SEL skills during the summer readiness program. Contacts at profiled districts cite the importance of teaching organizational skills in preparation for middle school. At District D, students also learn the typical middle school schedule and preview the sixth-grade curriculum (e.g., science, math). At District C, students learn to use iPads to take notes, submit assignments, and use a reminder application. At District E, teachers structure each day of the sixth-grade readiness program to address a different skill (e.g., organization, note-taking, learning styles and executive functions, time management). For each skill, students engage in four to five related activities.

Contacts at all three profiled districts emphasize teaching SEL skills in sixth-grade readiness programs, such as problem solving, conflict resolution, teamwork, and self-management.

Key Skills to Practice to Boost Sixth Grade Readiness



Organization

- Organize school supplies
- Create a calendar to plan ahead for school year
- Learn how to submit assignments online



Learning Styles

- Complete self-assessment
- Reflect on peers' learning styles in small groups
- Present on own learning style to the rest of class



Note-Taking

- Practice different note-taking systems (e.g., Cornell)
- Learn how to highlight and underline key takeaways
- Take digital notes on iPads



Teamwork

- Brainstorm communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution strategies
- Discuss how different learning styles complement each other in a group
- Engage in group problem-solving activities (e.g., Escape Room, scavenger hunts)

Teach Incoming Sixth Grade Students How to Set Academic and Personal Goals for the School Year

Incoming sixth grade students can prepare for a successful school year by learning how to set academic and personal goals. At **District C**, students learn about academic and personal SMART (i.e., Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely) goals. Contacts note that students struggle most with setting goals that are measurable, so they recommend modeling goal setting to students.

Common SMART goal themes include communications, inclusion, and perseverance. Contacts note that training students to set SMART goals helps them understand that they have control over their learning outcomes. In the last week of the four-week-long sixth-grade readiness program, students set SMART goals aimed at a specific time frame in the school year, such as during the first month or the first quarter.

Examples of Weak and Strong SMART Goals



I want to get better grades.
I will work harder and study more.



I will complete my homework between six and nine o'clock on school nights at my desk in my bedroom. After completing my homework, I will put my homework in my folder in my backpack. At school, I will turn in my homework to my teacher first thing in the morning.



I want to increase my classroom participation. I will try harder to speak up.



I will raise my hand twice a day when I have a question or a thought.

Integrate Community Bonding and Building Familiarity into Programs to Acclimate Students to a New School

Contacts at both **District C** and **District D** recommend providing group activities for incoming sixth grade students to build community. At District D, students establish relationships with future teachers and classmates, learn building expectations, and connect with current middle school students. Throughout the program, students understand that successful students work with each other, learn the importance of school rules, and reflect on their role in the middle school community. For example, students create core values posters and discuss how their actions and behaviors connect to these values during daily morning meetings. By building community, students acclimate themselves to a new school site.

To promote familiarity with the new building, administrators at District C invite honors high school students to give tours and show students how to use lockers. High school students also share their middle school experiences and serve as mentors to incoming sixth grade students. In both programs at District D and District C, students learn to identify available school community resources and opportunities.

Activities to Foster Community and to Increase Building Familiarity at *District D*



Foster Community

- Teacher [Kahoot!](#)⁶
- Teacher Bingo
- Name games



Increase Building Familiarity

- Combination lock introduction and practice
- Locker races
- Building scavenger hunt
- Outdoor school introduction
- Place-based activities

Integrate Sixth Grade Readiness into School Year Curriculum to Scale Summer Programing to All Students

Administrators at **District C** and **District F** integrate sixth grade readiness curriculum into the school year, either at the end of fifth grade or at the beginning of sixth grade. Towards the end of fifth grade, students at **District F** practice middle school routines and expectations, such as wearing identification badges and visiting the middle schools they will be entering. During this period, a district-level committee specifically focused on the fifth to sixth grade transition identifies students at risk for transitional challenges, based on factors such as high anxiety, social skills need, and behavioral issues, to proactively ensure appropriate student support.

In the past, District F also hosted a weeklong program for fifth grade students during the school year, targeting at-risk students. In this school year transition program, middle school teachers partnered with fifth grade students. Fifth grade students visited their middle schools, played games, and cultivated relationships with building leadership. While the program was successful in facilitating sixth grade readiness, contacts at the district cite that it was challenging to staff these programs with internal teachers. Contacts note that identifying social workers or other school administrators to lead the program could serve as a future alternative.

13) Kahoot! For Schools. <https://kahoot.com/schools/>.

At **District C**, teachers embed sixth grade readiness curriculum into the school year. All sixth grade students participate in a transition course for the first nine weeks of school, which expand on the elements of the sixth-grade readiness program (e.g., SEL skills). After nine weeks, the transition course becomes the Foreign Language course. In this framework, all sixth grade students learn about and practice the skills essential for middle school success.



Sixth-Grade Readiness Program Outcomes at *District E*

Contacts at most profiled districts do not report tracked outcomes related to sixth-grade readiness programs, specifically. That said, contacts at **District E** note that some students choose to enroll in the middle school readiness program for two consecutive summers (the readiness program serves incoming sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students)—a sign that students derive value from and enjoy the program.

4) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member district approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What is the optimal number of days and hours of instruction for summer programming to maximize impact on student achievement?
- What are effective practices for summer program structure and curricula, to ensure impact on student achievement?
- What summer programs do contact districts provide to support students transitioning into kindergarten and sixth grade?
- How do contact districts structure summer programming?
- How do contact districts identify students to participate in summer programs?
- How do contact districts staff summer programs?
- How do contact districts fund summer programs, including teacher compensation?
- What types of training do district leaders provide to summer program teachers before and during the program?
- How do contact districts approach and incorporate community partnerships into summer programming at contact districts?
- How do contact districts communicate about and promote summer programs to students and families to ensure that targeted students participate?
- What metrics and evaluation tools do contact district use to measure the impact of summer programming on kindergarten and sixth grade readiness?
- What metrics and evaluation tools do contact district use to measure the impact of summer programming on mitigating summer learning loss?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). <http://nces.ed.gov/>.
- "Getting to Work on Summer Learning." RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR366.html.
- Kahoot! For Schools. <https://kahoot.com/schools/>.
- "Learning from Summer: Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Urban Youth." RAND Corporation. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/learning-from-summer-effects-of-voluntary-summer-learning-programs-on-low-income-urban-youth.aspx>.

Research
Parameters

The Forum interviewed district-level administrators, summer program directors, and teachers.

A Guide to Districts Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Enrollment
District A	Northeast	54,000
District B	Mid-Atlantic	60,000
District C	Midwest	6,000
District D	Midwest	17,000
District E	Mid-Atlantic	90,000
District F	Midwest	6,000
District G	Northeast	29,000

6) Appendix

Kindergarten Readiness Pre-Program Questionnaire for Parents/Guardians at *District F*

Your opinion matters to us. In order to make sure this is a successful experience for your child, we would like to know what worked well and what we need to improve. Please take a moment to complete the survey regarding your current attitude and beliefs about your child's school experience.

School Your Child is Attending _____

Parent/Guardian Name _____

Please check the box that describes your feelings and thoughts.	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
I am nervous about my child's transition to kindergarten.			
My child is nervous about the transition to kindergarten.			
I know the process for informing the school when my child is absent.			
I know the process for student arrival and dismissal procedures.			
I feel confident about my child attending school in this building.			
I am aware of family and parent opportunities at this school.			
I feel comfortable talking with the principal and teachers.			
I know what a typical day will look like for my child in kindergarten.			

Something I would like to know about this school:

Kindergarten Readiness Post-Program Questionnaire for Parents/Guardians at *District F*

Your opinion matters to us. In order to make sure this is a successful experience for your child, we would like to know what worked well and what we need to improve. Please complete and return this survey to the Principal. Thank you!

School Your Child is Attending _____

Parent/Guardian Name _____

Please check the box that describes your feelings and thoughts.	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
I am nervous about my child's transition to kindergarten.			
My child is nervous about the transition to kindergarten.			
I know the process for informing the school when my child is absent.			
I know the process for student arrival and dismissal procedures.			
I feel confident about my child attending school in this building.			
I am aware of family and parent opportunities at this school.			
I feel comfortable talking with the principal and teachers.			
I know what a typical day will look like for my child in kindergarten.			
Most of my questions about my child's transition to school have been answered.			
I feel confident that my child will be given the attention and direction needed from the teachers.			
As a parent/guardian, I think the program was helpful for me.			
I believe the program was helpful for my child.			

My recommendations for improving the program:

I still have many unanswered questions. Please contact me to set up a meeting prior to the start of school. I can be reached at _____.