

# SUMMER SPARK

## WHAT DO HIGH-QUALITY SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS LOOK LIKE?

High-quality summer learning programs are designed to engage youth through fun activities that develop their academic and social-emotional skills, and increase health and wellness. Summer programs are generally effective at producing outcomes when the programs have high-quality implementation and when youth attend consistently over a period of weeks or months, according to research from the RAND Corp.

High-quality summer learning programs share the following key features. These standards are adapted from the Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs and the Youth Development Alliance/Youth Development Resource Center Standards for Quality Youth Development Programs:



### ATTENDANCE / DOSAGE

- Youth attend consistently (attend 85 percent of sessions on average).
- Programs run a minimum of 150 hours (or 5 weeks).\*
- Programs include at least 25 hours of on-task mathematics or 35 hours of language arts instruction to produce academic outcomes.\*\*

### POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

- There are mutually respectful and caring relationships between staff, volunteers and youth.
- Staff, volunteers and youth know each other's names and spend considerable time getting to know each other but maintain appropriate boundaries.
- Individuals and the group learn through conflict resolution.

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\* NSLA Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs. Retrieved from: [www.summerlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CASP-Quick\\_Reference\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.summerlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CASP-Quick_Reference_Guide.pdf)  
\*\* Augustine, McCombs, Pane, Schwartz, Schweig, McEachin & Siler-Evans. (2016). Kids Who Attend More Benefit More: Voluntary Summer Learning Programs. Retrieved from: [www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9924.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9924.html)

### SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

- Safety and security procedures are in place (e.g. emergency procedures, fire extinguisher, first aid kit, check-in/check-out procedure, etc.).
- Youth are supervised at arrival, throughout indoor and outdoor activities, and as they leave the program.
- The physical environment is clean and has adequate facilities for basic needs (water, restrooms) and needed equipment for the planned activities.
- Healthy and balanced meals and/or snacks are served (e.g. fruits and vegetables).
- There are clear expectations so that the program has order. Youth and adults jointly design a community conduct agreement, and define positive behavior and consequences.
- Community spirit is present (e.g. daily shared traditions, awards for positive actions or attitudes).

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## ACTIVE, ENGAGED LEARNING AND SKILL BUILDING

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- Learning is thematic or project-based with an explicit learning and skill-building focus connected to the real world.
- The program has knowledgeable instructors.
- A certified teacher is consulted on curriculum development.
- The program accommodates different learning styles and encourages youth to try out new skills and learn from mistakes.
- Activities or field trips expose youth to places they have never been or activities they have never done.
- Throughout the day, youth are given opportunities to make plans, reflect and strengthen their critical thinking.

## YOUTH VOICE, CHOICE AND LEADERSHIP

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- Youth have a voice in shaping the program activities, a choice of activities and opportunities to develop their leadership skills.
- Youth feel ownership of the program and a sense of pride.
- Adults share facilitation with youth.
- Youth have a chance to mentor or teach skills with others in the program.

## QUALITY STAFF AND SUPPORT

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- The adult to youth ratio is 1:12 or lower.
- Seasonal staff are hired at least three months before the program begins and are hired against a set of articulated competencies for each position.
- The program requires staff training, and training includes time for activity planning, practice facilitating activities and classroom/behavior management.
- Site coordinators have a role in hiring and supervising staff, have information to make day-to-day decisions and lead at least weekly staff meetings to celebrate successes and make adjustments.
- Staff are observed, coached and given feedback to improve throughout the summer.
- Staff are paid a living wage that is adequate to retain staff and reduce turnover.

## INTENTIONAL PLANNING AND IMPROVEMENT

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- Activities are intentionally planned.
- A detailed hourly, daily and weekly schedule is available for youth, parents and staff.
- Predictable routines are incorporated.
- The program has goals and learning objectives that are developmentally appropriate for the ages and stages of the youth involved.
- Program staff engage program partners in joint training and planning prior to the summer, communicate regularly, co-facilitate activities and have clearly articulated roles and responsibilities.

## DIVERSITY, ACCESS AND INCLUSION

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- Youth from different backgrounds are included and their unique needs are served.
- The program has an anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policy. Staff ensures the program is inviting, safe and inclusive to all.
- Program staff reflect the diversity of the youth and community being served.
- The physical environment is barrier free, and activities are adapted to allow participation by youth with varying physical, intellectual and social abilities.

## FAMILY, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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- Parents are the primary stakeholders of the program and have multiple opportunities to participate, including volunteering or through activities that stimulate family learning.
- Developmentally appropriate but multi-age programs encourage regular attendance and full family participation.
- The program staff communicate with parents through multiple methods at regular intervals before and during the program.
- Program hours meet the needs of families and are flexible.
- Youth produce meaningful, tangible work and showcase new skills in a culminating event or performance for families or invited guests.
- Staff plan and collaborate with school and community leaders and communicate regularly. There are common goals between school curricula and program activities.

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