

BRIDGING THE SUMMER GAP

What District Leaders Say About Learning Beyond the School Year

A study by the National Summer Learning Association and AASA, The School Superintendents Association



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Foreword

Dear friends,

The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) and AASA, The School Superintendents Association, are pleased to cosponsor a new national Superintendent Summer Survey by Gallup.

We know that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the influx of federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act, many school districts invested heavily in creating and expanding their summer learning offerings for students. We are proud of and grateful for these important efforts.

As emergency funds expire and a new Congress and White House administration establish new priorities and strategies, we wanted to understand what types of summer programming school district leaders plan to provide going forward.

This report captures a national snapshot of school district leaders' perspectives, goals, priorities and challenges. It compares their responses with an earlier and similar Gallup survey on this topic taken by parents and caregivers.

We hope this report will help inform your internal discussions, planning and decision-making, allowing us all to utilize the summer months as a key time to help more students catch up, keep up and successfully prepare for their next school year.

We look forward to being partners in this essential work.

Sincerely,



Aaron Philip Dworkin

CEO
NSLA



David R. Schuler, Ph.D.

Executive Director
AASA, *The School*
Superintendents Association

Background

What do superintendents think about summer learning experiences for kids?

Overseeing instruction and learning is a year-round job for U.S. school superintendents. After the traditional school year ends, many students participate in summer learning or enrichment programs designed to further their academic, physical and social development. Hosting a structured summer program for students that allows them to learn or develop their skills can provide valuable experiences outside of school and reduce the likelihood of summer learning loss.



The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) and AASA, The School Superintendents Association, partnered with Gallup to survey U.S. school district superintendents to better understand the summer learning opportunities their districts offer, including the types of activities provided in 2024 and the activities planned for 2025.

This report is the next chapter in summer learning research. It follows the 2024 National Summer Learning Association-American Camp Association Summer Learning Experiences Survey conducted to gain insight into how children spent or planned to spend their summers in 2023 and 2024.

The superintendent report underscores the high degree of importance K-12 superintendents place on summer programs to reach their district’s objectives. This is reinforced by the finding that most superintendents intend to maintain or increase their district’s spending on summer programs in 2025, even as American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and COVID-era federal funding for K-12 programs decline. Superintendents cite enhanced learning outcomes as the primary benefit of summer programs and identify parent and child scheduling conflicts as the main barrier to broader participation.




Main findings from this research include:

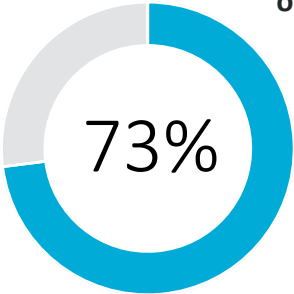
1 Ninety-one percent of superintendents say summer programs are **important to reaching district goals.**




2 More than eight in 10 superintendents plan to **maintain (66%) or increase (16%) spending** on summer learning in 2025.



3 Superintendents primarily see learning benefits from summer programs — **73% say maintaining or improving academic skills is the single most important benefit.**



4 Superintendents primarily see **scheduling conflicts as the top reason children in their district may not participate in summer learning programs:** 75% cite conflicts with parent work schedules, and 65% cite conflicts with children’s other activities, as the top barrier to summer enrollment.



5 One-third of superintendents measure summer program success through **improved student academic scores and performance.**

Another 25% rely on student **performance at the start of the new school year.**



6 The majority of superintendents say their **programs were either at capacity or over capacity.**

5% Over capacity	58% At capacity	37% Below capacity
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Findings

Nearly all superintendents say summer programs are important to reaching district goals

Overall, 91% of superintendents say summer programs are very important (41%) or important (50%) to reaching strategic goals in their district. Superintendents serving in urban or suburban districts, or having medium to large enrollment, are more likely than those leading rural or smaller districts to say summer programs are very important.

TABLE 1

In general, how important are summer learning programs to reaching strategic goals in your district?

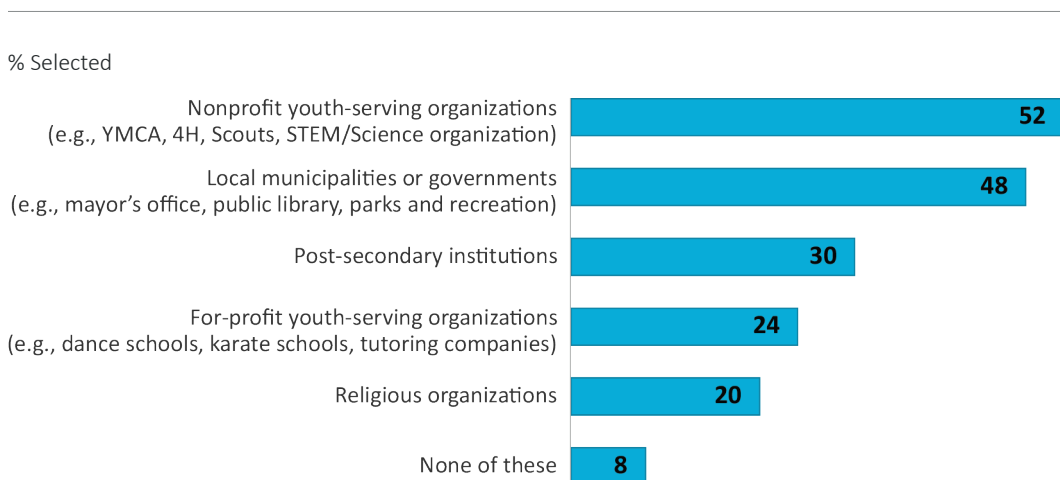
	% ALL SUPERINTENDENTS	% DISTRICT SETTING		% DISTRICT ENROLLMENT SIZE	
		Rural or town	Urban or suburban	Less than 1,000 students	1,000 students or more
Very important	41	36	49	34	49
Important	50	54	44	55	45
Not very important	8	8	8	11	5
Not important at all	1	1	0	<0.5	1

Note: Categories may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

In addition to providing programs for their students, school districts also distribute information about summer programs run by outside providers.

CHART 1

Does your district distribute information about summer programming provided by...? Select all that apply.

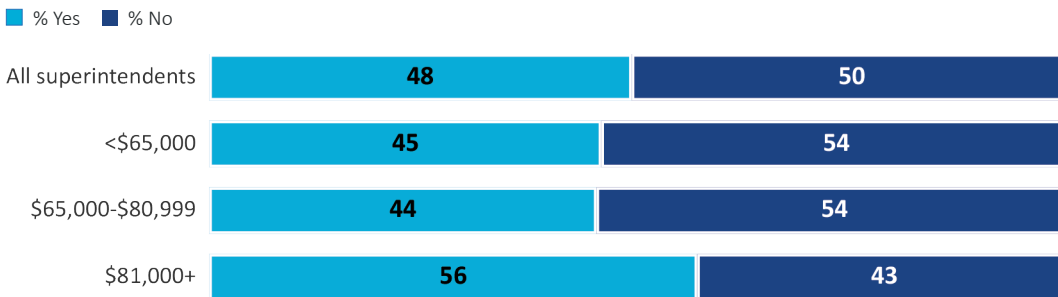


Superintendents are divided on whether adequate summer learning programs exist for students in their local area. There are slight differences in the perception of availability by a district’s median household income. Superintendents in lower- and middle-income districts are less likely than their peers in higher-income districts to believe adequate summer learning opportunities are available to their students.

CHART 2

Do you think there are adequate summer learning program opportunities available in your local community for K-12 students?

By district median household income

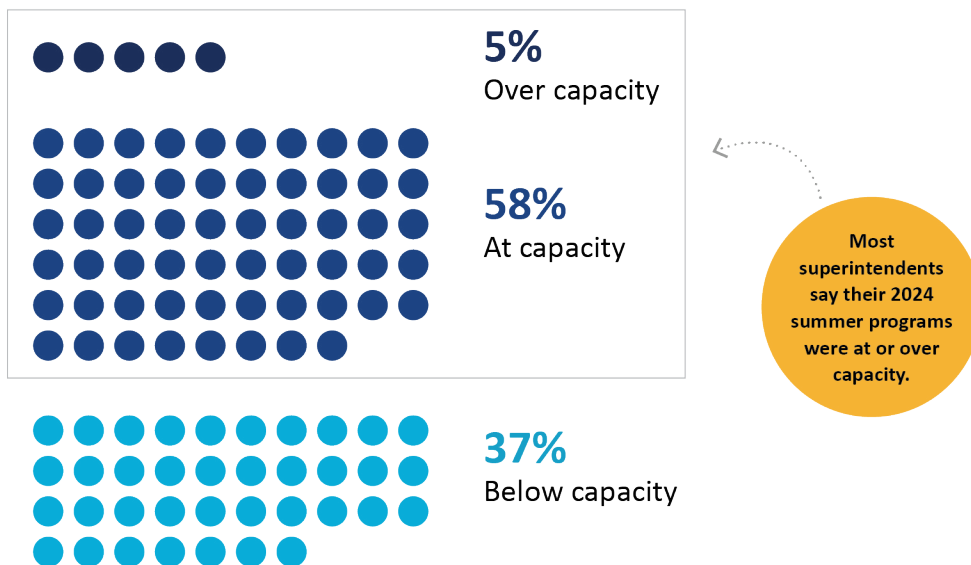


Note: Categories may not sum to 100% due to rounding and nonresponse. Median household income in the neighborhood surrounding the district office.

Most superintendents say their 2024 summer programs were at or over capacity, signaling high levels of participation.

CHART 3

Were the summer programs your district offered in summer 2024 generally...?



Most superintendents plan to maintain or increase spending on summer learning in 2025

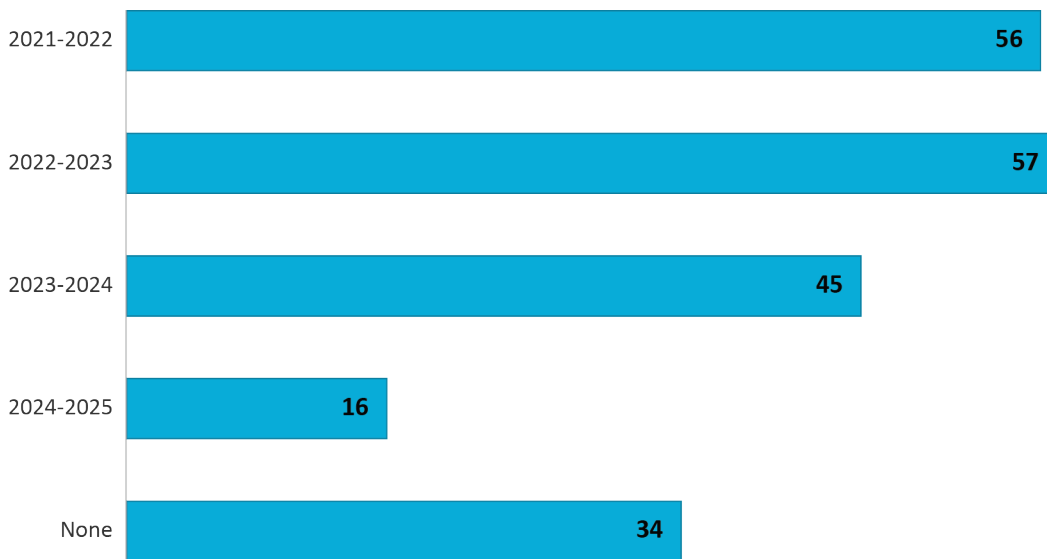
Most superintendents (66%) plan to keep their 2025 spending on summer learning the same as in 2024, while 16% plan to increase it. Fewer than one in five (18%) expect to decrease summer program spending this year. These spending intentions are similar across all district types.

The 2021 ARPA provided districts with financial assistance to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The funds could be used for a variety of needs. Many superintendents report using those funds to expand or add summer learning programs.

CHART 4

Thinking back to American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds your district may have received in 2021, which of the following years, if any, did your district use any of those funds for summer learning programs? Select all that apply.

% Selected

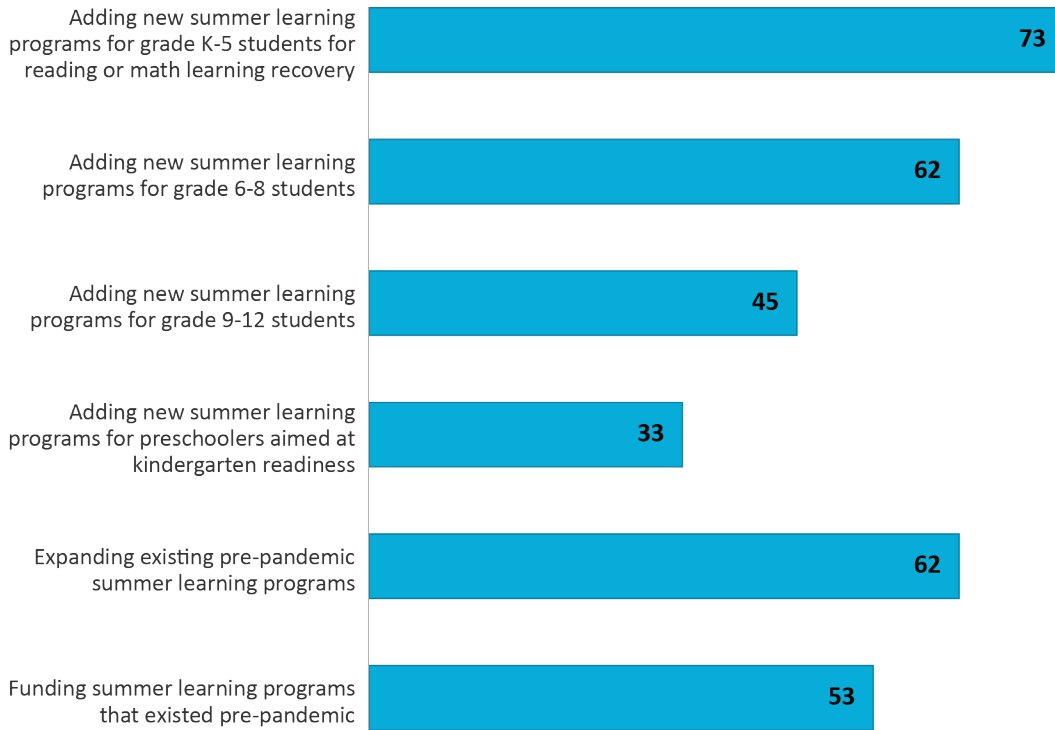


Superintendents say ARPA funds were primarily used to add new programs.

CHART 5

Did your district use the ARPA funds for each of the following?

% Selected



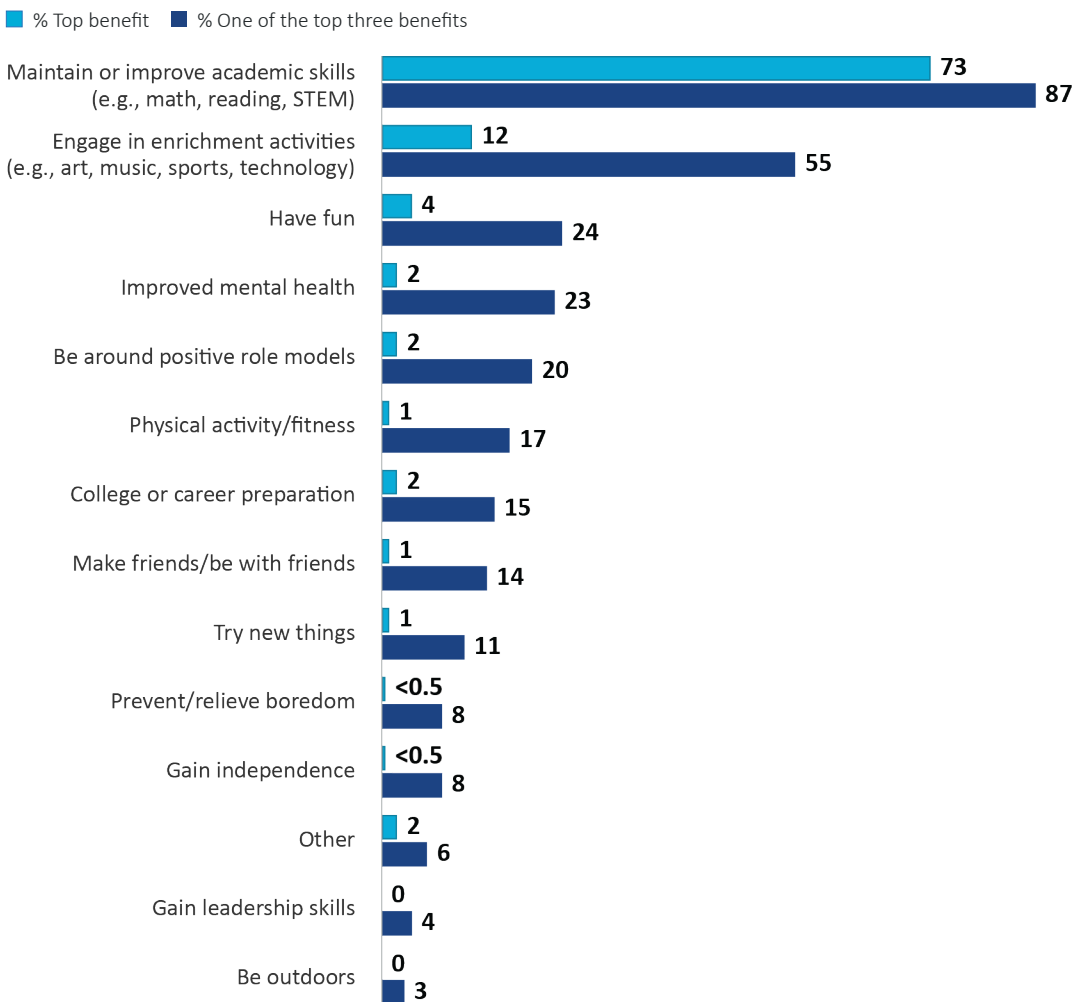
ARPA was a temporary source of funding that is nearing its end. In line with this, superintendents say expanded or additional summer programs still in place are now being mainly funded by the district budget (81%) and grant funding (52%), whereas just 12% are funded by remaining ARPA funds.

Superintendents see learning outcomes as the primary benefit of summer programs

Superintendents largely see the benefits of summer programs through an academic lens: 87% rank maintaining or improving academic skills among the top three benefits of these programs, and 73% name it as the single most important benefit. Aside from academic skills, superintendents cite engagement in enrichment activities, having fun, improved mental health and being around positive role models as other key benefits.

CHART 6

Overall, what do you perceive as the top three benefits for students in their summer activities?



The 2024 Summer Learning Experiences Survey posed the same question to parents. In contrast to superintendents, parents largely see the benefits of summer programs through an engagement lens: 51% rank having fun as among the top three benefits, compared with 24% of superintendents. Aside from having fun, parents commonly cite wanting their children to make or be with friends, engage in physical fitness, try new things, engage in enrichment opportunities, and be outdoors. A smaller proportion of parents rank maintaining or improving academic skills (18%) and improved mental health (15%) among the top three benefits.

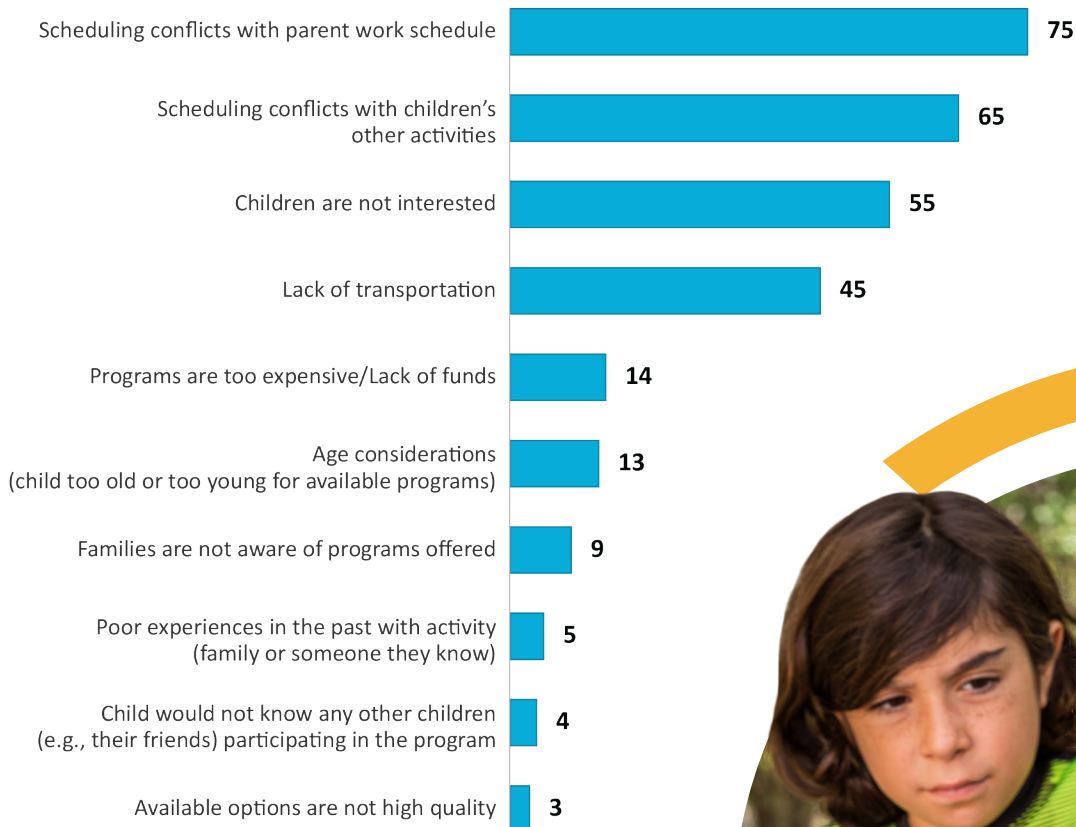
Schedule conflicts seen as primary barriers to enrollment

Superintendents see scheduling conflicts with a parent’s work (75%) or children’s other activities (65%) as the main barriers to greater summer program enrollment. A lack of transportation is also a major barrier identified by superintendents, consistent across urban, suburban and rural schools.

CHART 7

What do you perceive as the top three reasons that children in your school district may not participate in summer learning programs?

% One of the top three reasons



In the 2024 Summer Learning Experiences Survey, **parents cite cost (66%) as the main barrier** to greater summer program enrollment.

Significant proportions of both superintendents (55%) and parents (25%) cite children not being interested in summer programs as a barrier to enrollment.



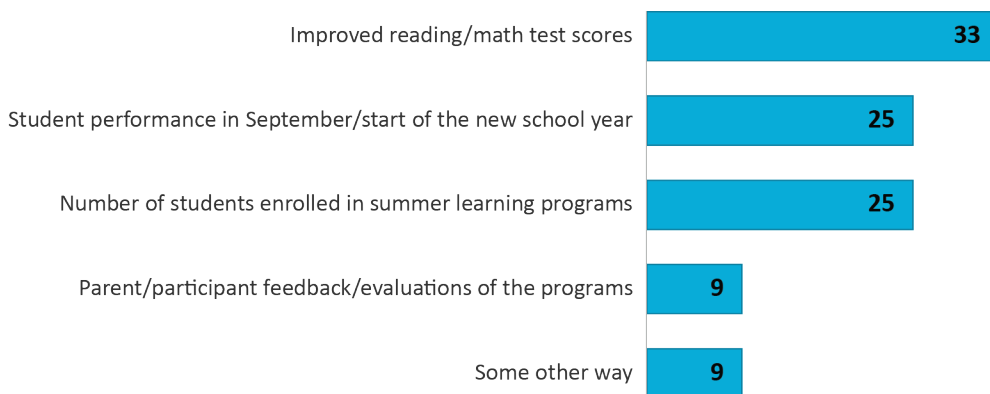
Superintendents measure summer program success through improved student academic scores and performance

When asked how they evaluate the success of their summer program offerings, 33% of superintendents say they rely on improved student reading and math scores, and 25% say they measure success through student performance at the start of the new school year.

CHART 8

How does your district primarily measure the success of its summer learning programs?

% Selected



Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding and nonresponse.

Superintendents in districts with smaller enrollment are more likely to cite improved test scores as the primary way they evaluate programs (39% compared to 28% in medium or large districts). This is also true for superintendents in lower-income districts, with 40% relying on test scores compared to 32% in medium-income and 27% in higher-income districts.

The most frequently reported district programs include remediation and special education

Most school district superintendents say their district offered summer learning programs for remediation (73%) and special education (55%) in the summer of 2024. However, much smaller percentages offered broader programs, including summer school for all (27%), day camps run through other organizations (25%) and enrichment programs for high-performing students (24%).

The percentages of learning programs offered differ more by enrollment size than any other variable, including income. Districts with under 1,000 students are less likely than larger districts to offer all types of summer programming, with the exception of summer school for all.

TABLE 2

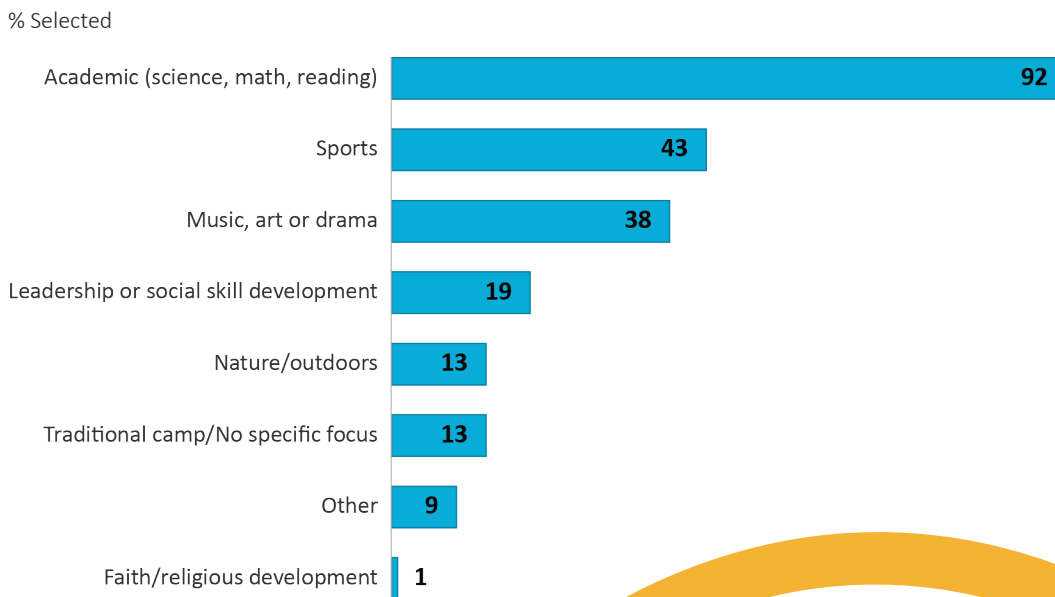
School districts provide students with a variety of learning programs in the summer months. In the summer of 2024, did your school district offer any of the following? Select all that apply.

	% ALL SUPERINTENDENTS	% DISTRICT ENROLLMENT SIZE	
		Less than 1,000 students	1,000 students or more
Programs for students who qualify for remediation	73	65	86
Programs for students identified as special education or 504	55	38	80
Camps with a specific focus (sports, theater, leadership, etc.)	29	22	40
Summer school for all	27	27	26
Day camp programs run through other organizations	25	14	39
Enrichment programs for high-performing students	24	13	39
Day camp programs run through the school district	23	15	34
“Boot camps” or skill development opportunities for children in specific grades	21	14	32
Our district did not offer summer learning programs in 2024	8	14	0
Overnight camp programs run through other organizations	2	1	3
Our district runs a 12-month school calendar	<0.5	<0.5	0

When asked about the content of the programs offered last summer, superintendents said academic-focused summer programs, such as those teaching science, math or reading, were most common, followed by camps centered on themes, such as sports, music, art or drama. Of the 9% of superintendents who said their programs had other areas of focus, many specified the topics as career and technical skill development.

CHART 9

Which of the following describes the types of summer learning programs your district offered in summer of 2024? Select all that apply.

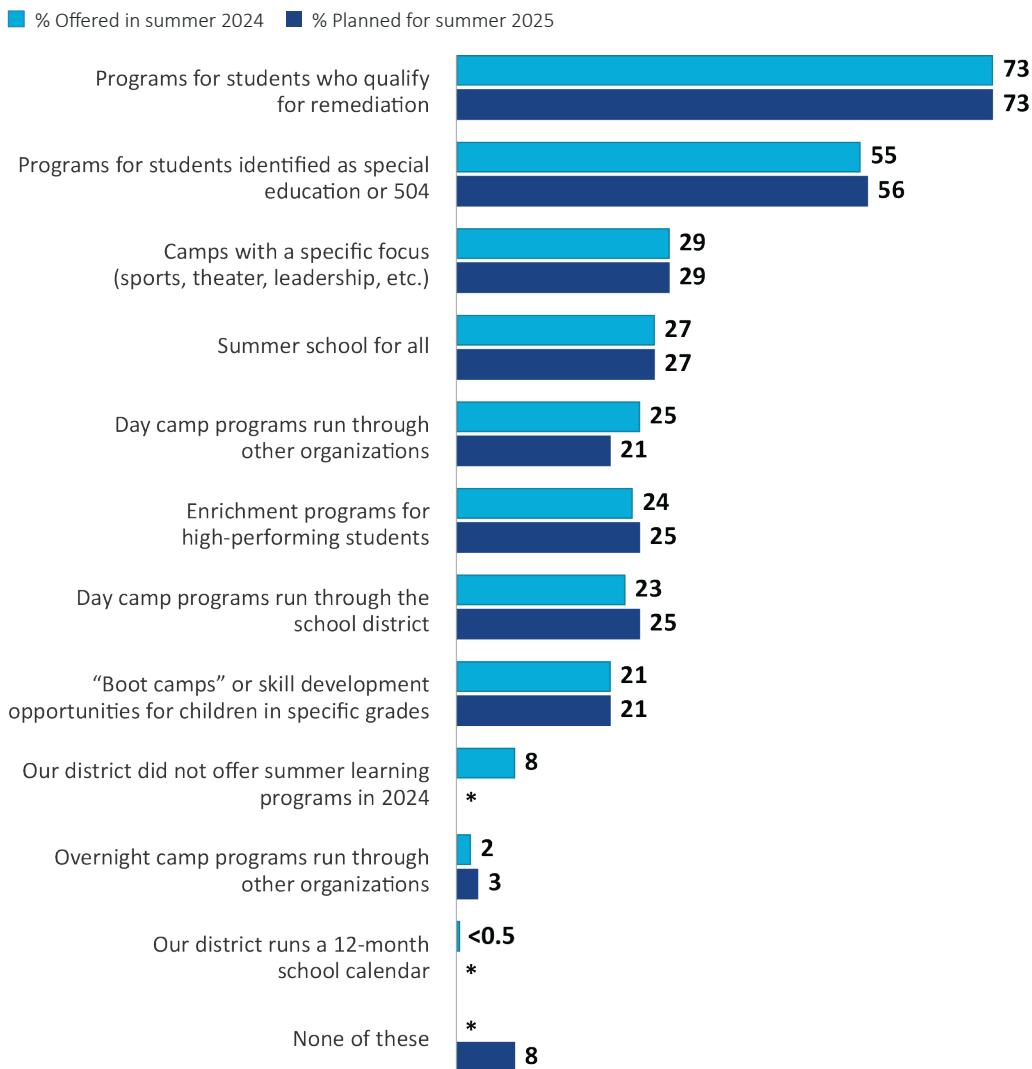


Looking ahead to the summer of 2025, 73% of superintendents report that their school district plans to offer remediation programs, while 56% intend to offer special education or 504 programs.

CHART 10

Which of the following describes the types of summer learning programs your district offered in summer of 2024? Select all that apply.

Does your school district plan to offer any of the following during the summer of 2025? Select all that apply.



*Indicates that the response option was not included for the reference period.

Methodology

Results for this Gallup poll are based on self-administered web surveys in English conducted Nov. 12, 2024, to Jan. 20, 2025, with a sample of 421 superintendents. The sample was provided by Market Data Retrieval (MDR). All respondents who qualified based on confirming to be a current superintendent of a school district were eligible to complete the survey.

Gallup weighted the sample using post-stratification weighting to ensure the final sample approximated the national demographics of superintendents on the basis of student enrollment locale and Census region.

The margin of sampling error for the overall sample is ± 5.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.





About National Summer Learning Association

Celebrating 30 years of impact, NSLA has worked to combat summer learning loss and close the opportunity gap, which research shows grows most dramatically between lower- and higher-income students over the summer months. NSLA works to ensure all of America's students, regardless of background, income or ZIP code, can access and benefit from a high-quality summer learning experience every year. NSLA supports and collaborates with a broad and ever-growing network of 25,000+ leaders of school districts, youth-serving government agencies, and nonprofit and corporate partners from across the country focused on improving the lives of youth. Learn more at summerlearning.org.



About AASA, The School Superintendents Association

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders in the United States and throughout the world. AASA's mission is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to equitable access for all students to the highest quality public education. For more information, visit www.aasa.org.

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