

Tackling Learning Loss: Expand Access to Summer & Afterschool Programs

In response to the long-term impact of COVID-19, Alabama should create a pilot grant program to expand high-quality, community-based summer and afterschool programs in reading and STEM. The program would promote partnerships between local school districts and community-based organizations to address ongoing learning loss, as proposed by Gov. Ivey in her 2021 State of the State Address.

Why is this important for students?

Even before COVID, Alabama faced long-standing academic challenges that disproportionately affect our most vulnerable students. Closing achievement gaps requires more than just the regular school day.

- Students attending summer programs for 20+ days saw significantly better outcomes in math and reading. In addition, students who attended for two summers outperformed students who did not by up to a 20% difference in both reading and math (Rand Corp. & Wallace Foundation study).
- Alabama students who attend Summer Adventures in Learning (SAIL) programs made average gains of 1.9 months in reading and 2.7 months in math during a 5-6 week program.
- More time in afterschool programs narrowed the math achievement gap by grade 5 (UC-Irvine study).
- Research shows that every \$1 invested in afterschool programs saves at least \$3 by increasing students' earning potential, improving students' performance in reading and math, and reducing crime and juvenile delinquency.

Why should the state invest now?

While current federal ARP ESSER dollars can be used for summer and afterschool programming, those funds will run out in 2024 and students' recovery from the pandemic will still be underway. We need to spend the next three years building our summer and afterschool infrastructure, so we know what works and can scale it up. In the long-term, this will also accelerate the learning of our most vulnerable students to help close the achievement gap that existed in Alabama long before the pandemic.

What are the core components?

Partnerships between Schools & Community Organizations

Grants would incentivize partnerships between local school districts and community organizations to raise quality and expand access. This will allow for funding and program design to meet the needs of the community. Similar to First Class Pre-K, the grants would leverage existing programs and create new ones in unserved communities, while requiring all to meet high standards.

High-Quality Instruction in Literacy & STEM

Students from low-income families can lose 2-3 months of learning over the summer months when not engaged in academics. Effective programs have high-quality instruction, curricula aligned to the regular school day, and well-trained instructors. Programs should focus on building students' reading and STEM skills over the course of their program, where Alabama students need to show the most growth.

Engaging Enrichment Activities

Central to the success of summer and afterschool programs is that they are engaging and capture student interest to drive participation in these voluntary programs. Increasing access to community-based enrichment components also allows children to experience activities they may not have otherwise.

Continuous Improvement

Programs will use data to ensure students are making academic progress throughout their participation. This will include pre and post assessments and regular progress monitoring to make any necessary adjustments in instructional delivery. This data collection will also allow the state to identify best practices and scale up programs that work.

The goal is to raise quality and expand access to summer & afterschool learning opportunities to accelerate student recovery from the pandemic and put Alabama students on track for success.