



# The Importance of Summer Learning

**NATIONAL SUMMER LEARNING WEEK**

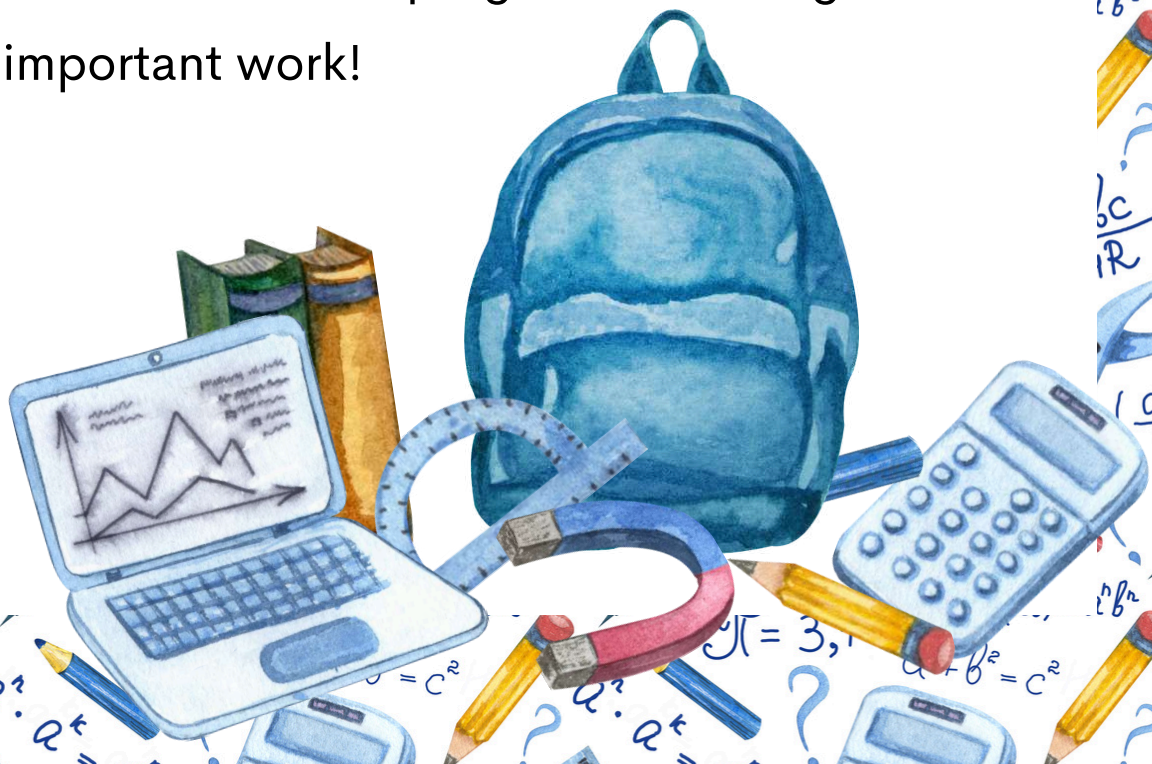


**ACTNOW**

Afterschool for Children & Teens



Summer is a crucial time for programs! With the lack of structured school time, millions of children are left without programming. Specifically in Illinois, **for every child in summer programming, there are four more waiting to get in one.** ACT Now Illinois would like to recognize the importance of summer programming, and take the time to appreciate all the things our summer programs do for youth! This paper highlights some of the important things summer programs bring for youth. Thank you to all the summer programs for doing such important work!



# LEARNING LOSS

Summer is a crucial time for the education of students. With it being a gap between formal education time, it provides an opportunity for students to grow in many different ways.

However, a concern in the educational field is Summer Learning Loss (SLL). It is estimated that **students may lose up to 2 months of learning during the summer**. This is a setback for both students and teachers who will need to spend time reviewing, or, if unfortunately unnoticed, will cause students experiencing the learning loss to fall behind their peers.

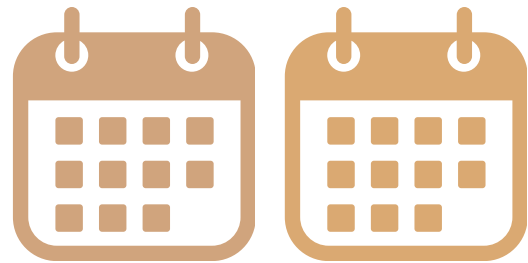
Furthermore, studies reveal significant disparities among students, with low-income students losing 2 months of reading achievement over the summer while their middle-income peers gain reading skills. This disparity increases over time, accounting for two-thirds of the gap in reading achievement between low-income and middle-income students.

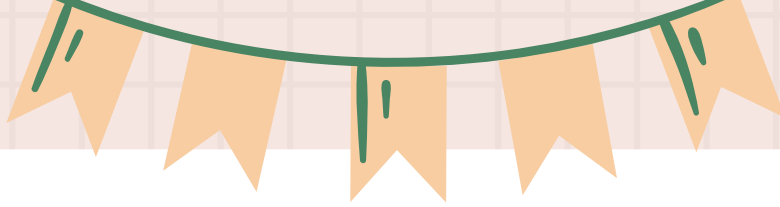
Fortunately, well-designed and well-delivered summer programs can address SLL, increase learning, and expand opportunities delivered to students. Additionally, longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of summer programs found that voluntary summer programs free of charge for families significantly impacted the learning of low-income students. Students regularly attending the summer learning program reaped the benefits of increased math and reading performance. In

Illinois specifically, summer programs are widely supported, with 100% of parents satisfied with their children's summer experiences. However, there remains a gap in who receives the experience, with every child in summer programming, four more waiting to get in.



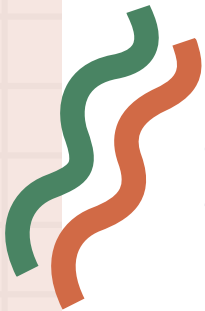
**Students may lose up to 2 months of learning in the summer**



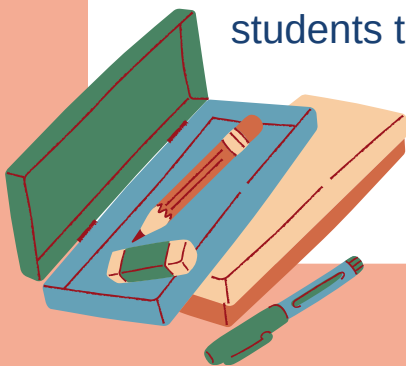


# ENRICHMENT EXPERIENCES

Enrichment experiences of various kinds offer youth the opportunity to explore other interests of their own and learn more about themselves. Unfortunately, **summer usually exacerbates the unequal distribution of these experiences**, with fewer programs being offered for free or through school, serving as a barrier to low-income students' accessibility to the experiences.

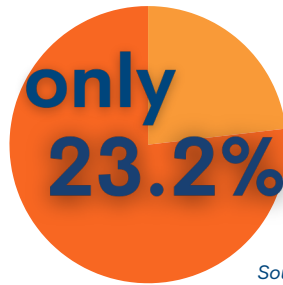


Summertime, when youth are not in the structured time and curriculum of the school day, is a great place for students to have experiences with many different activities like the arts, museum or zoo visits, and other activities not typically offered in school days like swimming and sports. **Recent studies show that knowledge gained in enrichment experiences directly connects to knowledge used in the classroom**, and thus students receiving the experiences have an advantage in the classroom. Because so many of these experiences are tied to money, it is crucial for summer programs to offer accessible and affordable opportunities for all students to gain these experiences.



# PHYSICAL HEALTH AND 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.



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

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System

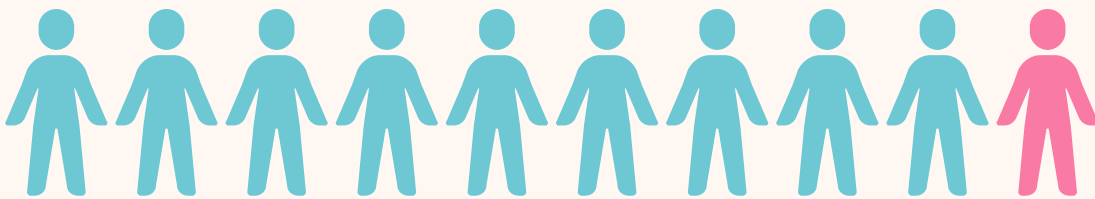
Further, food insecurity remains a significant challenge for families, with **1 in 5 children experiencing hunger**. Structural racism exacerbates the rate of food insecurity and diet-related chronic diseases, particularly in historically underserved populations. Data suggests that **Black households 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.

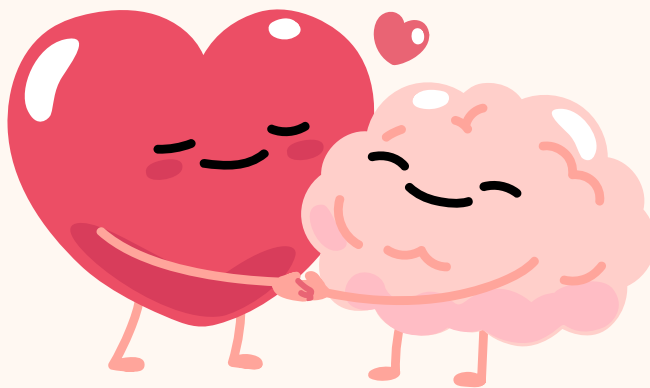
# MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Supporting children's mental health remains crucial, especially after the isolating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. 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.



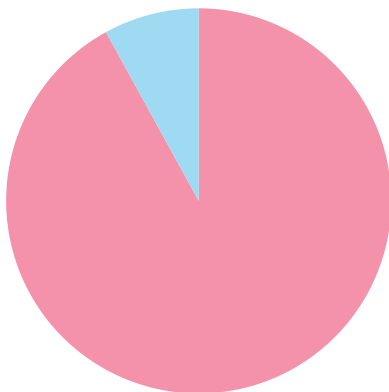
**9 out of 10 parents acknowledge the positive impact of afterschool programs on their children's mental health**



# SAFETY

Out-of-school time (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.

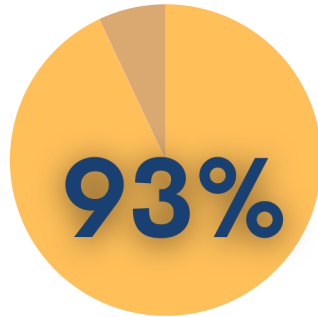
Furthermore, research suggests that out-of-school programs contribute to a reduction in crime and juvenile delinquency. Attendance in these programs reduces adverse experiences that may predispose youth to crime and risky behavior. By providing increased adult supervision and support, these programs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



**92% of parents recognize summer programs as positive settings with safe environments**

# OUTDOOR EDUCATION

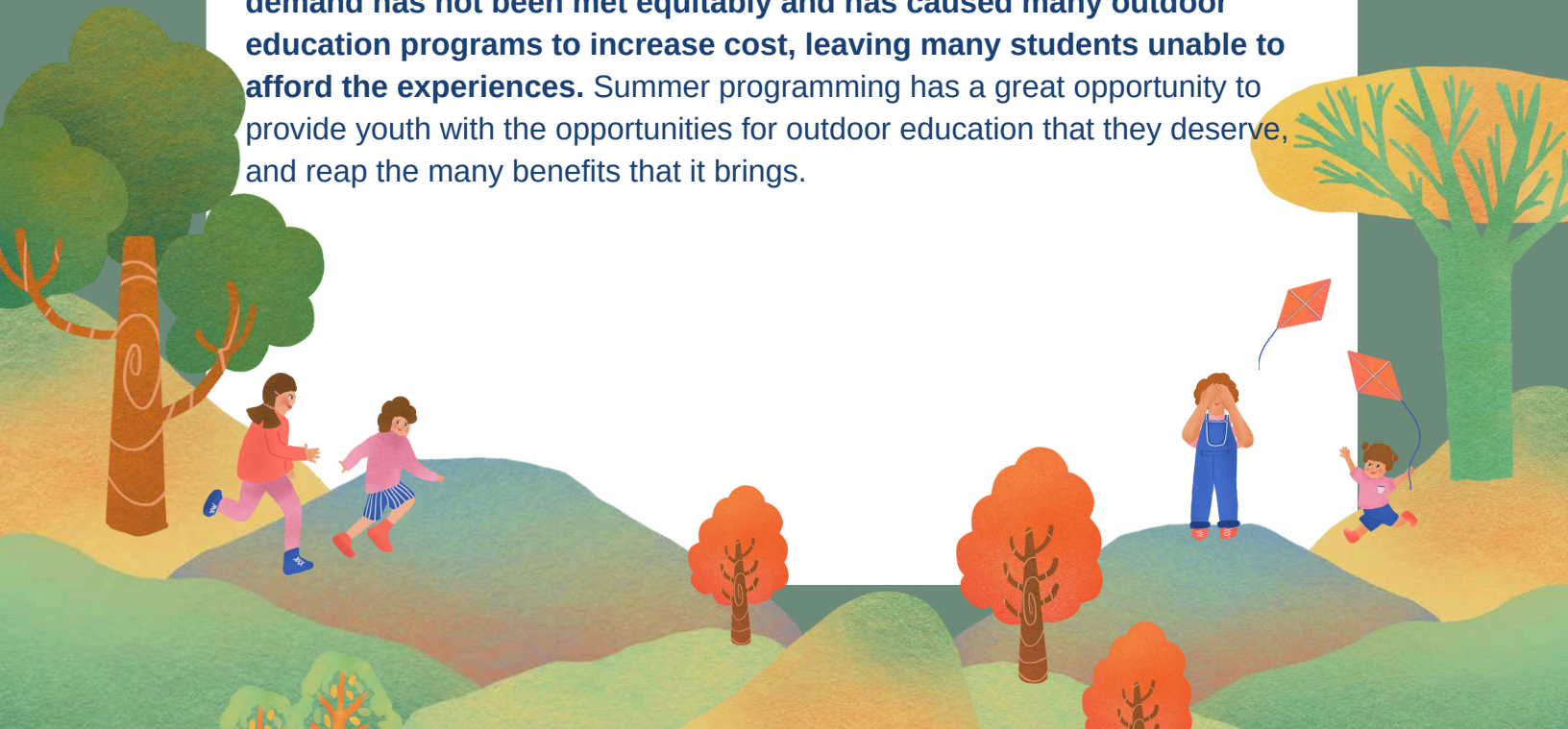
The summer months in Illinois are the months that offer the best weather and climate for outdoor activities. While during the school year, most students are indoors most of the day, the summertime offers an important time for exposure to the outdoors and outdoor education that is not offered to them during the year.



**of Illinois parents place importance on the outdoors in selecting their child's structured summer experience**

Outdoor education provides various studied benefits, including better physical health, increased environmental stewardship, enhanced creativity and self-confidence, and stronger collaboration and relationship skills. **Learning about the outdoors or being outside is beneficial for youth, and the summer months are perfect for these experiences.**

Interest in outdoor education increased with the COVID-19 pandemic, partly because of the reduced transmission of COVID outside. However, after recognizing the many benefits more and more parents have pushed to have their children in outdoor education spaces. **Unfortunately, this increased demand has not been met equitably and has caused many outdoor education programs to increase cost, leaving many students unable to afford the experiences.** Summer programming has a great opportunity to provide youth with the opportunities for outdoor education that they deserve, and reap the many benefits that it brings.







# Happy National Summer Learning Week 2024!

Thank you for supporting summer learning, and doing some summer learning yourself about the importance and impact of summer programming.



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