

SUMMER TOOLKIT

NATIONAL SUMMER LEARNING WEEK

JULY 10–14, 2023





Table Of Contents

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Pg. 03 | About National Summer Learning Week |
| Pg. 04 | Summer Learning Week 2023 Themes |
| Pgs. 05 –07 | Why Summer Learning Programs Matter |
| Pgs. 08 – 11 | Advocacy Tools |
| Pgs. 12 –13 | Social Media Content |
| Pg. 14 | Resources for Summer Learning |
| Pg. 15 | Social Emotional Learning Activities |
| Pg. 16 | Literacy Activities |
| Pg. 17 | Arts Activities |
| Pg. 18 | STEM Challenges |
| Pg. 19 | Physical Health and Nutrition Resources |
| Pg. 20 | Mental Health Resources |
| Pg. 21 | Skill Building Activities |

WHAT IS NATIONAL SUMMER LEARNING WEEK?

Each year, the **National Summer Learning Association (NSLA)** works with partners across the United States to help educate the general public, elected officials, and community stakeholders about the integral summer programming that is facilitated for youth and families. **National Summer Learning Week aims to celebrate the high-quality program providers that work to engage youth in exciting and healthy summer learning opportunities.** In order to host this week-long celebration, the NSLA collaborates with a variety of diverse entities, including state afterschool networks, out-of-school time (OST) providers, educators, policymakers, community-based organizations (CBOs), and both local and national businesses. Together, we work to develop **resources and advocacy initiatives** for the summer learning field.

WHY CELEBRATE IT?

Summer continues to be a key time to provide kids the space to reconnect with one another and participate in safe, enriching programs run by caring staff who are trained to help youth build confidence and try new things. Summer is also a critical time in a young person's life that can be leveraged to address the social-emotional and physical needs of the individual - as well as help prepare them for the academic year. We also recognize summer as a special time to highlight the amazing ways our providers are keeping young people and their communities safe and learning! **Join ACT Now and NSLA this year, from July 10, 2023, to July 14, 2023, in celebrating National Summer Learning Week!**

Don't forget to participate in the creative advocacy efforts and events!



SHARE YOUR EVENT!

If your program is hosting an event, click [here](#) to add it to the growing list of National Summer Learning Programs for youth and families to participate in throughout the week! **ACT Now** and help highlight the wonderful work our summer learning providers are facilitating in the state of Illinois to those across the country!

If you are looking for resources on how to host an event, make sure to **[access the NSLA's free and easy-to-navigate toolkits](#)** specifically for program providers and families!

2023 Summer Learning Week Themes



**NATIONAL
SUMMER
LEARNING WEEK**
JULY 10 - 14, 2023

Love of Literacy & Learning

Help **youth learn something new** or **immerse** themselves in a fun fictional world through **reading**! Aside from being fun, reading is also critical to children's success in school and in their daily lives. Help encourage and **empower youth to read amazing stories**, anywhere and everywhere, this summer.



Amazing Arts



Encourage youth to embrace and participate in **various forms of artistic expression**, such as music, literature, dance, theater, visual arts, and more. The arts provide wonderful avenues for **self-expression, creativity, and imagination**. This summer, inspire young individuals to **appreciate and actively engage** with the arts.

Wonders of Wellness, Health & Sports

Promoting the overall well-being of children is vital for their **joyful learning experience**. This encompasses physical, mental, emotional, and social health. Just as we encourage children to engage in **physical activity** and maintain a **healthy lifestyle**, it is equally crucial to support them in **developing social relationships and fostering open conversations** about mental health.



STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)



To shape their future path, it is essential for youth to **prioritize exploring STEM education**. Engaging in STEM **fosters practical skills and critical thinking abilities** necessary for success in a rapidly evolving world. By immersing themselves in STEM activities and conversations about their aspirations, young individuals can equip themselves with **the tools and knowledge needed to excel** in middle school, high school, and beyond.

Community & Leadership

Community engagement and leadership play crucial roles in the lives of young people, greatly influencing their **mental well-being and access to diverse connections and supportive mentors**. Extensive studies have shown that establishing healthy relationships is vital for youth to flourish and overcome challenging experiences. These valuable bonds not only enable them to acquire essential skills such as teamwork and effective decision-making but also facilitate the formation of **cherished memories** among the youth of various age groups.



SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS

EDUCATION

Despite schools and Out-of-School Time (OST) programs adopting traditional classroom modalities, student performance in 2023 remains a concern with the continuation of a 14-year decline in test scores. Recent data reveals that **students have fallen behind in math achievement by an average of 6 months and reading by 3 months**, with the **poorest districts experiencing twice as much learning loss** as the wealthiest. These trends indicate that there are ongoing challenges impacting learning and student achievement after the pandemic, with the **largest drop in math scores in 50 years**.

Furthermore, studies reveal significant disparities among students, with **Black students scoring 10% lower in math and 7% lower in reading** at age 13 compared to the national average in 2022. These findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions and support for students of color.



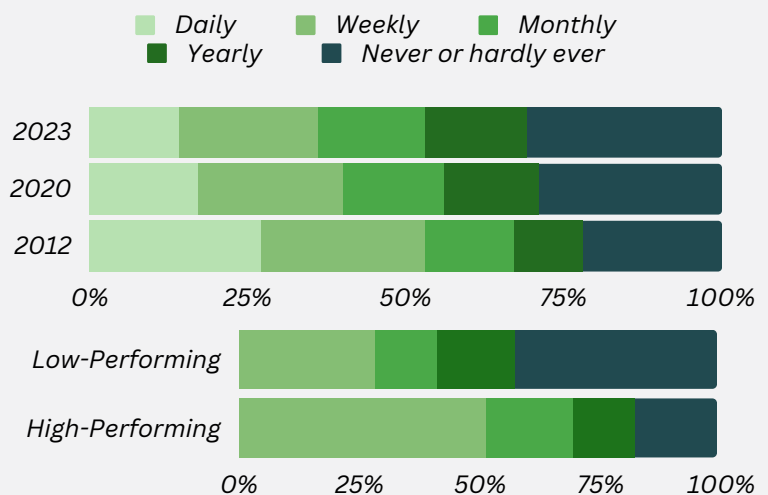
Fortunately, summer programs have emerged as valuable resources for academic assistance. According to the 2020 Illinois After 3PM report, 52% of families in Illinois reported at least one child participating in a summer learning program, with **100% expressing overwhelming satisfaction**. These programs have yielded highly positive outcomes, with data indicating a **17 to 21% increase in math learning** for participants and **over 7 months of math and reading skills improvement** for those who were furthest behind. These results emphasize summer learning as an essential tool for closing the achievement gap.

LITERACY

Recent research has shown literacy to be a crucial area of loss during the pandemic, with data from the Department of Education indicating that **reading for fun is a strong predictor for academic success** – and one which is **on the decline** in recent years.

Summer programming can be a crucial intervention for youth. Students not only can experience over half a school year of improvement in reading skills, but they can also engage in a supportive environment that nurtures their love of reading and improve literacy and academic outcomes for years to come.

How often students read for fun on their own time



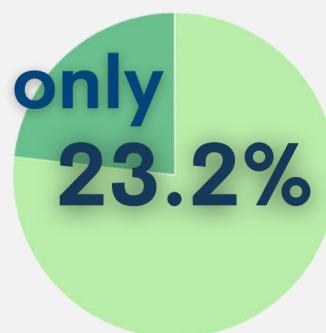
Source: NAEP Nation's Report Card

PHYSICAL HEALTH & NUTRITION

In recent years, there continue to be growing concerns about the physical health and nutrition of school-aged children. Limited opportunities for movement during long school hours have exacerbated these issues, with less than a quarter of high schoolers getting recommended levels of physical activity.

Further, food insecurity remains a significant challenge for families, with **1 in 5 children experiencing hunger**. Structural racism exacerbates the rate of food insecurity and diet-related chronic diseases, particularly in historically underserved populations. Data suggests that **Black households experience food insecurity at more than three times the rate of White households**. This highlights the need for interventions to ensure equitable access to nutritious meals for children across the country, particularly for those populations who rely on them.

Fortunately, summer and afterschool programs have emerged as a valuable resource in addressing these challenges. Parents recognize the benefits of afterschool programs, with 85% reporting that these programs provide fun physical activities for their children. Additionally, 75% of parents agree that their children can access nutritious foods through afterschool programs. These supports become even more important in the summer, with **60% of parents reporting that physical activity is extremely important** to them in a summer program – **8% higher than for school-year-based afterschool programs** and second only to building life skills.



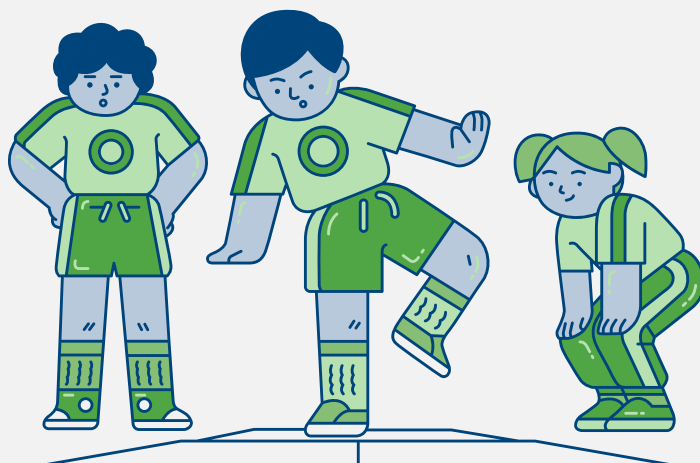
of high school students are physically active for at least 60 minutes each day

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System

Black households experience food insecurity at more than

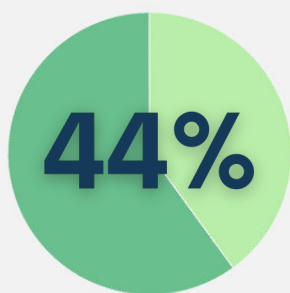
3x the rate of white households

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture



SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND MENTAL WELLNESS

Supporting children's mental health remains crucial, especially after the isolating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent data reveals historically high rates of high schoolers reporting poor mental health, with disproportionately higher rates for girls and low-income youth, all of whom continue to struggle in the wake of the psychological distress of the public health crisis, continuing to highlight shortcomings in our support structures.



of high schoolers felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row

Source: Pew Research Center

Afterschool programs play a vital role in addressing these challenges by providing opportunities for social interaction and skill development. An overwhelming **9 in 10 parents acknowledge the positive impact of afterschool programs on their children's mental health**, believing that these programs foster social competency through enjoyable and supportive interactions with peers and knowledgeable mentors.

Research consistently shows that participation in afterschool programs contributes to the development of essential social-emotional competencies. These programs promote prosocial behavior, enhance intrinsic motivation, improve concentration, and boost self-esteem. These skills benefit children not only within their learning environments but also in their daily lives and the broader community.



SAFETY

OST and summer learning programs provide safe spaces for children to learn, explore, and develop. Data indicates that **92% of parents recognize these programs as positive settings** with safe environments and dedicated, caring staff members. Safety of the environment, knowledgeable and caring staff, and opportunities to build life skills – all of which build essential supports for the safety and well-being of youth – are top criteria for families when choosing a program. These factors contribute to the safety and well-being of youth – particularly important for low-income households, **2 out of 3 of whom see reducing risky behavior as an extremely important factor** when selecting a summer program, underscoring the significance of these nurturing environments for the safety of youth at the most risk.

Furthermore, research suggests that out-of-school programs contribute to a reduction in crime and juvenile delinquency. Attendance in these programs reduces adverse experiences that may predispose youth to crime and risky behavior, and by providing increased adult supervision and support, these programs create a safer community environment and minimize instances of unsupervised youth during the unstructured time of summer.

It is clear that summer programming is highly beneficial and necessary for students throughout Illinois!

ADVOCACY TOOLS

Summer is the perfect time to elevate the experiences of youth in your program and thank our policymakers for supporting the afterschool and summer learning providers in Illinois.

ACT Now encourages program providers to invite policymakers to participate in physical site visits as well as schedule meetings with elected officials in their district offices. By hosting elected officials at your site, you allow legislators to see the amazing work that summer programs are doing. Legislators are keen to participate in summer programming, hear from youth themselves, and connect with families. **This toolkit** from the American Camp Association is a great resource to assist program providers as they coordinate site visits with legislators!

Types of Advocacy



There are so many ways to advocate for your program. Sharing on social media, sending letters to legislators, or calling your elected officials are all great ways to show how important summer learning sites are to supporting youth and families!

Please consider sending our action alert to your local, state, and federal elected officials and help educate them about the importance of summer learning programs!

ACT NOW'S ACTION ALERT

If you decide you would like to personally write to, email, or talk to your elected officials, that's great! The Illinois State Board of Elections hosts a District and Official Search page where you can find your elected state and federal officials. To access this website, click [here](#).

Note: You must enter a **complete address with a corresponding zip code** (ex: 101 North Wacker Drive, Suite 1700, Chicago, IL, 60606, Cook County) for the map to locate your legislators' information. Otherwise, you may enter the county in which you pertain (ex: Macon County, Macon County) in order to find out your elected officials.



PERSONALIZING LETTERS AND EMAILS TO ELECTED OFFICIALS

Sending emails can be a very efficient and meaningful way to communicate!

Well Written Correspondence Is:

- **Clear:** Elected officials are more likely to respond if they directly represent you! **Let them know that you live in their district, or that your program is located in the district that they represent.**
- **Brief:** Try to **keep correspondence to one page** and **explain why summer learning opportunities are so important.** How does federal relief and/or state funding positively affect your program or the youth and community your program serves? Have local businesses and community members helped your program by providing materials/mentors/funding? Highlight the unique aspects of your summer program!
- **Individualized:** Be sure to deliver a **unique message** to the elected official. **Personal messages** are more likely to influence legislators to learn more about your cause!
- **Nonpartisan:** Remember, there is a higher chance of receiving a response to your advocacy if the **message does not center on partisanship.** However, knowing more about **what your legislators care about**, and the topics that they prioritize (eg. agricultural education, criminal justice reform), can be helpful when trying to tailor your messaging.

Letter Outline

Opening Paragraph:

- State the **subject** of your letter
- Use the **bill number** or **budget line name**
- **Identify** yourself and your organization



Body of Letter:

- **Explain the issue clearly** and factually at a level your legislator will understand. They are not experts! For instance, try not to use acronyms in your writing.
- Give an “on-the-ground” and **personal example of the impact** of the issue to make the legislator care
- State **your position on the bill or policy** where appropriate
- **Thank the elected official** for their attention to the issue
- Let your legislator know that you are a **credible contact** in case they want more information

Conclusion:

- **Thank them again** for past, present, and future support of your cause
- Give a **summary of the main points** you wanted to address
- **Ask for a reply!**

SAMPLE EMAIL/LETTER

Dear Senator/Representative Last Name,

I am writing to you with regard to **(summer learning opportunities in Illinois)**. I am the Program Facilitator/Director/Coordinator of **(organization's name)** which annually serves **(#/geographic location)** students, youth, and their families. OR provides **(#/type of activity)** programs at **(organization's name)**.

As your constituent, I want to thank you for supporting summer learning opportunities for Illinois' youth and invite you to celebrate with **(insert your program name)** throughout National Summer Learning Week 2023, starting on July 10, 2023, to July 14, 2023. For afterschool and extended learning providers, summer is a time to help supplement students' in-school experiences.

Summer programs are a crucial part of combatting the negative outcomes that the Covid-19 pandemic had on youth. Summer programs provide academic enrichment, social-emotional learning competencies, services focused on mental health, nutritious meals, safe and supportive environments to engage with peers, and positive adult influences that help reduce juvenile delinquency.

I ask that you continue to support summer learning opportunities for youth in Illinois as they provide crucial support services for communities. **(Insert a brief story about your program or how the services you offer combat summer learning losses and help keep kids healthy and safe)**. With your help, we can ensure all young people in our community and across our state have the tools they need to successfully transition into educated, self-sufficient, accomplished adults.

Sincerely,
(Your Full Name)

SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER



Dear Senator **(Full Name)**:

Thank you for taking the time to converse with me on **(Date of conversation)** to talk about the importance of summer learning programs in Illinois and in your district **(Include district number/area)**. As we discussed, **summer enrichment programs help to improve academic and social-emotional outcomes, keep youth safe and healthy, and support workforce development** not only in underserved and historically marginalized communities but across the state of Illinois. **Many providers are ready to collaborate with state agencies and school districts** in order to support the diverse needs of young people as they relate to providing learning renewal opportunities and summer experiences.

I look forward to speaking with you again to discuss further the ways in which we can work together to ensure that young Illinoisans within our communities have the tools they need to successfully transition into educated, self-sufficient, accomplished, empathetic, and civically minded adults.

Sincerely,
(Your Full Name)

PERSONALIZING PHONE CALLS TO ELECTED OFFICIALS

Making a phone call can be an easy and quick way to communicate!

● How to Make Your Phone Call

- To reach your legislators in Springfield, **call the switchboard at 217-782-2000**. You can also find the numbers listed for the Illinois House and the Senate. (Note: As the summer progresses, you will want to **call your legislators' district offices first before calling their offices in Springfield** as they will be out of session.) If speaking to a legislative aide, jot down their name and contact information.



● Phone Calls Should Be:

- **Prepared:** Research your legislator so you **know their stance on out-of-school programming**. Tailor your content to fit their legislative goals. Develop a **concise list of talking points** you want to share with the legislator during the call. Craft these points to **highlight the main issue, your work, and the youth you serve**. Incorporate the **impact/outcomes (data) from your program**.
- **Clear:** State your name and **identify yourself** as a constituent. Provide your address and telephone number if the legislative aide requests it. If you are calling about a specific piece of legislation, **identify it by name and bill number**. If you are calling on behalf of a program, note the **name and location of the program**. Let the legislator know what **actions** you would like them to take!
- **Appreciative:** If your legislator has supported your cause in the past, let them know that you **appreciated** it. Add that you are hoping they will continue to support this issue.

● Sample Phone Call

- **Staff Member:** Thank you for calling **Representative/Senator (Last Name)'s** office. How may I help you?
- **Caller:** Hello, my name is **(Your Full Name)** from **(City or Town)**, and I am calling on behalf of **(Name of Afterschool Program or Organization)**.
- **Staff Member:** Wonderful, what can I do for you?
- **Caller:** As a constituent of **Representative/Senator (Last Name)'s** district, **(Insert information on why you are calling. Include why summer programming is important to you, your program, and the youth and community your program serves)**. Remember, be brief!
- **Staff Member:** Thank you for sharing your concerns with us. I will relay your comments to the **Representative/Senator (Last Name)**. Can you share your phone number or email address?
- **Caller:** Yes, my phone number and email address are **(Insert phone number and email address)**, thank you! Have a great day, and I look forward to hearing back from **Representative/Senator (Last Name)**.

Social Media Content Examples

Social media continues to be a powerful resource for program providers, youth, advocates, and families to connect and share information. It allows people to **network, share ideas, advocate, and raise awareness about a variety of campaigns and issues**. If you or your organization is not already on social media, the first step is to sign up for a free account on a platform! With summer programs facilitating activities virtually and digitally already, it will be seamless to engage policymakers remotely by **tagging them in your content or inviting them to join an event**.

Most legislators use Twitter and Facebook to interact with their constituents and local community members. Some also use Instagram to reach more people and specifically youth populations. Set up a [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), or [Instagram](#) page today!



Sample Twitter Posts

Use These Hashtags!

#SummerLearningWeek
#SummerMatters
#DiscoverSummer
#ACTNow4Summer



Summer programs play a critical role in providing youth+families with access to nutritional meals, safe spaces to renew learning/try new things & services to support mental well-being. 90% of parents recognize the positive impact of expanded learning opportunities!
#SummerWorks

#SummerLearningWeek kicks off on July 10th! Celebrate the field! Host an event or facilitate activities for youth & families that are based on literacy skills-building, the arts + STEM exploration, & focus on the mental/physical well-being of young people:
<https://www.summerlearning.org/summer-learning-week/>



Spark young people's imaginations this **#SummerLearningWeek**! Encourage youth to read a book, play a game, get outside, cook up a new summer recipe, and more! Summer is a great time to learn and explore new interests:
<https://bit.ly/SummerLearningWeek>
#DiscoverSummer



Summer in Illinois is full of fun! Our programs help youth foster new relationships, get active and moving outdoors, support their mental well-being & provide new learning environments for STEM+the arts! Thank you to all our amazing summer learning providers **#ACTNow4Summer**



Summer = an opportunity to level the playing field via high-quality programs that produce measurable benefits in math, reading & social-emotional learning in youth.
#SummerMatters in Illinois! Leverage the @WallaceFdn **#SummerLearning** Knowledge Center: <http://bit.ly/2ABM5JI>



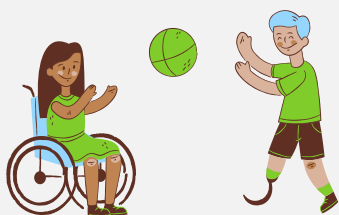
Image Database

Click here to access a document with links to images you can use with the developed social media content (posts). Please note that these are only recommendations of photos.

Sample Facebook Posts

National #SummerLearningWeek kicks off on July 10th! Between July 10, 2023, and July 14, 2023, programs, youth, and families across the United States will be celebrating the expanded learning field! Join in on the fun by hosting your own event or facilitating activities for youth that build literacy skills, engage them in the arts and hands-on STEM learning, and focus on the mental and physical well-being of individuals:

<https://www.summerlearning.org/summer-learning-week/>



#SummerLearning in Illinois is fun-filled! Our programs help youth foster new relationships, get active and moving outdoors, support their mental well-being, and provide new learning environments for STEM and the arts! Thank you to all our amazing summer learning providers - Happy National Summer Learning Week <https://bit.ly/3NxPPkd> #ACTNow4Summer

Summer programs play a critical role in providing youth and families with access to nutritional meals, safe spaces to renew learning and try new things, and services to support mental well-being. A staggering 90% of parents recognize the positive impact expanded learning opportunities have on their children's mental health and credit engaging programming with trusted mentors as the primary reason! <https://bit.ly/3NxPPkd>

#SummerWorks



Spark young people's imaginations this #SummerLearningWeek! Encourage youth to read a book, play a game, get outside, cook up a new summer recipe, and more! Summer is a great time to learn and explore new interests. To learn more ways to get youth engaged and to celebrate July 10th through July 14th, visit: <https://bit.ly/SummerLearningWeek> #DiscoverSummer

Summertime is an opportunity to level the playing field through high-quality programs that produce measurable benefits in math, reading, and social emotional-learning for youth. Learn more about why #SummerMatters for youth in Illinois and across the country. Check out the Wallace Foundation's #SummerLearning Knowledge Center: <http://bit.ly/2ABM5JI>



Resources For Summer Learning

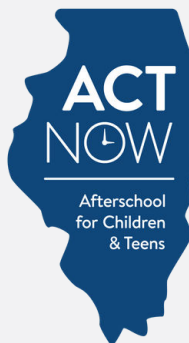
ACT Now has compiled a variety of high-quality, new, and engaging summer learning activities and challenges that can be facilitated almost anywhere with household items or low-cost materials. **Most of these resources are completely FREE!** Remember, it is important to incorporate a variety of the Summer Learning Week's themes into your program for young people to **get a well-rounded summer experience, reconnect with others, and renew wellness practices, STEM, literacy, art, and SEL competencies** over vacation time. Use these tools to build a comprehensive and enjoyable summer learning experience for your community!

What You Will Find

- General Programming
- SEL Activities
- Literacy Activities
- Arts Activities
- STEM Challenges
- Physical Health and Nutrition Resources
- Mental Health Resources
- Skill Building Activities



General Programming



ACT Now: The Summer Activity Guide

ACT Now, in collaboration with the **50 State Afterschool Network**, has been developing fun and engaging activities and challenges designed specifically to accommodate the COVID-19 summer. This resource is based on **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies and hands-on learning** and is easily adaptable to a variety of settings. Click [here](#) to access this Guide.

Mizzen by Mott



Mizzen by Mott is a **free app** built with and for afterschool providers. It has easy-to-access **afterschool lessons, activities, tips, and articles!** In addition, it offers organizational tools, a range of topics from arts to zoology, and opportunities to read user reviews and add reviews. Each session has step-by-step guidance, including learning objectives. This makes the app super accessible and easy to use. Check it out!



Social Emotional Learning Activities



Soar With Wings – SEL Skills for School & Life

Soar With Wings focuses on helping kids **build social-emotional skills** for school and life. Their **digital lesson** bundles feature standards-aligned **activities, an educator guide, and a digital lesson** PowerPoint for easy use and access. They **serve grades K-5** and have **fun activities** like "Act It Out!", "Time to Play!", and more reflective topics like "Inner Strength" and "Becoming My Best Me." Click here to access these resources!

UNICEF Kid Power

UNICEF has a page featuring **22 fun team-building games and activities** for kids. These activities are a fun and informal way to help kids build **collaborative and interpersonal skills**. In addition to instructions, UNICEF provides notes on how the activity helps build skills and which skills are being targeted. The page has **both indoor and outdoor activities** like "Forehead Dots" and classics like "Traffic Lights."

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Casel works to make social and emotional learning (SEL) part of a high-**quality and equitable education** for all spanning from classrooms to statehouses. The **CASEL Program Guide** is designed to help educators and school administrators **select an evidence-based SEL program** that best **meets the needs of their community**. They **serve Pre-K through 12th grade** and have **86 programs**, including "Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR)," "Captain McFinn: Explore Kindness," "Facing History and Ourselves," etc.

Illinois State Board of Education

The Illinois State Board of Education has compiled **resources** for educators to **implement social and emotional learning practices**. They have **positive behavioral interventions and supports** that include Crisis Intervention, Culturally Sensitive and Responsive Teaching, Home School Community Partnerships, etc. They also have Anti-Bias and Anti-Hate resources, resources for supporting children of military families, and resources for promoting a **healthy school climate**.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Guidebook

This guidebook contains ideas for **incorporating SEL activities into classrooms** and **additional resources** to inform educators and equip them with tools to integrate practices into their curriculum. Examples of specific exercises and interventions include **activities to promote self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness/relationship skills**.

Pure Edge

Pure Edge provides a range of **free classroom resources** that include learner Brain Breaks, health & wellness curricula, and Virtual PE. Their free curriculum for Pre-K through 12th graders outlines how to **alleviate stress and calm over-stimulated minds**. Pure Edge also provides **professional development** and **self-care strategies** via adult Brain Breaks, trainings, and webinars, and ongoing **support for our partner districts and organizations**.



Literacy Activities



Reading Rockets



Reading Rockets has a whole page dedicated to keeping youth on top of their reading skills during the summer. These activities range from **trading cards to a scavenger hunt**. In addition to activities, this website has tactics to make reading books fun during the summer. These resources are free and target kids, parents, and providers. Check it out!

Open Books offers a range of video resources, writing activities, and fun games like reading bingo! They also have a YouTube channel where videos feature their staff and even celebrities like Dolly Parton participating in story time by **reading books out loud**. In terms of writing activities, readers can sign up to receive daily writing prompts or follow provided activities like MadLibs to infuse their writing with creativity and imagination. Their activities mainly target kids from grades 3 -12.

Open Books



Reading is Fundamental – Literacy Central



Reading is Fundamental has nearly 16,000 literacy-focused resources for grades pre-K through 12. Materials range from lesson plans to coloring pages, games, and even author interviews! Using their database, you can **select for reading level, genre (like graphic novel or folktale), and themes (like bilingual & Spanish or American history)**. While some books require purchase on their website, they are mostly accessible through Z-Library, the world's largest eBook library!

Read Write Think has K-12 resources that are grouped into collections; these collections each include lesson plans, teaching materials, and professional learning resources and are based on topics like primary sources or poetry. These programs offer in-depth, thoughtful ways to engage students and even have **instructional plans and learning standards available** for instructors to use! There are many lessons for all grades, leaving providers with several options to choose from!

Read Write Think



Children's Literacy Foundation (CLiF)



The Children's Literacy Foundation (CLiF) is a nonprofit organization focusing on improving literacy. They have a compiled list of low or no-cost literacy activities that are fun and exciting for kids. These activities target pre-K to early middle school students and provide community-wide and school-wide options. From activities like **character Facebook profiles to letters to book characters**, these activities are sure to engage students!



Arts Activities



WheatonArts – Family Art Workshops

WheatonArts has created several arts and crafts video tutorials for families and youth to do each week. The activities **use common household materials, plants, and low-cost resources**. The tutorials are also great for children of all ages. Click [here](#) to follow along with the videos and check back for more uploads!

Beat By Beat

Beat By Beat has a whole page full of **more than 150 compiled drama activities** for youth. From warmups to ensemble building activities, to improvisation, these activities are sure to interest students. Each activity comes with a listed **purpose, procedure, and comments** from other people on what they liked and what they thought the activity could improve on.

Deep Space Sparkle

Deep Space Sparkle has **visual art related activities** for K-6th grade. Each of the activities involve hands on art like drawing or painting and have video demonstrations and art guides to make them easy to execute and follow. **Activities are colorful and have fun themes** like "Penguin At Night" and "Just Add Glitter!"

Teach Rock

Teach Rock has lesson plans for elementary to high school students all about different types of popular music. Through their drop-down menu, practitioners can select lesson plans about genres like rock, soul, or Latin. Their **music programming** also incorporates topics like **Black history, appropriation, and gender and sexuality**. Each activity comes with music clips, procedure, handouts, common core standards to align with, and objectives.

Illinois Art Station

Illinois Art Station has great programs for providers, families, and youth! This website provides lesson plans, professional workshops, and creation stations. This is a great place to **begin your art education** while learning how to then provide that activity to youth. To learn more about these opportunities, click [here](#).

Waterford.org

In addition to having **50 music related activities** and a list of 10 picture books about music, Waterford has a section on the benefits of **music learning on social-emotional learning and brain development**. From games like music scavenger hunts to apps that teach children how to make music, Waterford has a range of activities that can accommodate different modalities and plans.

The Art of Education University

With **27 art activities and lessons** using low to no cost ingredients, these activities are easily accessible. For example, **paint made with spices or instant coffee**. Instead of pottery, there are also alternatives like clay made out of paper or dough made out of salt!



STEM Challenges

KidSpark Education

KidSpark Education provides **free STEM curriculum** for elementary and middle school-age youth. This organization offers **teacher lesson plans, STEM curriculum packets, student workbooks, instructional videos, and more**. Not only is this program fit for virtual STEM programming, but it also can be utilized for in-person programming.

Stem 101

STEM 101 is a great website that offers **paid curriculum for middle school and high school students**. The organization's curriculum includes topics from manufacturing, and computer engineering, to architecture and design. The programming ranges from 56 to 220+ hours depending on the curriculum selected. STEM 101 has **amazing engagement strategies and a reputation for leaving kids curious to discover more STEM-related topics**. In addition, there are both remote and in-person curricula available. Check it out [here](#).

Afterschool Alliance

Afterschool Alliance has a page full of **curriculum, professional development, and evaluation tools** specifically developed for teaching STEM in the out-of-school-time environment. Check it out [here](#)!

Museum of Science and Industry

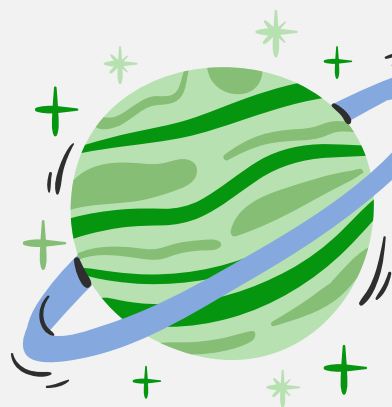
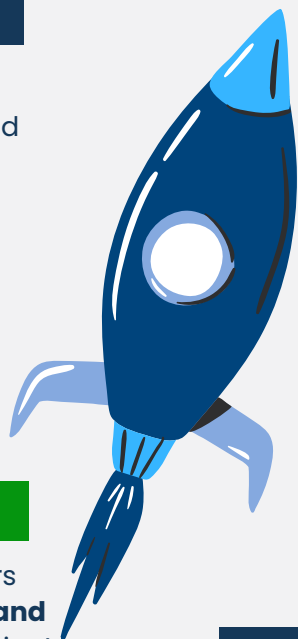
The Museum of Science and Industry has developed **a set of curricula** that has small activities youth can do to learn about different scientific phenomena. These activities are **great to incorporate into STEM programming** whether remote or in-person as they require very few or low-cost materials. All of these lesson plans are free to the public. Some of these activities are **hands-on, videos**, and even **virtual games**. Click [here](#) to access past summer's activities.

NASA

Check out this blog post on **summertime STEAM projects** for K-12. These activities are **all space-themed** and just need simple materials! From making a moon phase calendar and calculator to making a straw rocket, these activities are sure to excite students!

Science Buddies

Science Buddies has more than **450 STEM activities** for kids that let kids create and witness interesting scientific phenomena! Each activity has a section with **key concepts, an introduction, and a "what happened" section** so kids can think about and debrief what they saw. From **turning milk into plastic to making a fire snake**, these activities are super interesting!





Physical Health and Nutrition Resources



National Summer Learning Association

The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) has developed strategies for **incorporating physical activities and knowledge of healthy food choices** into summer programming. Click [here](#) to read the handout and learn how to get youth moving and thinking about healthy lifestyles this summer season.



Mobile Apps

Zombie Run and **SworKit Kids** are fun mobile apps that promote physical activity among children. Similar to GoNoodle, these apps encourage kids to stay active while enjoying interactive experiences. **Zombie Run** combines **running with solving puzzles and escaping from zombies**, engaging both the body and mind. **SworKit Kids** offers **tailored exercises and workouts for children**, with easy-to-follow instructions and a wide variety of activities to keep them excited and engaged in staying active. More apps can be found [here](#)!

Summer Nutrition Program Social Impact Analysis

This report highlights research on the importance of summer nutrition, specifics ranging **from summer meal access to helping kids have a healthy relationship with food**. The report includes best practices and statistics on how to provide meals in the summer. Check it out for all the [summer nutrition information](#).

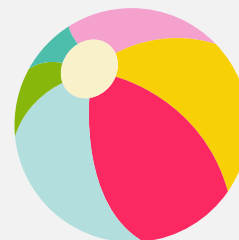


OPEN – Online Physical Education Network

Through their “At Home Summer Camp” programming, OPEN offers 4 weeks’ worth of fun [physical exercise activities](#) that are easily accessible. From backyard games to sport stacking, these games are sure to help students move their bodies. Each activity also includes **equipment lists, detailed packets about the programming, and YouTube demonstrations** when necessary.

The YMCA – The Y Feeds Kids

The YMCA [Summer Food Program](#) helps feed kids who rely on school for food in need of meals during the summer. Due to this need, the **YMCA is providing free meals and snacks to kids in need**. Their website also includes cost-effective and nutritious recipes like chocolate zucchini muffins, or roasted cauliflower tacos!



AFHK – Action For Healthy Kids

AFHK's resource library provides a wide range of alternatives and strategies for parents to limit their kids' screen time. They emphasize activities that require minimal materials, such as a backyard fitness circuit course. Detailed instructions and tips are provided for each activity, ensuring parents have the necessary guidance. By exploring these valuable resources, parents can effectively reduce screen time and promote their children's overall well-being. Click [here](#)!



Mental Health Resources



Healthy Children

Healthy Children has a detailed article based on information from the **American Academy of Pediatrics** on how to talk to kids about tragedies or traumatic news events. It includes guidelines for communicating with children of different ages and developmental needs. There is also information about noticing signs that a child may not be coping well.



The Youth Mental Health Project

The Youth Mental Health Project has simplified **facts and resource sheets** to help raise awareness about mental health and best practices for mental health. These sheets include information on **different types of mental health professionals, loneliness, sleep, stress, anxiety**, and more for older students to read or for providers to keep in mind.



National Federation of Families – Children's Mental Health Acceptance Week (CMHAW)

CMHAW provides activities, workbooks, and videos for children, youth, families, and providers to have **conversations and programming around mental health**. CMHAW also has an activity workbook with 10 pages of activities for younger students to explore their feelings, identity, self-image, and self-concept. Check them out **here!**



ISBE Safe2Help

The Illinois State Board of Education has a 24/7 program, called Safe2Help where students can report school safety concerns in a confidential environment. **This toolkit** includes resources on **how parents and educators can help remove stigmas around mental health** and foster a culture of caring. Each section also includes sample classroom strategies, suggested resources, and research-based guidelines on how to use these resources.



Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership

Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership has webinars and professional resources in **both English and Spanish**. **These resources** include "Residential Treatment Guide for Youth with Mental Health Needs" and "Reflective Practice Guide."





Skill Building Activities



You 4 Youth

It is important for youth to learn about civic engagement as they have the power to lead. You 4 Youth offers **lesson plans and activities that get students involved and inspired to be change makers**. This program is aligned with 21st Century Learning Centers programmatic requirements as well. Check these materials out [here](#)!

You 4 Youth – College and Career Readiness

You 4 Youth has developed an entire page to **help providers with college and career readiness**. There is a set of modules that providers can utilize to learn how to guide students in the right direction. This program created mentors out of providers. Check it out [here](#)!

Outdoor Activities

This website provides a diverse selection of group activities for kids, fostering skills like teamwork, collaboration, and problem-solving. These promote social development and critical thinking, offering parents a valuable resource to encourage healthy growth. Check it out today [here](#)!

Kaboom

Kaboom offers programming for civic engagement geared towards specific age groups. They have a plethora of age-appropriate topics that will **teach young people to be leaders**. Many of their programs are **offered in Spanish as well**. These resources are free and downloadable. Please [check them out](#)!

Fit Money

Fit Money is a platform dedicated to delivering complimentary, impartial financial literacy programs. Its mission is to equip K-12 students with essential life skills to ensure a financially secure future. Click [here](#)!

National Summer Learning Association

The National Summer Learning Association has created [a set of helpful resources](#) for college and career readiness ranging from **SAT prep to research briefs**. To keep teen youth on track for graduation integrate some of these resources into your summer programming. There are even simple tips to help guide teen youth with post-graduation plans.

Google for Education

Google has **free digital skills lessons** to help kids learn develop new skills using online resources. For instance, programs include **teaching kids how to organize their time with a digital agenda or how to learn new vocabulary with flash cards**. For providers and parents, each activity also has a **full lesson plan, sample rubric, and certificates of completion** that can be printed out and handed to students.

ACT Now – College and Career Readiness Guidebook

Afterschool programs and summer learning experiences are excellent environments for youth of all ages to begin **thinking about their post-secondary education plans and explore future careers**. To help Out-of-School Time providers engage with, and incorporate these resources into their programming, ACT Now has compiled them into [this straightforward guidebook](#) to highlight quality, affordable, and creative activities and materials.