

FEBRUARY 2022

# EVALUATION OF SUMMER TOGETHER

Summary of Findings

SUBMITTED TO:

SF Department of Children,  
Youth & Their Families (DCYF)  
Crankstart  
SF Education Fund

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# A VISION FOR SUMMER TOGETHER

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By Spring of 2021, most students in San Francisco had spent all or most of their days since March 2020 in virtual learning and socially distanced because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents, educators, and community leaders throughout the City were urgently concerned about the impacts of this isolation on the learning and well-being of young people in San Francisco. Pre-existing inequities exacerbated during the pandemic magnified these educational and mental health challenges for Black, Latinx, Pacific Islander, low income, and English Language Learner children and youth.<sup>1</sup> Summer 2020 had offered limited in-person opportunities for enrichment programming, due both to reduced capacity and hesitation to enroll because of the pandemic.

Summer Together was designed to significantly expand the scale the availability of summer learning experiences for San Francisco children and youth to mitigate some of these negative impacts. Summer Together leveraged an infusion of \$25 million in private philanthropic funds to supplement longstanding City summer programs, including those operated by community-based organizations and funded by the Department of Children, Youth & Their Families (DCYF), as well as those offered through the Recreation and Park Department (RPD), the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL), and the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). Summer Together also became an opportunity to reimagine and strengthen a historically robust but siloed system of summer enrichment opportunities.

The vision of Summer Together was to build a coherent, coordinated system that would expand the opportunities available, especially to the most vulnerable families in San Francisco. Managed by DCYF, Summer Together convened leaders from the San Francisco Mayor's Office, RPD, SFUSD, the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL), DCYF-funded community-based organizations, and private summer camp providers. Announced in March 2021, following uncertainty about public health guidance, Summer Together required City agencies and community partners to plan on a condensed—and rapid—timeline to open programs in June. **These partners rose to the challenge and rallied around a common goal: to offer free, in-person and virtual summer learning experiences for the city's youth.**<sup>2</sup> In-person

***This past year has been a year of loss, and we're going to take the summer to [begin] a year of recovery. I really, really hope that the summer is our first step into helping students recover from the learning loss that they've experienced this past year, but also the loss of connections to their peers, connections to caring adults, and connections to joy and fun.***

**--DCYF Commissioner**

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<sup>1</sup> "Summer Together: The San Francisco village supporting our children, youth & families" by the City of San Francisco, the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth & Their Families, and the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department; presented on April 9, 2021 for Youth, Young Adults and Families Committee.

<sup>2</sup> This report focuses on the in-person programs offered through Summer Together.

programs—the focus of this evaluation and report— were designed to reacquaint children to in-person instruction through fun and engaging activities with their peers. Summer programs delivered a range of services, including project-based academics activities, physical outdoor activities, credit recovery for high school students, and comprehensive support for students and families, including social, emotional and mental health supports.

Summer Together ensured that students with the most needs were served first by providing families meeting certain criteria early registration opportunities. DCYF and its partners communicated available opportunities on the Summer Together website and through schools and other community partners. DCYF-funded community and school based programs opened for registration, given priority access to targeted families; priority families had access to early RPD program registration before it opened more broadly; and families interested in private camp slots funded by Summer Together were matched to and enrolled in camps by DCYF staff.

Summer Together programs operated in multi-week sessions. Many Summer Together programs, including all school-based programs funded by DCYF, began programming on June 7, 2021 and ran through mid-to-late June. Others began in mid-June and operated through early August 2021. San Francisco students returned to in-person school on August 16, 2021.

In Spring 2021, Policy Studies Associates (PSA) was engaged to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of Summer Together. The evaluation was designed to explore a central question: ***How does Summer Together contribute to an equitable system that supports the growth, well-being, and success of young people in San Francisco?***

Through interviews, focus groups, and surveys with Summer Together system leaders, program providers, families, and youth participants, the PSA team explored:

- The impact of Summer Together funding on the landscape of summer programs
- Program implementation highlights and challenges
- Benefits for participants and their families
- Lessons learned about system coordination, planning, and infrastructure

This report summarizes these evaluation findings. A summary of evaluation methods is included at the end of this report.

***The decision to reserve the majority of the places for vulnerable children and to allow for their early enrollment was brilliant. It would be so great...to continue to give priority placement to our most vulnerable populations.***

**--Summer Together  
Provider**

## Terms for Summer Together in this report

**DCYF-funded community-based:** Programs operated in a community center by a nonprofit organization, through a DCYF contract.

**DCYF-funded school-based:** Programs located in a host school, operated by a nonprofit organization through a DCYF contract.

**RPD:** Programs operated by the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department.

**Private camps:** Private camps in the San Francisco Bay Area that set aside slots for Summer Together; fees for those participants were paid through Summer Together.

**SFUSD\*:** Credit recovery and summer academic programs operated by the school district.

*\*SFUSD programs not funded by DCYF were not included in data collection for this evaluation.*

# IMPACT OF FUNDING ON THE SUMMER LANDSCAPE

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**“Funding was a gamechanger” that enabled Summer Together providers to better meet the needs of participants and families.**

Summer Together infused significant funds into San Francisco’s landscape of summer programming, allowing providers to do what they do best: deliver responsive programming. Providers reported that the funding allowed them to respond to the needs of their participants and families and enhance the summer experience for youth during an otherwise difficult summer amid the pandemic. They increased services for vulnerable families and were able to expand program services. In the words of one provider, “Funding was a gamechanger.”

## More Vulnerable Families Served

Funders and City leaders alike aimed to serve the most vulnerable families through Summer Together, prioritizing enrollment for low-income families, English Language learners, homeless and underhoused families, children in the foster care system, and children with disabilities. DCYF’s most recent community needs assessment also identified Black and African American, Latino, Pacific Islander, and low-income Asian families as priority populations.

**Summer Together providers served high proportions of children and youth identified as vulnerable in San Francisco.**

Based on an analysis of enrollment data tracked by DCYF, RPD, and private camps, Summer Together served nearly 12,500 unique participants in summer 2021, in DCYF-funded community- and school-based sites (8,384 participants), in RPD programs (1,729 participants), and in private camps (2,335 participants).<sup>3</sup> In addition, 11,890 students were reported to be

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<sup>3</sup> The PSA team was able to match numeric identifiers for 140 children who may have attended both RPD and private camps. We did not exclude these participants from our analyses, nor did we assign them to one program type and delete them from the other. It is possible that this may have led us to double count this relatively small number of children. However, as we could not confirm that these were the same children—not all of the demographic data matched across files, though the matching numeric identifiers indicate that the demographic data should have been the same—we opted to leave all of these possible duplicates in the analytic sample.

enrolled in SFUSD-led summer academic programs, for a total of more than 24,338 City youth served in summer programs in 2021.<sup>4</sup>

## PARTICIPANT GRADE LEVEL

Nearly 69 percent of Summer Together participants in DCYF-funded, RPD, and private camp sites were in elementary school (kindergarten through grade 5) (Exhibit 1); community-based sites served the largest relative proportion of high school youth (12 percent).

**Exhibit 1. Participants' grade levels, by provider type, in percents.**

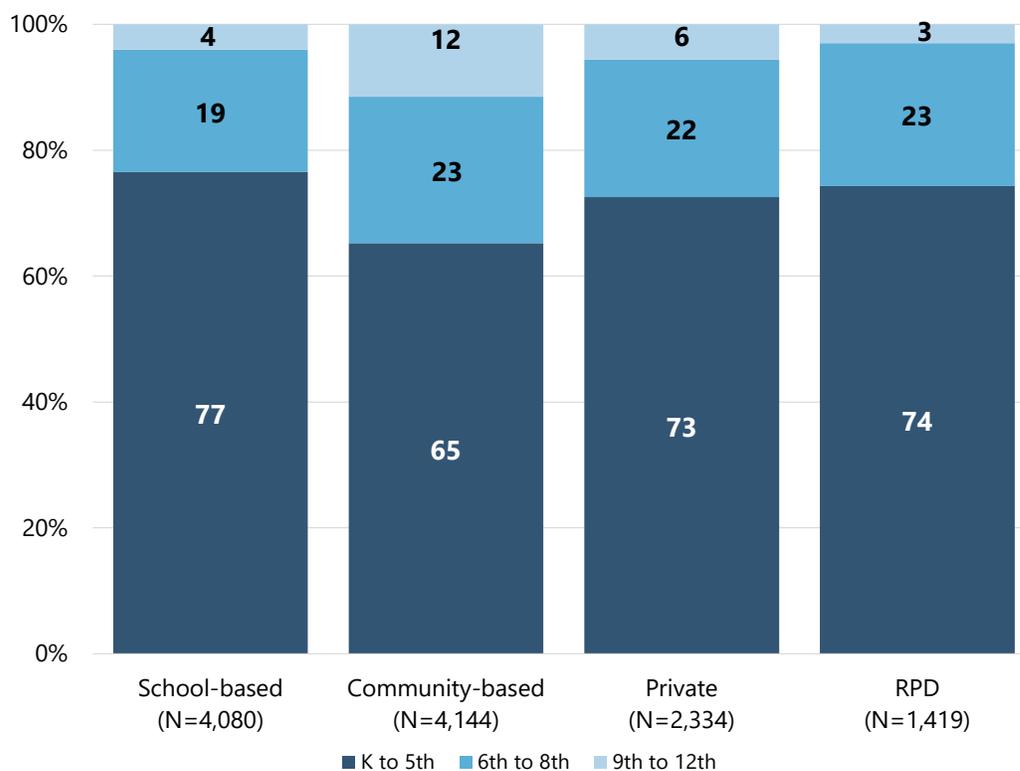


Exhibit reads: Of the 4,080 participants in DCYF-funded school-based programs, 77 percent were enrolled in kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

Note: Grade was listed as unknown for 160 participants at DCYF-funded programs, 1 participant at private camps, and 310 participants at RPD sites.

<sup>4</sup> The PSA team did not analyze participant data for SFUSD-led summer academic programs. The remaining analyses in this report represent available data for Summer Together programs that were DCYF grantees, RPD sites and private camp programs only. In addition, because different data were tracked for participants in DCYF, RPD, and private camp programs, some analyses reported are limited by type of provider. For example, participants' home language was collected at DCYF-funded school-based and community-based sites but was not collected at private or RPD sites. Housing data were not collected at RPD sites. While participants' housing status data were collected at DCYF-funded sites and private camps, housing data were missing for 35 percent of participants. Given the differences in data availability, where the analyses are limited by data availability, we note the limitations in text or in exhibit notes. Information on all data sources can be found in the Evaluation Methods section of this report.

## PARTICIPANT RACE/ETHNICITY

Across all DCYF, RPD, and private camp programs, of the participants with reported race/ethnicity, a large majority were Asian (35 percent), Black or African American (12 percent), or Latino/Hispanic (26 percent) (Exhibit 2). Some caution is warranted with these percentages: Race and ethnicity data were missing or not reported for 29 percent of participants at school-based sites, 18 percent of participants at community-based sites, 7 percent of private camps, and 21 percent of RPD sites—i.e. race/ethnicity were missing for approximately 20 percent of participants across sites.

**Exhibit 2. Participants’ race/ethnicity, by provider type, in percents.**

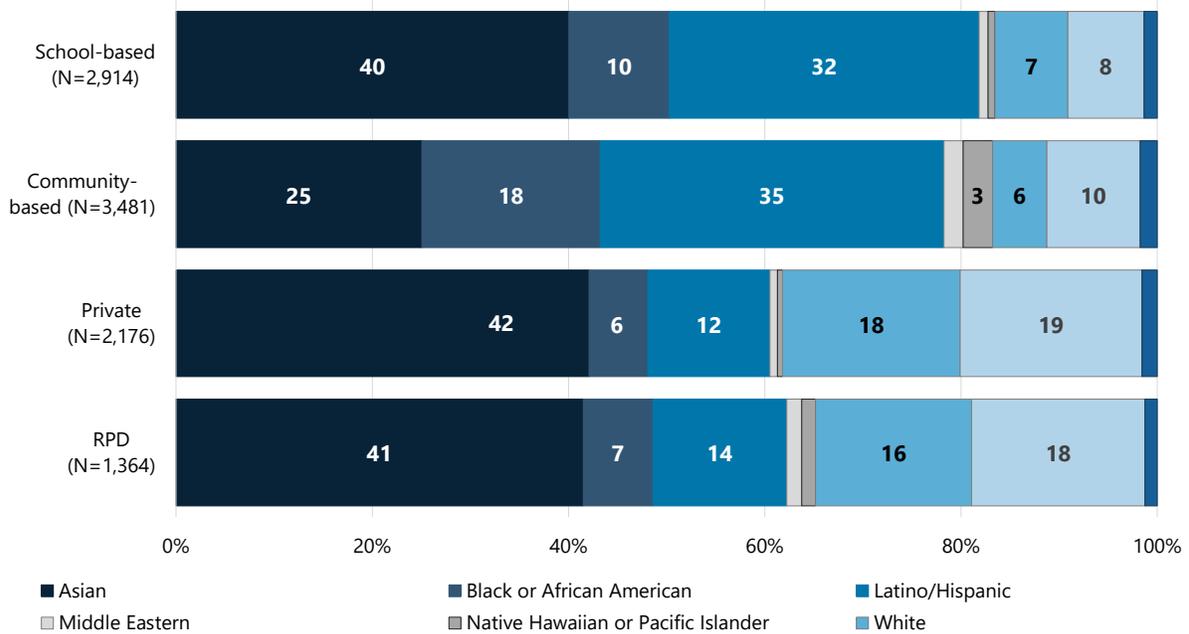


Exhibit reads: Forty percent of school-based site participants reported their race/ethnicity as Asian.

Note: Where the data are not labeled, the percentage of participants identifying as that race/ethnicity was 2 percent or less. This exhibit does not include the percentage of participants for whom there was no race/ethnicity data recorded or if participant declined to state their race/ethnicity: school-based—1,215 participants (29 percent); community-based—774 participants (18 percent); private camp—159 participants (7 percent); RPD site—365 participants (21 percent).

## PARTICIPANT HOUSING STATUS

Of the 65 percent of participants at DCYF-funded and private camp sites for whom housing data are recorded, approximately two percent were living in unstable housing situations: either unsheltered or living in emergency or temporary transitional housing.<sup>5</sup> Three percent of private camp participants reported living in public housing.

## PARTICIPANT HOME LANGUAGE

Participants’ home language data were available for approximately 70 percent of participants who attended DCYF-funded sites. Spanish and Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese, or Toishanese) were the most common languages spoken in participants’ homes outside of English (Exhibit 3).

<sup>5</sup> We do not have housing data for children who attended RPD sites.

### Exhibit 3. Participants' home language, DCYF-funded sites, in percents.

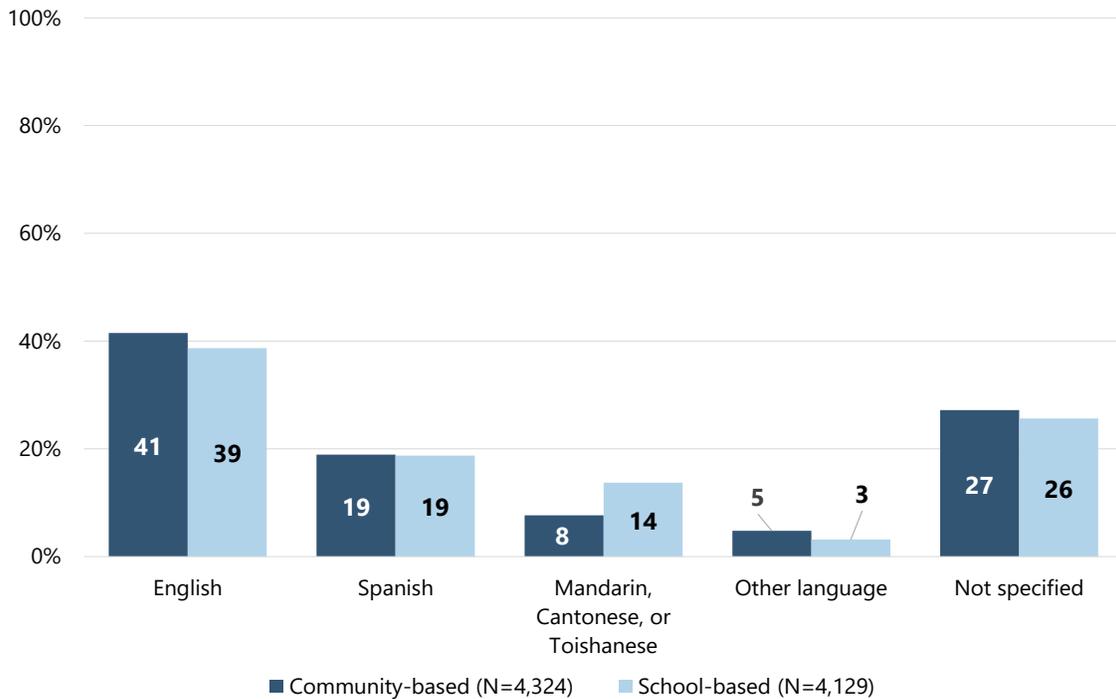


Exhibit reads: Of the 73 percent of participants at DCYF-funded community-based sites, 41 percent reported their home language as English.

Note: Participants' home language was not available for participants at RPD or private camp sites and was not recorded for approximately 25 percent of participants at DCYF-funded school-based and community-based sites.

### POPULATIONS SERVED

In surveys, Summer Together providers were asked to compare their experiences in 2021 compared to 2019—before the pandemic—to understand how Summer Together changed the families reached by their program.

**Through Summer Together, providers reported reaching more low-income families, more English Language Learners, more students with disabilities, and more SFUSD families than in previous summers.**

Across all types of Summer Together providers surveyed—DCYF-funded, RPD sites, and private camps—all reported serving greater numbers of low-income families, English Language learners, students with disabilities, and SFUSD families through Summer Together (Exhibit 4). These populations were long-standing priorities for City-funded programs; however, the increases reported by private camps were notable. Ninety-three percent of private camps reported serving more low-income families, 79 percent reported serving more SFUSD families, and 64 percent more English language learners in 2021 than they had in previous summer.

Overall, 77 percent of RPD programs reported reaching new populations of youth and 100 percent of private providers reported they expanded the number of youth served and reached new populations of youth. As one private camp provider shared, Summer Together created “[New opportunities to] reach SFUSD students. Period. It has been a dream of our organization to expand into working with students within SFUSD.”

**Exhibit 4. Percent of providers reporting serving more vulnerable populations in 2021, by program type, in percents.**

Compared to previous summers our program...

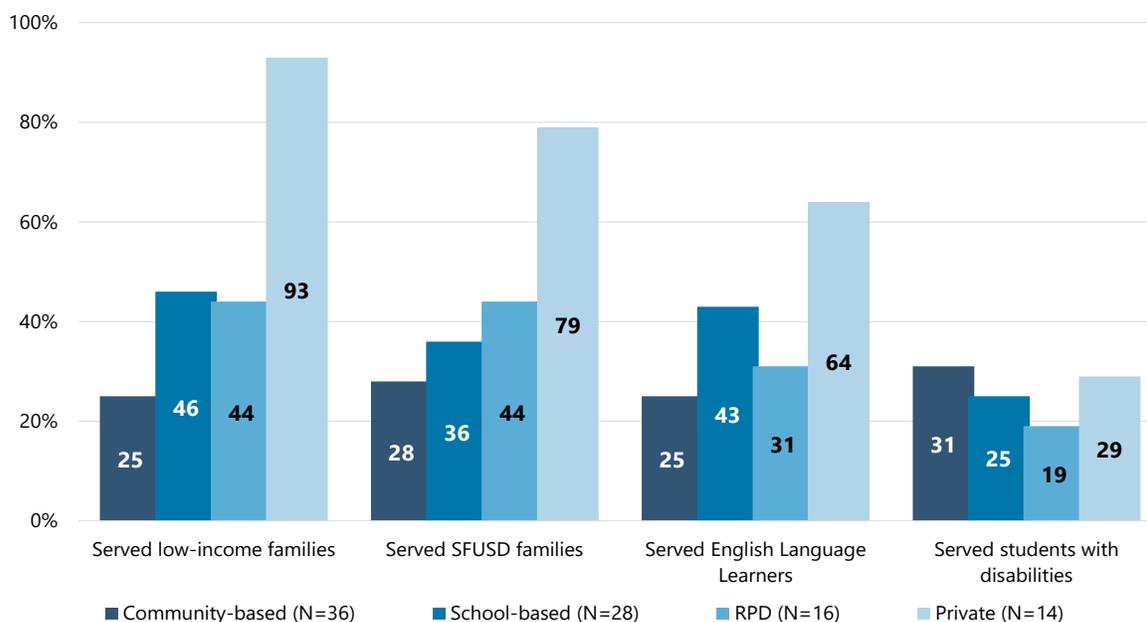


Exhibit reads: Twenty-five percent of DCYF-funded community-based providers who responded to the provider survey reporting serving more low-income families in 2021 than in previous summers.

***We have the biggest program that we’ve ever had, and we were able to hire again. Thanks to the SF Summer Together funding, we were able to almost double the size of our staff and also bring on a number of teachers, school social workers, our school attendance outreach person, a grade level counselor and a lot of support that has helped us to meet the needs of more kids than we usually serve.***

***--Summer Together provider***

## Expanded Program Services

Summer Together gave providers the resources needed to implement enriching programs. A majority of providers agreed or strongly agreed that they had the materials (97 percent) and space (96 percent) needed to deliver program activities; that they had the information (96 percent) and resources (92 percent) needed to safely implement in-person programming; and

that their program was accessible and convenient to families (92 percent) (Exhibit 5). School- and community-based program providers also agreed or strongly agreed that they had strong connections with the community (100 percent) and leveraged connections with schools (79 percent) and partnerships with other organizations (74 percent) to deliver programs.

### Exhibit 5. Provider ratings of Summer Together supports and resources, in percents.

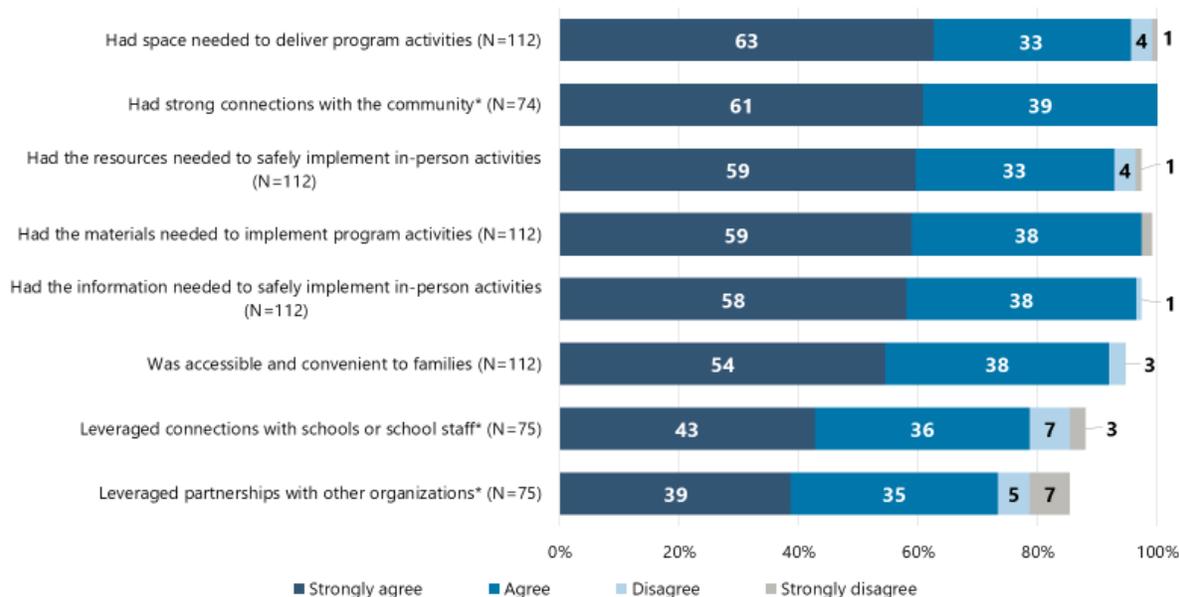


Exhibit reads: Sixty-three percent of providers strongly agreed that their site had the space needed to delivery program activities. Thirty-three percent of providers agreed, 4 percent disagreed, and one percent strongly disagreed with this statement.

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 percent as some providers selected “Not applicable” or “Don’t know” options which are not included in this chart. Items marked with an asterisk were asked only of DCYF-funded sites, not RPD or private camp sites.

### PROVIDER CAPACITY

Although many providers relied on a strong foundation of experience and relationships to deliver these programs, they also reported that Summer Together had a significant positive impact on enabling them to deliver quality services in summer 2021. For example, at least half

***The funding is] huge. Every dollar we get we put back to our kids and our families. So, it's an extra day of food bags going home. It's an extra half of a staff member to take the student with special needs. It's an extra field trip.***  
  
***--Summer Together provider***

of providers agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to enhance curriculum and programming (72 percent), expand the number of youth served (68 percent), pay staff more (68 percent), provide more resources to families (68 percent), develop new partnerships with DCYF (61 percent), develop new partnerships with other programs (51 percent), and hire more specialist staff (50 percent) (Exhibit 6). As one provider commented, “I am proud we got to offer the families in our community a summer program for the full day. It was awesome to have so many resources to be able to offer [that] to the families and students.”

## Exhibit 6. Provider reports of impact of Summer Together, in percents.

Summer Together enabled programs to....

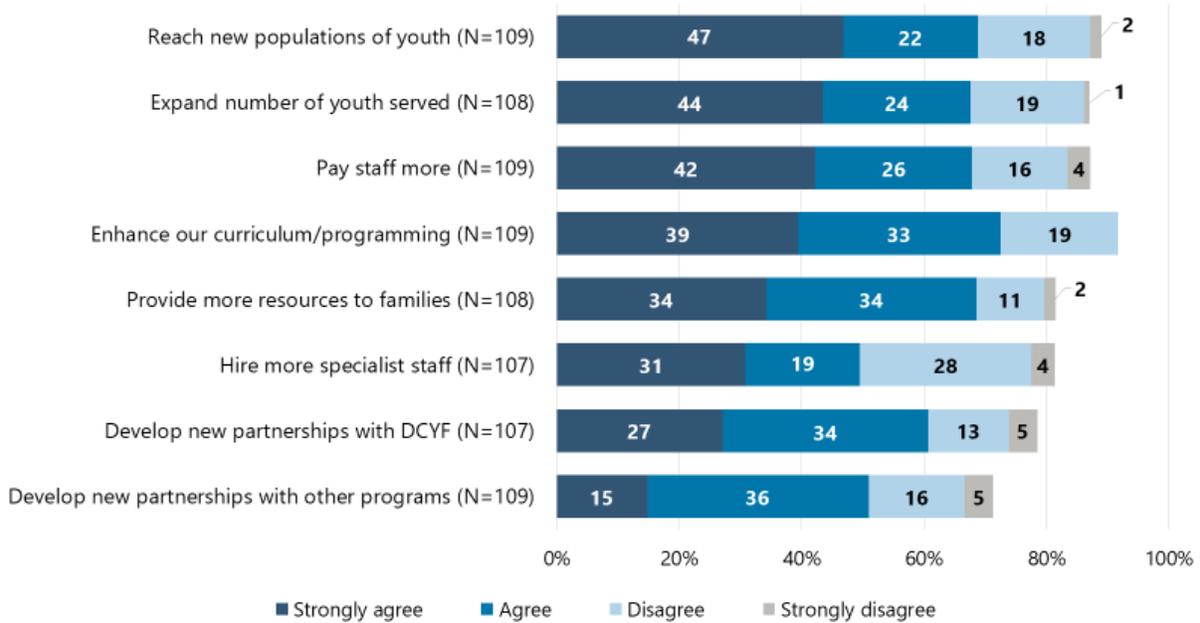


Exhibit reads: Forty-seven percent of providers strongly agreed that Summer Together enabled them to reach new populations of youth. Twenty-two percent of providers agreed, 18 percent disagreed, and two percent strongly disagreed with this statement.

### PROGRAM SERVICES

**Providers expanded the range of services and supports that they were able to provide during the summer to meet the needs of the children and families they served.**

Providers reported that Summer Together funding allowed them to improve and expand their summer programs (Exhibit 7). These new resources were particularly evident in the responses of DCYF-funded community-based programs: 66 percent reported that they connected families to resources more in 2021 than previous summers, 60 percent offered more academic enrichment, and 51 percent offered more mental health supports.

## Exhibit 7. Percent of providers reporting increased services in 2021, by program type, in percents.

Compared to previous summers our program...

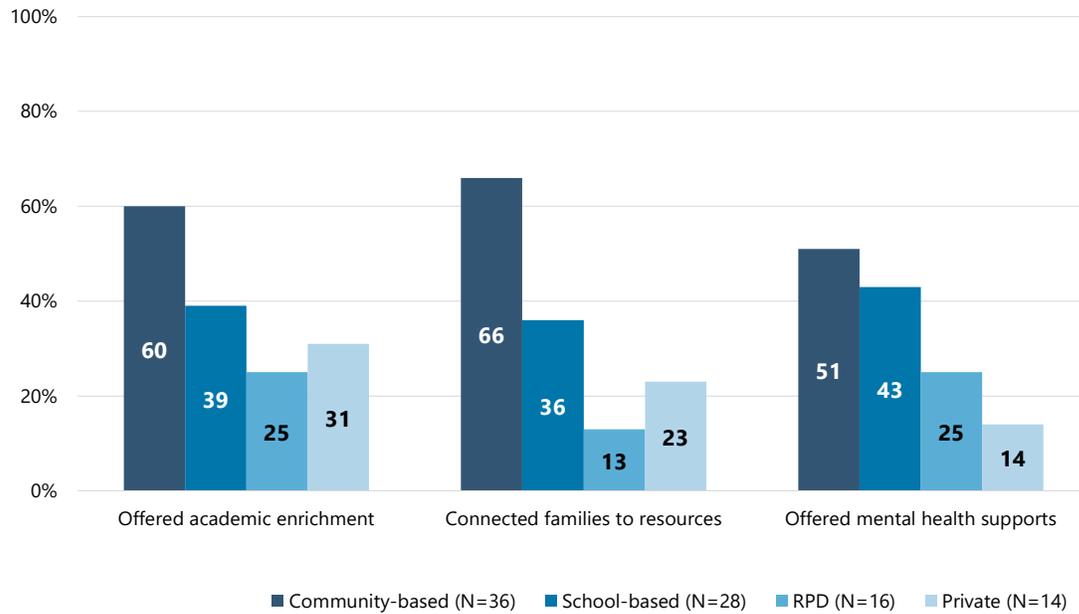


Exhibit reads: Sixty percent of DCYF-funded community-based providers who responded to the provider survey reporting serving more low-income families in 2021 than in previous summers

***Summer Together] allowed us to do more with more instead of doing more with less. For years, we've been serving our communities with not enough and then that causes the inequities. And being able to offer some of the things that I've been able to offer in my program this summer has been amazing.***

***--Summer Together provider***

# IMPACT OF SUMMER TOGETHER ON YOUTH AND FAMILIES

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The effects from the pandemic and virtual learning led parents and caregivers to seek out summer programs that engaged their child after “a year of being isolated.” Summer Together provided the opportunity for children and youth to engage socially with other students, move away from technology and be outside, interact physically with peers, facilitate meaningful peer and adult relationships, and re-acclimate to structured environments in preparation for the return to school in the fall.

## Why Summer Together?

**Parents enrolled their children in Summer Together for the safe and engaging environments with peers, and to prepare for the return to in-person learning and interactions.**

According to Summer Together parents and caregivers, COVID-19 impacted their children in a variety of ways, ranging from learning loss to creating or exacerbating social and emotional difficulties. In survey responses, parents identified social relationships (64 percent), academic knowledge and skills (61 percent), mental/emotional well-being (58 percent), physical health (51 percent), and happiness (50 percent) as areas on which the pandemic and virtual school had a negative effect on their children (Exhibit 8). In focus groups, many parents highlighted an urgent need for social interaction for their children “After a while they need some interaction...” and they expressed their happiness for this summer program “It just works out wonderful that they offer this program.”

In survey responses, more than three-quarters of parents also highlighted the anticipated social and emotional benefits of Summer Together as a “big reason” for enrolling their child, including the opportunity to be with other children (88 percent), the desire for their child to develop better social skills (80 percent), and to gain more confidence (79 percent) (Exhibit 9).

**Exhibit 8. Parents’ perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 and virtual schooling on their child, percent responding “Large or small negative effect,” in percents**

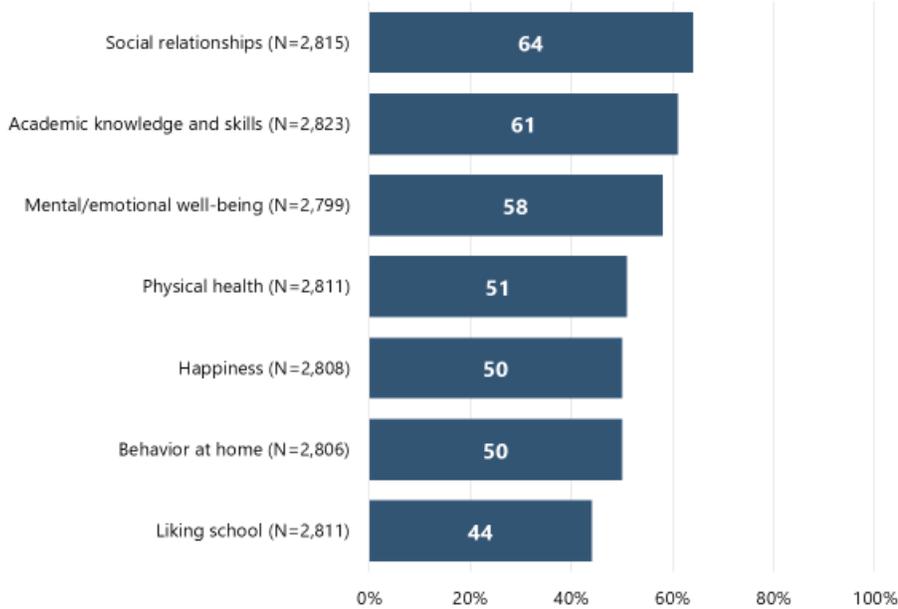


Exhibit reads: Sixty-four percent of parents who responded to the Summer Together survey said that COVID-19 and virtual school had a negative effect on their child’s social relationships.

**Exhibit 9. Reasons for enrolling children in Summer Together, percent responding “A big reason,” in percents**

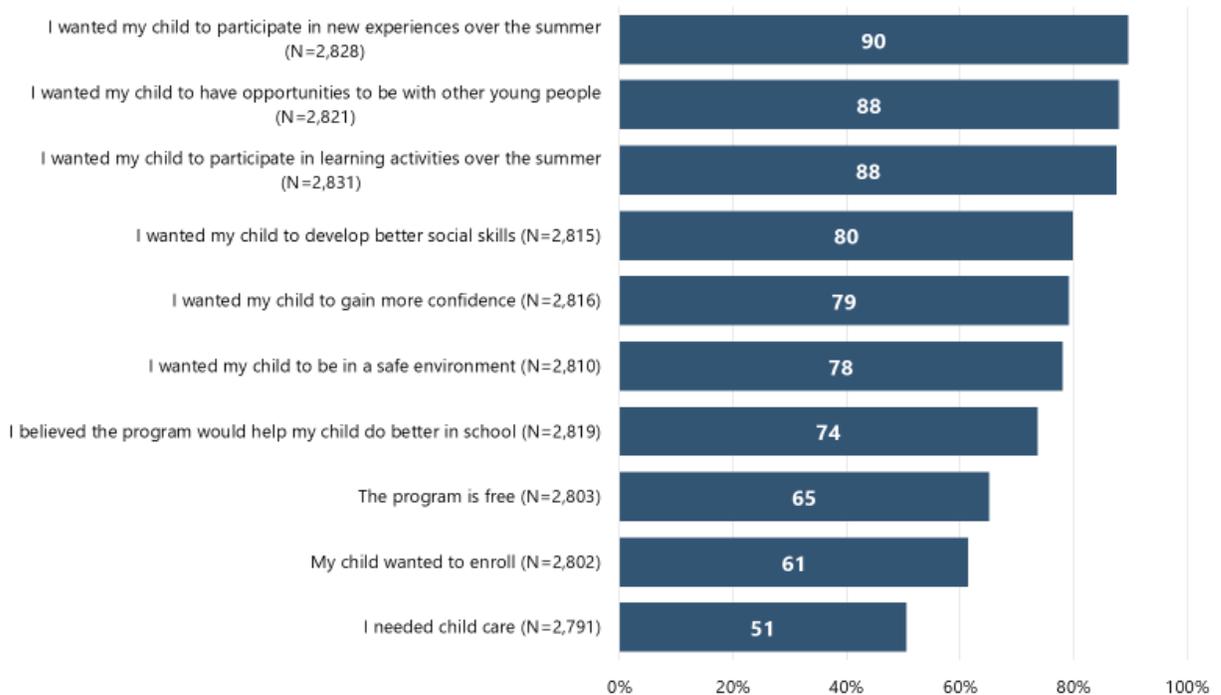


Exhibit reads: Ninety percent of parents who responded to the Summer Together survey identified “I wanted my child to participate in new experiences over the summer” as “a big reason” they enrolled their child in programming.

# Youth Engagement

Youth appreciated the opportunities to spend their summer in a structured setting that allowed them to once again participate in activities that had been missing during the lockdowns and virtual learning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## PARTICIPANTS ENJOYED SUMMER TOGETHER

On Youth Question Cards<sup>6</sup> administered in Summer Together programs, participants overwhelmingly reported that they had a good time and had fun at their programs (85 percent) by selecting the green smiley face on a three-point, “smiley face” Likert type scale (which is referred to as “agreement” in this report). (Exhibit 10). Eighty-four percent of respondents also agreed that they tried new things at the program; eighty-one percent shared that they liked the activities offered. In a focus group, a participant shared that the best part of the summer was “making memories”, while another shared that the experience allowed for “a lot of fun activities.”

***They made friends really, really quickly. And they like stuck together like they were glue. They just had a lot of fun just being kids, which is something that I kind of anticipated, but I didn't realize the extent that they needed it.***

**--Summer Together provider**

Providers agreed with this evaluation of the benefits of Summer Together for participants: 82 percent viewed the exposure to new experiences as a major program benefit; an additional 17 percent said this was a minor benefit.

### Exhibit 10. Summer Together participant enjoyment and satisfaction, in percents.

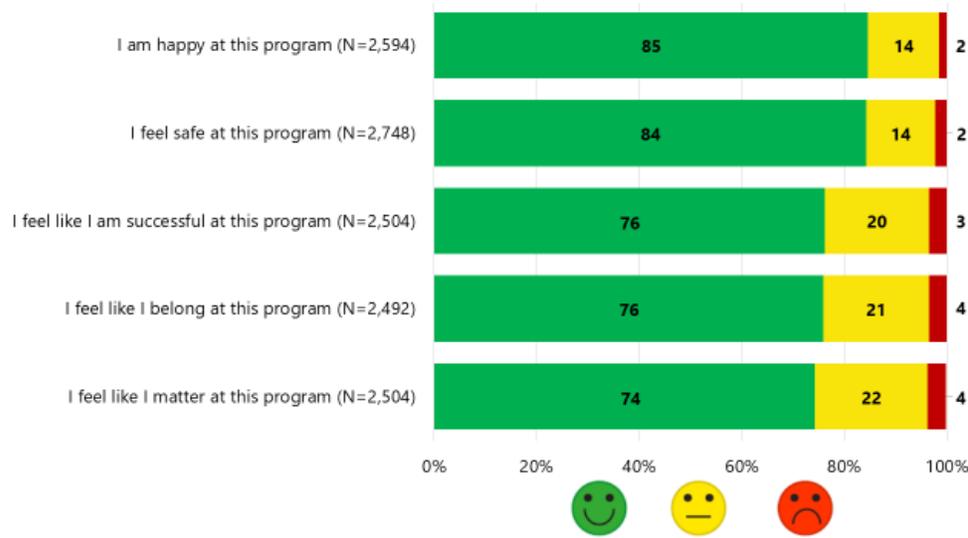


Exhibit reads: Eighty-five percent of participants who responded to the question agreed that “I am happy at this program.”

<sup>6</sup> Instead of a traditional end-of-program survey, PSA developed a series Youth Question Cards, each with three questions, for participants to complete approximately weekly throughout the program session.

## LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT IN SUMMER TOGETHER

Participation data can serve as an important indicator of engagement in programming. DCYF-funded community-based and school-based programs tracked days of participation in Summer Together. These data were not available for RPD sites or private camps.

Participants attending DCYF-funded community-based and school-based sites attended an average of 20 days of programming. Participants at school-based sites appear to have attended more days of programming than their peers attending community-based sites (Exhibit 11). However, this may be due to differences in the design of programming across different sites (e.g., if school-based programs were designed to be opened for more days of programming, thus their participants attended more days) or differences in record keeping across the sites (i.e., if school-based sites took more regular attendance than community-based sites, participants at school-based sites would appear to have been more engaged).

### Exhibit 11. Days of participation in DCYF-funded programs, in percents.

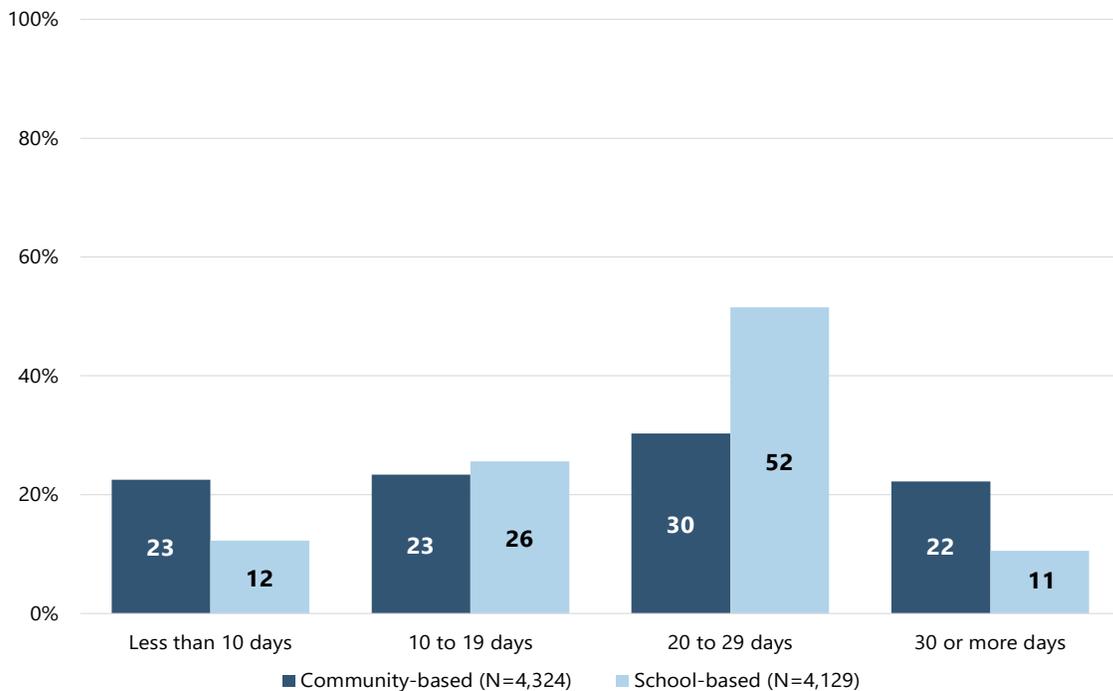


Exhibit reads: Twenty-three percent of participants enrolled in community-based sites participated at least 1 day but less than 10 days.

Note: Attendance data were not available for RPD sites or private camps.

Though there were fewer middle and high school-aged Summer Together participants, those who did participate attended slightly more days than elementary participants (Exhibit 12), suggesting high engagement in programming among those older youth.

## Exhibit 12. Days of participation, by grade level, in percents

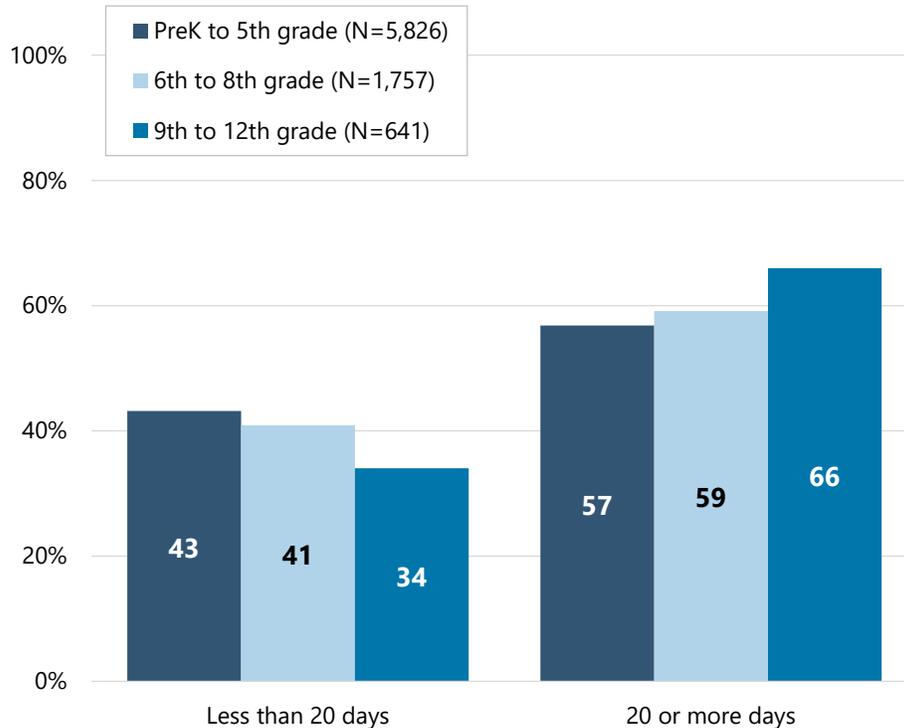


Exhibit reads: Forty-three percent of elementary-aged participants attended more than 1 day but less than 20 days.

Note: This analysis excludes the 150 participants for whom we did not have grade information.

RPD sites offered Summer Together programs in sessions that were three weeks long. Fifty-two percent participated in one RPD session; 27 percent in two sessions; and 21 percent in three RPD summer sessions

# Social-Emotional Learning

**Summer Together providers spent significant time addressing the social and emotional needs of participants.**

After over a year of limited in-person interactions, Summer Together participants needed enriching experiences to enable them to connect with and reengage with peers and adults. The pandemic and virtual learning meant that peer-to-peer relationships were not able to form and thrive as they do under regular learning and social conditions, so creating conditions for in-person interactions was a core goal of the Summer Together program. The COVID-19 pandemic also meant that youth were isolated from supportive adults with whom they might normally have relationships (e.g., coaches, teachers). Summer Together programming provided a critical outlet for developing these relationships.

Providers reported spending significant time intentionally building relationships and skills for emotional regulation and socialization. Programs provided space for youth to readjust to

being around peers and adults, which required significant investment on the part of staff. In focus groups providers shared examples of their work addressing social and emotional needs:

- **Emotional Regulation:** "Our program focuses on relationship building between students and staff and generally we see young people participate for multiple years until they age out of programming. This summer our strategy for relationship building, meeting social emotional needs, and managing participant behavior used a model called Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI). Specifically, we used a tool from TBRI called the engine plate to teach young people about emotional regulation. Each day, multiple times a day, students and staff "checked their engines" to reflect if their engines were running in the red (too fast - angry, restless, anxious, excited), blue (too slow- bored, tired, hungry, sad), or green (just right- calm, relaxed, ready to learn). Each day staff taught students a new strategy to use when they feel their engine on red or blue. Over the summer the goal was to build an emotional regulation toolbox so that kids could walk away knowing how to: 1. assess how they are feeling, 2. how to communicate what they need, and 3. use a strategy to regulate themselves."
- **SEL/Reintegration:** "We work with a high proportion of students with diagnosed disabilities and diverse needs. And so, we are tackling general social emotional needs as well as supporting students in reintegrating with their peers when they haven't done that in a while. And we're doing a lot of just very simple relationship building with the students, and also really focusing on their ability to move through transitions using self-regulation."
- **Socialization:** "We are getting them reintroduced to being in a group setting and sharing space with others. That's also a skill that they have to be reintroduced to: dealing with other children in a group setting."
- **Relationships:** "Our staff was really great at forming strong relationships with our students and families from the get-go. With a staff of experienced youth workers, it was very natural for them to create individual bonds with each student and to talk with parents daily to maintain open lines of communication."
- **Community:** "The strength of our community continued to be a high point this summer. In response to the pandemic, we allocated all day on Fridays to community building, on top of the community building folded into our program Monday through Thursday. Our Fridays included hiking, museum trips, visiting murals in the Mission, and just enjoying the chance to see one another face to face."

***Our families have mentioned that it is the human interaction that they need. The kids who came to our program the first week didn't really know how to interact with other kids or adults anymore.***

**--Summer Together provider**

***We are most proud of seeing students' emotional improvements throughout the program. Several children who came to us appeared very reserved and had separation anxiety in the beginning. However, all our students had completely opened up and began to interact with each other. Parents have expressed seeing an improvement in their child's ability to express themselves and engage with others.***

**--Summer Together provider**

Providers were proud of what they were able to accomplish during Summer Together, and most felt confident in their abilities to meet the social and emotional needs of youth and connect with participants and their families. When asked to rate their program strengths, 86 percent identified forming/maintaining connections between staff and participants either as a "great strength" or "somewhat of a strength" (Exhibit 13). Eighty-seven percent identified maintaining peer-to-peer relationships among participants as a strength, as did 78 percent for forming and maintaining connections with families. Sixty-nine percent of providers reported that meeting the social and emotional needs of participants and managing participant behavior was a strength.

**Exhibit 13. Provider reports of implementation of social supports, in percents.**

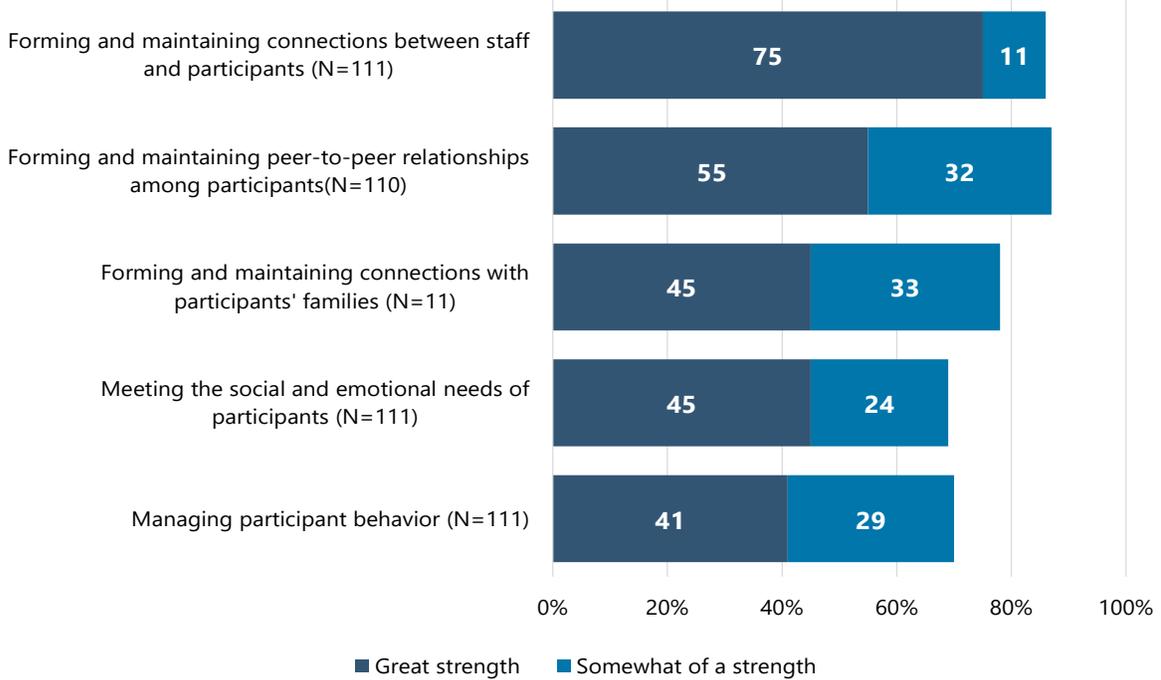


Exhibit reads: Seventy-five percent of providers reported that forming/maintaining connections between staff and participants was a great strength and 11 percent of providers reported it was somewhat of a strength.

These ratings are particularly strong considering the extent to which providers noted that students struggled with behavioral issues. Several providers noted incidents of participants struggling with social norms and coping with frustrations. And while many programs reported being able to hire specialists and additional staff to help, some programs felt they still needed more specialized training and supports to meet the social and emotional needs of youth and manage behaviors. As one provider noted: "Managing students with different social and emotional needs who have been out of group settings for a year and a half, it was physically and emotionally exhausting for front line staff. And they experienced a significant amount of

stress and trauma that I don't think the public at large recognizes. Some of the campers came to us with social and emotional challenges that were hard for staff to address. Some training on this would be beneficial.”

**Summer Together gave participants the opportunity to develop relationships with peers and with adults.**

Feedback from Summer Together participants indicates that they responded positively to these strategies to foster social-emotional skills and strong relationships with peers and staff. In responses to Youth Question Cards, participants overwhelmingly agreed that adults in the program care about them (84 percent) and that that they had friends at the program (75 percent) (Exhibit 14). One focus group participant cited that part of the reason summer was so enjoyable was because, “My friends go here.” Participants appreciated the space for in-person interactions in Summer Together. A focus group participant shared, “It helps me talk to people more....and make more friends and stuff like that.” Ninety-four percent of parents/caregivers also reported that their child made new friends because of the program.

Solid relationships with program staff meant they could easily notice if something was wrong among participants. One participant elaborated on the benefit of these relationships saying, “[Staff] can notice if something’s wrong, and they’ll ask if you want to talk, or sometimes you could just go up to them and be like, [can I] talk to you about something?” Another described how the program was helping them develop valuable emotional regulation skills: “[One thing] this program has helped me with is handling my emotions better[...] I thought, I don’t know how to handle them and control them. The staff here helped me so I can learn how to control them.”

These strong relationships translated to high youth ratings of social-emotional well-being: 85 percent of participants were happy at the program, 84 percent felt safe. In addition, participants felt successful in the Summer Together program (76 percent); like they belonged (76 percent); and like they mattered at the program (74 percent) (Exhibit 15).

***It's easy to talk to [staff]. We can literally talk to them about anything. Going to school, you know how you have a counselor, and they want you to tell them everything? Or going to the Wellness Center? But it's harder. I don't know why it's harder, but just here, just being here and around people that look like each other [...] and our age, it's easier for us to go to them, than to go to someone at school.***

**-- Summer Together participant**

**Exhibit 14. Participant reports of relationships in Summer Together, in percents.**

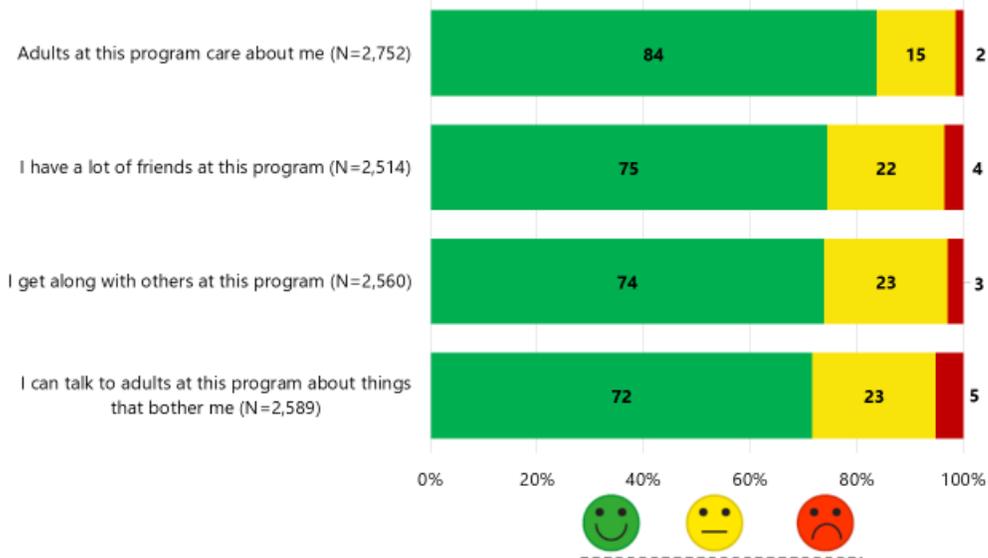


Exhibit reads: Eighty-four percent of youth who responded to the question reported that adult staff at their program care about them.

**Exhibit 15. Participant reports of belonging in Summer Together, in percents.**

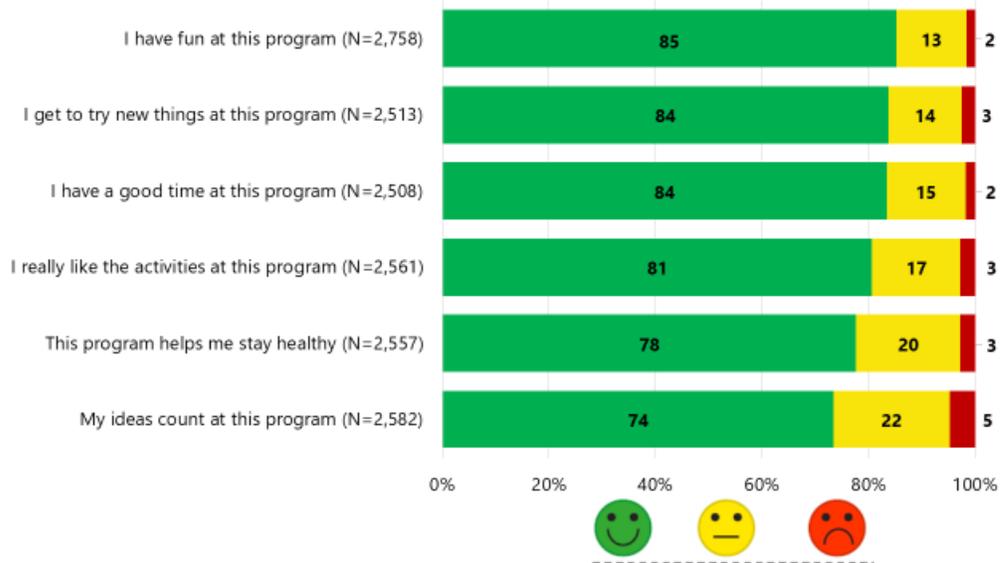


Exhibit reads: Eighty-five percent of youth who responded to the survey reported that they were happy at their Summer Together program.

# Engagement in Learning

**Summer Together programs helped youth prepare for a return to school by getting them back on a structured schedule and reconnecting with engaging academic content.**

Most Summer Together programs, particularly those funded by DCYF, offered academic enrichment activities. Ninety-seven percent of school-based programs offered academic enrichment, as did 84 percent of community-based programs, 44 percent of RPD sites, and 53 percent of private camps. This represented an increase in academic supports offered during summer programs: overall, 45 percent of programs reported that they offered more academic enrichment in 2021 than previous summers (including 60 percent of DCYF-funded community-based programs, 41 percent of DCYF-funded school-based programs, and 31 percent of both RPD and private camps).

Providers reported pride in preparing students for the new academic year. Sixty-nine percent of providers reported that providing academic and learning supports for participants was a strength of the program. One provider was most proud of “the balance of traditional summer fun with academics, mental health education, and SEL development.” Providers shared examples of the academic supports they incorporated:

- *“We developed original content for five grade groups (K-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, and 9-12). In my 13 years at [my organization] and 30 years in youth development, I have never seen youth this engaged in a literacy program. One first grader whose parent wanted him to stay home one day, told the parent he ‘would die’ if he couldn’t come to club to finish the project.”*
- *“We have developed a Tec Rec pedagogy that students LOVE and has been recognized by the World Innovation Summit on Education. It is a hands-on approach that exposes students to a myriad of projects and activities.”*
- *“We utilized the Power Scholars curriculum and assessment system that we’ve implemented over the past five summers. It was helpful that returning staff and teachers were already familiar with the curriculum and implementation. It also has an SEL focus during the training to help mitigate behavior issues that may abound throughout the summer.”*

**Q: What are you most proud of in your program this summer?**

**A: That we’ve been able to deliver high quality, hands-on learning in art, science, and technology to a much more diverse population of kids, many of whom face significant challenges—and we all had fun doing it!**

**-Summer Together Provider**

Regardless of whether academics was an explicit focus of the program, Summer Together offered a structure and routine expected to re-engage students in the learning environment and to be beneficial as participants transition back to full-time school in the fall. According to a

provider, “Staff lead with compassion and hold their students accountable. There is time for fun, but also a time to be serious.” Eighty-nine percent of parents agreed that the structure and routine of their child’s summer program was a benefit of Summer Together programming for their child.

Eighty-one percent of participants agreed that the program made learning fun; 75 percent reported the program will help them do well in school, and 64 percent reported being excited to go back to school (Exhibit 16). Participants also expected an adjustment period for the return to in-person schooling in 2021-22, which made their summer programming experiences even more valuable. In focus groups, one participant shared, “One thing I also like is how they prepare us for going back to school,” while another added that, “I feel like it’s prepared us for how it’s going to be when we go back [to school].”

**Exhibit 16. Participant reports of Summer Together supports for learning, by percents.**

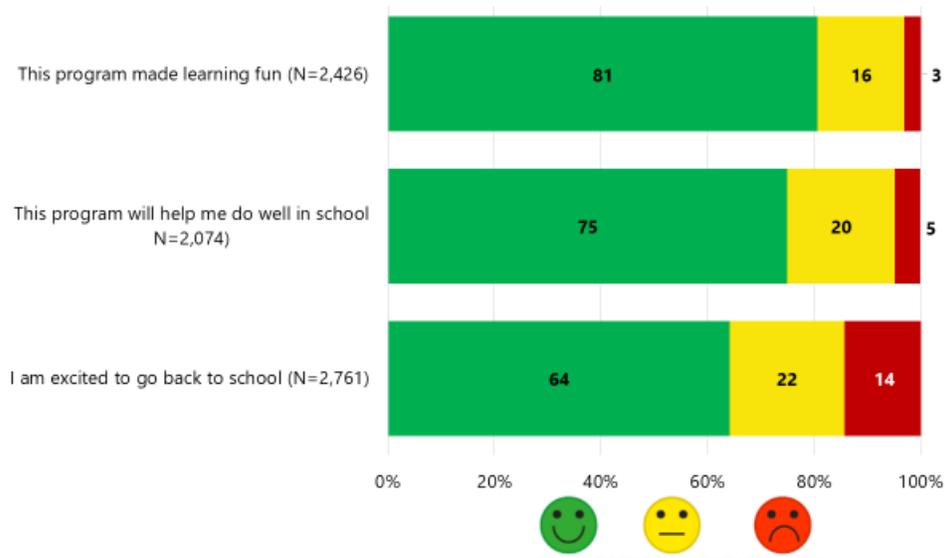


Exhibit reads: Eighty-one percent of youth who responded to the survey reported that their Summer Together program made learning fun.

## Benefits for Families

Summer Together met family expectations: nearly all parents or caregivers reported on surveys that their child was happier (96 percent), made new friends (94 percent), developed new skills (94 percent), and was prepared to do better in school thanks to the program (89 percent) (Exhibit 17).

**Exhibit 17. Parents’ perceptions of Summer Together benefits, percent responding “Strongly agree” or “Agree,” by percents.**

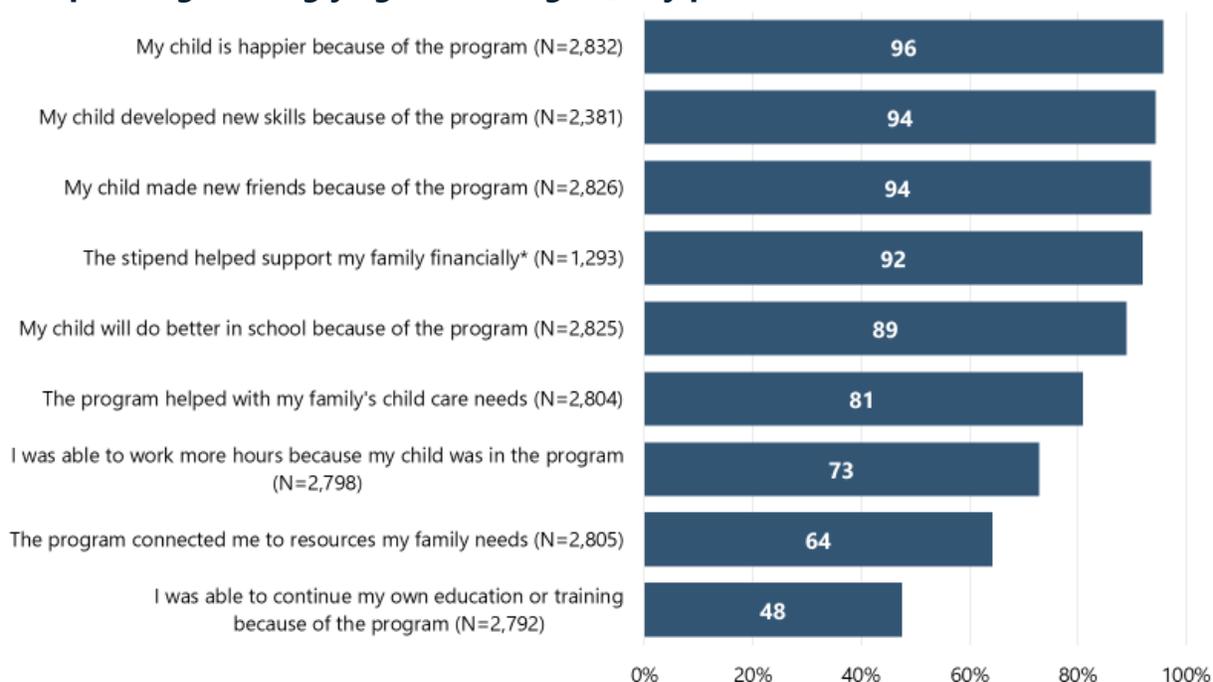


Exhibit reads: Ninety-six percent of parents or caregiver who responded to the survey indicated that their child is happier because of their participation in Summer Together.

\* For this question, only respondents from DCYF-funded Summer Together sites are included in the denominator.

**Parents and caregivers also reported that Summer Together had a positive impact on the quality of life for their family.**

Parents reported that Summer Together helped support families with childcare (81 percent), enabled them to increase the number of hours worked (73 percent), and connected them to additional resources (64 percent). Many commented that the free program helped their family through a very difficult financial time:

***It really completely exceeded my expectations. [...] It's really helped financially. I mean, most of the parents that are working, it really gave them a break and the sense that it's a place that is safe. You don't have to worry. They're in good hands, and they're getting all these benefits, cognitively, emotionally, and the physical activities.***

**--Summer Together parent**

- *"It's really helped financially."*
- *"It saves me a lot... before I paid for the YMCA, so it was quite expensive, a lot of money for a single mom."*

- *"I felt a huge peace of mind to be able to work straight through while they were in a program."*
- *"My child would not have been able to participate in the program if I had to pay."*

In addition, families in DCYF-funded community-based and school-based programs received a \$500 stipend for each child who participated: 92 percent of survey respondents agreed that these stipends helped to support their family financially.

**Providers saw many needs for additional supports for Summer Together families, with mixed capacity for meeting those needs.**

#### MENTAL HEALTH AND BEHAVIORAL SUPPORTS

Providers wished for more training related to participants' learning and mental health needs: only 31 percent and 38 percent rated the support and guidance provided by Summer Together on these topics as good, very good, or excellent, respectively. Providers explained, "we weren't aware of potential training resources of working with high need children" and named this as an important gap in their training experience.

Providers also noted that they lacked information about the behavioral and mental health needs of participants enrolling in their program: "Not having enough information about the campers prior or enough time to connect with the campers prior to camp starting [was a challenge]." Many were unaware of known issues and didn't have the adequate training or supports to address them: "Being able to receive additional information about the participants would have been awesome. We had some students with behavior issues that we did not know how to handle."

#### WRAP-AROUND SUPPORTS

Although parents who responded to the survey were positive about their experiences, providers wished they had the capacity to provide even greater supports for families. Providers would have appreciated more information on other City resources available to support families: "It would be wonderful to receive more information about the City's educational, health, and daycare resources and programs to share with families." Providers rated support around 'Information related to city resources available to families' relatively low, with only 46 percent rating this information as good or better.

DCYF-funded providers were more prepared to deliver those wrap-around supports: over half (53 percent) agreed that this was a strength, compared to 17 percent of RPD sites and 21 percent of private camps. Yet, the needs of families in these RPD and private camps were apparent. One provider noted that "transportation and food are still challenging for the families with the most need. A school bus and free lunch would be a great help to them." Some providers lacked the resources, experience, or infrastructure to help meet these needs. In one private camp, staff took on the responsibility: "[A support in the future would be] lunch or snacks for the funded kids. Some would come with cookies or candy but not a balanced nutritional lunch, so our counselors brought sandwiches to feed them. Bag lunches of a simple cheese sandwich and an apple or box of raisins would be great and take the pressure off staff."

# IMPLEMENTATION OF SUMMER TOGETHER

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While providers—community-based organizations, RPD site directors, and private camps alike—articulated implementation challenges associated with the first year of Summer Together, most also expressed deep appreciation for the initiative, with one terming it a “remarkable program at a critical time for students and their families.” Private camps were grateful for being included in Summer Together, and providers generally conveyed the sentiment that they would like to “continue in the future.” In focus groups and surveys, providers highlighted recommendations for future iterations of Summer Together, including:

- **Funding:** Providers deeply appreciated the increased funding investment and level of flexibility with funding. They would seek to sustain this in the future, while also being notified of funding amounts and contractual expectations earlier.
- **Early planning:** Early planning is critical for providers. They expressed a desire to know months earlier the number of program slots, building space (for school providers), and program expectations to facilitate with planning, school collaboration, staffing, enrollment, stipends, and purchase of needed materials.
- **Timely, consistent communication:** Timely, consistent communication was identified as a key need for providers moving forward, including alignment on expectations between DCYF and SFUSD.
- **Information on student needs:** Programs expressed that they needed more information about students to best meet their needs. This could be obtained both through a universal enrollment form, as well as through systematic sharing by school partners.
- **Cross-provider collaboration:** Providers sought to continue and enhance their collaboration with other providers. They encouraged DCYF to serve in a coordinating role, providing and sharing materials and resources such as a curriculum template.

This section of the report summarizes providers’ perspectives on planning and supports received for Summer Together 2021.

# Funding Flexibility

The funding generosity and flexibility of Summer Together afforded providers the ability to deliver programming in the manner they saw fit, and with the resources to execute on their vision. At the same time, the timing of funding and some of the ambiguity around it contributed to planning challenges that affected everything from staffing to materials to allocation of slots to participants.

**Funding flexibility was critical to providers' capacity to deliver quality Summer Together programming.**

Providers reported that the flexibility of funds and the increased investment in programs allowed them to execute what was needed for their programs and participants: "We appreciated the flexibility with the programming, as we are able to do what we do best, both online and in person." Providers consistently identified the additional and less restrictive funding, where organizations were permitted "to do what they do best" as making it "it easier to plan in the tight timeline. It also allowed us to be more creative in how we designed programs." Providers reported that the flexibility of funds allowed them "to design

*The scope of the City's investment in summer programming demonstrates incredible vision and generosity. Also leveraging private funding, providing checks up front (rather than via a reimbursement process), and the City's flexibility in the use of funds [was effective].*

■ Summer Together provider

community-focused programming," with increased capacity to "coordinate and build out their own enrollment, registration, and general program."

This funding flexibility and recognition of program expertise demonstrated trust and recognition of providers' ability to execute Summer Together with quality. In survey responses, the majority (55 percent) of providers rated flexibility in use of funds as 'Excellent' or 'Very Good' and 77 percent rated it as 'Good' or better. Providers also rated 'Recognition of program expertise and

experience' highly (73 percent rated "good" or better.

**However, the timing and lack of clarity related to Summer Together funding created challenges for providers.**

Providers noted that the late notice of funding presented multi-faceted challenges around hiring, purchasing, enrolling participants, and general planning: "The release of funds was too close to camp start date. We would rather have the funds earlier to buy more materials and plan better." Another provider explained, "The timeline of confirmation about receiving funds was really hard, as we usually plan for summer starting in January-February, and funds as well as grantee expectations were not confirmed/clarified until May." For private camps, late notice of funding presented a particular challenge, where camps needed to decide whether to reserve

slots for Summer Together, as explained by one provider: “The process started later than the ideal time, so it was hard to plan and be in limbo in the beginning without knowing if the spots were going to be granted for our program. It was risky to hold the spots in April - May when waiting to ensure funding for spots. If the partnership did not work out, we would have waited too long to market camp and fill those spots that we were holding back.”

Several providers also expressed difficulties in fully understanding the criteria for receiving Summer Together funding. Without written contracts ahead of time, some providers identified that they did not have “clarity on whether [the] promised amount would be paid out when we were putting down deposits for school site rentals and hiring.” One provider also noted that they had heard “mention of lower payouts if there are [participant] withdrawals but no clear processes.” Another provider flagged a similar issue in understanding funding per slots: “We were told that we would be paid for all of our approved spots regardless [of] if they were filled but then told at the second meeting that we would not. It caused us to scramble.”

## Guidance to Providers

**Inconsistent and delayed communication—beyond changing public health requirements— hindered provider capacity to plan for Summer Together.**

Providers consistently called for “more clarity on the guidelines” as they felt challenged by “constantly changing requirements.” Timing was a major factor in communication and expectation challenges, and in surveys only 57 percent of providers rated ‘timeliness of communications’ as good or better.

However, providers also expressed understanding of the changing climate around COVID: “Expectations were not confirmed/clarified until May. We want to name that it felt like intentions were on point and everyone was working hard to support the [organizations], but with COVID-era delays and timelines, it just felt really challenging on all sides.” Indeed, ‘guidance to public health and COVID-19’ was rated relatively highly in survey responses, with 71 percent of providers rating as good or better.

Providers presented a mixed picture of the quality of support with the weekly provider meetings convened in the weeks leading up to Summer Together, with only 53 percent rating these as good or better. Many providers found value early on with “beneficial training” and then diminishing returns as progressed. For example, providers appreciated the support for planning and to build connections across programs— meetings were opportunities:

***The TA offerings in June were really helpful for us in on-boarding new staff and supporting their competencies. We appreciate the focus on wellness and trauma-informed programming.***

**--Summer Together provider**

- “To build relationships with DCYF staff and community partners. New collaborations were developed through these connections”

- “For brainstorming and problem-solving challenges.”
- “For [organizations] to connect and share resources/curriculum/partners.”

However, as summer progressed, many providers struggled with the time commitment and the value the provider meetings: “Those weekly meetings started to become redundant and when we were deep in our planning stage, it was so hard to attend and pay attention to the [...] recaps. My time was better spent actually planning the logistics for my summer program, hiring staff, and enrolling students. There was just too much going on during that time to continue meetings that just took up valuable planning time.”

In general, providers did express an interest in “relevant and timely professional development” moving forward. Timing was seen as critical, however, with recommendation for information about trainings to be “sent out months in advance” to aid the planning process.

Email updates were generally appreciated, with 69 percent of providers rating those as good or better. Providers appreciated especially updates about registration: “The weekly registration status emails were really useful.” And communication about participants with special needs were helpful to providers in planning and decision-making: “The emails about campers with special needs were very helpful in us deciding if we had the capacity to host those campers.”

## Coordination with Schools

**Coordination with SFUSD schools was a significant planning challenge for many DCYF-funded providers that offered school-based programs.**

Many school-based programs sought more support in partnering with SFUSD schools. They identified ongoing issues with clarity of communication, information, and expectations, as well as obtaining adequate space in a timely manner. Poor coordination made planning difficult: “There was consistently lack of communication on SFUSD, so every time we made a plan, we needed to change the plan because of a lack of communication.”

These communication issues contributed to challenges in obtaining program space, as well as developing trusting relationships with school principals, as explained by one provider: “The space issue was a challenge as there were zero communication to the principals which we were told the district was going to take care of. We were sent to one location then booted to another, but the principal was not told, and I was on the receiving end of a huge blow out from the principal.”

***DCYF and SFUSD's lack of clear communication during the planning process made all of our jobs significantly more difficult than they have ever been. This was the most challenging summer planning my team has ever experienced, and it was far from the best program we could have put together. That isn't fair to students or parents. My team had to put in a minimum of 50 hours of work leading up to summer [...] to try to pull together a program amidst constantly moving goalposts and ever-changing expectations and guidelines.***

**--Summer Together provider**

Providers also experienced systems-level challenges in obtaining space, including navigating the SFUSD facilities use permit process. Many providers experienced this as a critical decision-point that held up planning around location, number of participants, number of staff, and communication with families. Additionally, timing of physical access to building space was a challenge: “[We need] access to SFUSD buildings earlier than 1 week prior. One week to reset spaces, train staff, and prepare for summer programming is not enough when we hadn’t been in person for over a year.”

More generally, many school-based providers perceived SFUSD to be a “reluctant partner. They reported that the district did not help with recruiting teachers, administrators, students; communicating with families or custodians; or facilitating union issues. Providers reported that it would be helpful if DCYF could help bridge the partnership with SFUSD schools in future summers, to allow for more “centralized” messaging and planning.

## Staffing

**Staff recruitment was a top challenge among providers, particularly for community-based and school-based programs.**

Summer Together programs came quickly on the heels of a challenging year for both participants and staff. Summer Together providers reported that teachers were burned out from a year of delivering remote instruction, and community organization staff—many of whom staffed in-person Community Hubs throughout the school year—were burned out as well. Private camps and RPD sites did not raise staffing as a challenge to the extent that it was raised among DCYF providers in school-based and community-based programs.

Providers demonstrated their appreciation for staff by providing them with more pay and training, and these providers praised the accomplishments of their staff teams highly. Still, staff recruitment was a pain point for many. Providers were asked in the survey if they were able to recruit enough staff to deliver high-quality programming. Although most reported affirmatively, 18 providers (16 percent) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Several of these providers noted that the greatest challenge was finding staff willing to work, for reasons ranging from staff reluctance to work in person, teachers and other staff needing a break, and insufficient time to hire and train staff:

- *“It was extremely challenging to recruit and hire credentialed teachers. Many of the teachers that we had connections to said that they needed a break after the tough year of teaching virtually and with the year-end rush to in-person learning. We did get a few last-minute recommendations from the SF Education Fund, but the one viable recommendation wasn’t yet credentialed.”*

- *“There was an overall shortage of staff available throughout the city and I believe having smaller programs operating in individual capacities as opposed to partnering with other organizations only increased the struggle to fully hire.”*
- *“Our greatest implementation challenge was the recruiting of credentialed teachers. We requested support, but did not receive any until a few days before the program. Luckily, our community network of teachers that we knew were able to step in to help by taking on additional pods and finding colleagues that were willing to help.”*

In some instances, providers noted they were able to leverage their partnership with the host school to get help with teacher recruitment. One provider that benefited from a positive relationship with the school said, “I believe having a well-trained staff along with veteran SFUSD teachers provided us a recipe for success.” But this was not always the case, and others reported having trouble finding credentialed teachers.

***A strength of our program is our relationship with our school partners. We continued to partner with the school teachers and principals during the summer when they were supposed to be on summer break. Teachers and principals are supportive of our program and offered to come in should we need help with their students. Our principal was onsite most of the summer which was so helpful. Our staff is the greatest asset of our program and our success. Most of the teachers and teacher assistants were returning from summers before who know the value of the program and were willing to be part of the cause that impacts our students.***

**--Summer Together provider**

**Despite recruitment challenges, providers were proud of the capacity of their staff to deliver high-quality summer experiences.**

In focus groups, providers shared many positive stories about the work of their staff, particularly their success in building relationships with youth. Some highlighted that with the Summer Together funding they were able to hire specialists to serve the mental health of participants, lower their student-to-staff ratios, and better support participants:

- *“We hired academic specialists to build project-based learning curriculum specific to the needs of our participants. We hired a [marriage and family therapist] and a curriculum specialist to build mental health education curriculum. We trained staff in youth development best practices and spent an entire week with all staff training, building rapport, and setting the tone for the program.”*
- *“We had a large team of high school interns, about 19 mostly former [SFUSD] students, who were enthusiastic leaders and participants. They related well to both the adult program leaders and the participants. They joined for an intensive week of staff training before the program began and learned many community building activities and facilitation techniques. The SFUSD school social worker, the school's family liaison, the*

attendance specialist, a grade level counselor, along with several teachers and a paraprofessional, were all part of the team and extremely engaged with students all day every day. The social worker provided in-class curriculum.”

- *“The one thing about Summer Together, the money was great. It enables us to hire a bunch of coaches and assistant coaches to do our work. And that’s been awesome. We went from a 1-adult-to-15 kid ratio to 15 or 20 kids to 2-3 adults, which provides such a better service. So the Summer Together resources were incredible to be able to provide a better service to our kids. And that’s what it’s all about, right, providing support to our families.”*

In surveys, the majority of providers generally agreed that their staff had the language skills needed to support participants and families (93 percent), the skills and experiences needed to deliver high-quality content (92 percent), and the SEL capacity to deliver the program (89 percent) (Exhibit 18). But they also saw room for improved staff capacity and training: fewer than half of providers “strongly agreed” with any of these statements.

**Exhibit 18. Provider ratings of staffing capacity, in percents.**

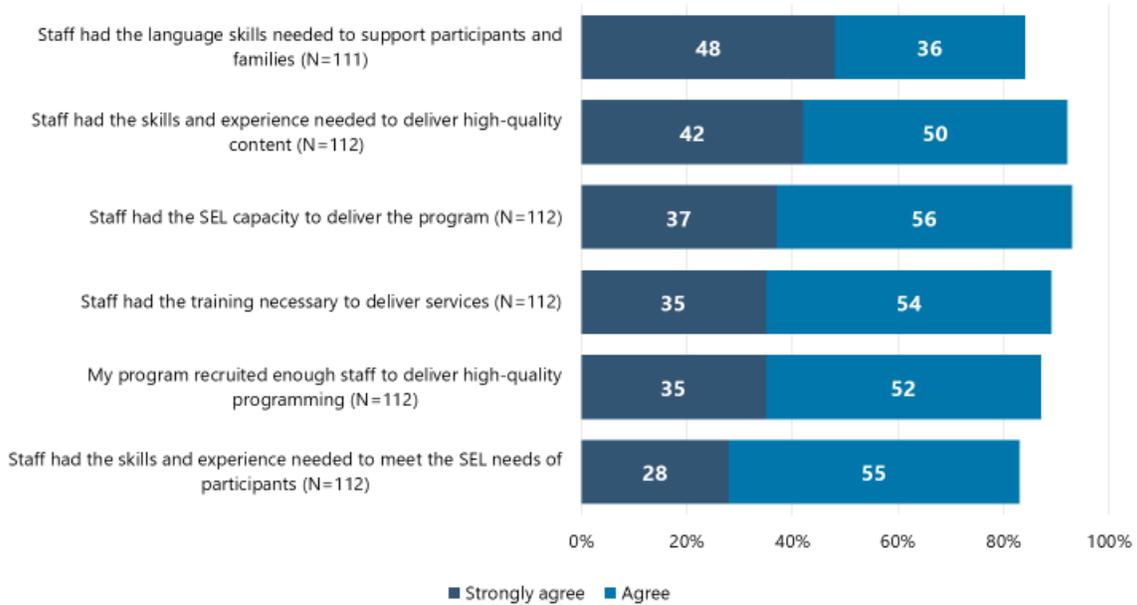


Exhibit reads: Forty-eight percent of providers surveyed said that they strongly agreed that their program recruited enough staff to deliver high-quality programming. Thirty-six percent of providers agreed with this statement, 13 percent disagreed, and 3 percent strongly disagreed.

# Stipends

Through Summer Together, families received a \$500 stipend for each child participating in a community-based or school-based program operated through a DCYF provider organization. These stipends were not available for children enrolled in an RPD or private camp program.

**While DCYF program providers struggled with guidance around family stipends, they emphasized the utility of these stipends to families, noting that stipends were a “meaningful amount of money for our families.”**

Providers emphasized how important and valuable stipends were to families: “The family stipends are such an asset as our families work to recover from the pandemic. I appreciate the generous size of the stipends, as well as the flexibility in how we issue them (checks or gift cards).” Providers underlined that the stipends were deeply meaningful and that “families needed and appreciated the stipends.” As one provider put it, “families who need money, received money;” 92 percent of parents reported that the stipends helped them financially.

However, providers also detailed operational and communication challenges associated with the stipends. In surveys, only 28 percent of providers rated the ‘Information and guidance related to family stipends’ as good or better. We outline the most salient issues below:

- **Timing:** Providers reported that the late plan for stipends limited their impact: “Stipends were announced, however were not finalized until the very end of camp services. I feel that had we established the amount from the beginning, we would've been able to serve more families who would benefit from such stipends and may have served as incentive to attend more often.” Once stipends were finalized, confirming the availability of funds caused further delay: “The challenge was in the confirmation that the funds were available. Our high school program ended before we were able to purchase gift cards as it's a very long process on our end to purchase so many. I wish we could've gotten confirmation at the beginning of July.”

***This was a game changer for so many families. We didn't tell them about the stipend, but when we gave it to them at the end of program the relief was palpable. Many families were in tears knowing that this would help provide for their family. We had a few parents tell us they had been recently laid off or had reduced hours and this stipend was critical. Though it was challenging to figure out the best method for delivery, avoiding the tax burden, etc. it was worth all of the effort.***

**-Summer Together Provider**

- **Clarity of information:** Providers grappled with how to communicate with families about stipends: “There was still lack of information on stipends halfway into the program. Parents were asking but we had no information to give them, nor did we have any idea how the money was going to be disseminated.”

- **Guidance on how to distribute:** Providers felt strained without clear guidance on how to distribute stipends: “The lack of guidance on when funds would be disbursed and any stipulations in the giving of the funds has been a major headache because then we have to figure out how to disburse them.” Providers also struggled to determine participant eligibility: “It would be great if in the future the information needed for this would be included in an application instead of rushing to gather it from parents.” Some programs were not sure if their programs were eligible to distribute stipends: “We’re still a bit confused about the stipends for families, and as we have not yet seen the funds appear in our budget [in the DCYF contracts system], we’re not certain about whether we are able to provide them.” Additionally, for some programs for whom certain individuals were eligible and others not (e.g., congregate living facilities), stipends presented challenges to distribute equitably: “We did not distribute stipends due to multiple families living onsite at our programs. Families with younger children would not qualify for the stipend (and live with people who would) and logistically would have caused too many problems.”
- **Cash flow:** The purchasing process for stipends placed an additional burden on providers to float the funds until they were reimbursed. In some cases, this presented possible cash flow issues: “We have the cash flow to cover it until we are reimbursed but wonder how this is possibly working for large organizations.”

***Getting the stipends to our families was a bit challenging - after cutting all those checks, we couldn't just mail them out and needed parent signatures. We always needed an administrative staff present at our check-in/check-out table (who knew about our stipend process) to catch parents to sign that they received the checks. For our older students who had waivers to arrive and leave our site on their own, we had to track down their parents and ask them to make special trips to sign for their checks. And we still have some students who did not show up during the last week of programming, so we have to figure out how to safely get those checks to them as well.***

**--Summer Together provider**

# BUILDING A COORDINATED SYSTEM

With private investment from Crankstart and other funders expanding City resources, Summer Together brought together public and private partners in new ways. These included the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department (RPD), the San Francisco Public Library System (SFPL), the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), the San Francisco Mayor's Office, and the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth & Their Families (DCYF). DCYF served as lead convener of the planning team.

## Cross-Agency Collaboration

**Summer Together significantly expanded coordination efforts among public agencies in San Francisco.**

As City agencies, DCYF, RPD, and SFPL operate under the authorities of the San Francisco Mayor and the Board of Supervisors, each with independent leadership. SFSUD is under the purview of the Superintendent and the Board of Education. Summer Together brought these agencies under distinct operating authority together as partners, requiring careful navigation of operational structures and policies.

Collaborations prior to the Summer Together were not unprecedented. Indeed, Summer Together benefited from the meeting and planning backbone that had been developed during the 2020-21 school year for the Community Hub Initiative (CHI) to offer in-person education supports during the year of remote learning, including at CHI sites hosted by RPD, SFPL, and community locations. However, leaders from across the partner agencies reported that planning for and implementing Summer Together intensified both the frequency of communication and collaboration, which in turn, brought increased knowledge and understanding of one another's teams, work, and culture. In addition, Summer Together required agencies to set aside some of their long-established procedures to support the Summer Together timeline and goals, including for serving youth from priority populations. At the height of Summer Together, the planning team met three times a week and there was a feeling that "red tape was dropped, egos were dropped" and that planning team members were "on the same page about serving high need

***I hope the collaboration continues going forward. DCYF was always this 'thing' over there to me and I didn't know who they were and what they were doing. I didn't know them. There's so much overlap [during the planning for the Summer Together initiative] that the relationship building was so good for the City. I strongly believe that.***

**--RPD leader**

children for this effort". Equally critical was the feeling from City agencies that the Mayor and Mayor's Office team were informed of and supported their coordinating efforts.

***We have weekly partner meetings where specific communications are brought to the table and [we know] what staff we expect to be there. We created these communication practices, and structures that I think are carrying over really well, because summer is short, but the impact that we're hoping for is so much greater.***

**-DCYF Leader**

In specific examples of coordination, the Summer Together planning team leveraged SFUSD communication channels and outreach networks to send out information about programs to families in the Summer Together priority population, working together to ensure that families who had become most disconnected and struggled most during the pandemic had access to summer programs. Summer Together leveraged existing plans for recreational programming through RPD, while providing new outreach and opportunities for the most vulnerable families to enroll in coveted summer programming spots. And Summer Together planners built on SFPL's traditional summer reading program to create the Summer Together book giveaway. According to an SFPL

leader, "I was really heartened by how well [the Summer Together director] knew our summer reading program, when we first started talking about this. If this [Summer Together book giveaway] becomes an annual thing having the runway to plan for it will be really great so that we can align to our [summer reading program] books."

This is not to say that there weren't bumps in the road to coordination. For example, while staff from the SFPL noted that "having a way to get books out to the community was really fabulous for us", it was also noted that "[coming] to the library and say[ing], how many books do you think you could give away?" would have better set the stage for embarking on a collaborative initiative of this scale between agencies, versus relaying a pre-determined number of books for giveaway, with limited time and capacity for the SFPL team to order, store, and deliver books at that scale. In addition, both City agency and SFUSD leaders noted that there was a "push and pull" that came with working together, and Summer Together partners often assumed—or desired—a level of coordination and communication that was not necessarily reflective of their shared realities. Leaders noted, for instance, that embargoes on releasing information even between City agencies (to allow for internal vetting or decision-making) were not uncommon and had to be taken in stride as they arose. Embargoes and/or internal agency communication hierarchies also influenced who could be present in each meeting. While the working philosophy for planning was that all players be at the table, as often and early as possible, sometimes this was not always feasible.

# Coordination with Providers

Summer Together communication structures and practices built on systems developed for the Community Hubs Initiative (CHI) implemented during the pandemic, in which DCYF grantee organizations and RPD sites offered in-person supports for remote learning for high-need students. Because of experiences with the CHI, the planning team knew that some of the most critical elements to “refine and tighten up” for summer programming would include:

- putting systems in place for how communication would happen
- setting expectations around roles and responsibilities
- establishing clarity on what could be offered to partners and what was needed from partners

***I feel like we came into this new experience really knowing how to ask our partners, here's what we need, here's what we can do. Here's what we can offer, here's how we communicate, versus trying to figure it out.***

**-DCYF Leader**

**Coordination requires fostering early, intentional, and committed systems of communication with planning partners, including providers.**

For example, Summer Together leveraged—and refined— weekly meetings and communication strategies to facilitate planning and coordination between agency partners and providers. As described in the implementation section of this report, providers had suggestions for future Summer Together planning, including better aligning these communications with the typical cycle for planning summer programming beginning in the fall of the year prior. As a member of the Service Provider Working Group commented: “The planning group should meet in the Fall. That way, in January, they can roll things out- this is the initiative, the requirements, the expectations, the components. And here’s what you all need to plan for to be involved.”

However, the communication structures put in place were also a bright spot for both capacity-building and for deepening partnerships. Meetings were typically infused with both planning discussion as well as community engagement and/or knowledge-building content.

***The way that [meetings] were facilitated [was] with some sort of community engagement piece built into every meeting. This allowed our [providers] to get to know one another, and communicate with one another and share information in ways that I don't think happened in the past. That's another way in which [there] are lessons learned in terms of partnership, and just the way that we build community amongst our grantees.***

**-DCYF Leader**

# Management Structures

Summer Together funding accelerated a coordinated expansion of programming as well as complementary supports at a level never before achieved for San Francisco youth and their families. And although it embraced the coordinating role for Summer Together, DCYF is not traditionally a cross-agency/cross-entity coordinating body for the City. As a result, staff across partner agencies—and providers—took on additional responsibilities for administering, launching, and supporting the program.

**Sustainable coordination at the scale of Summer Together would be enhanced through dedicated staff.**

DCYF and its partners pivoted and embraced the additional duties that launching Summer Together entailed. However, as noted by one non-DCYF planning team member, Summer Together “was very labor intensive and required a heavy one-time lift for staff [...] while not necessarily building out systems and processes that would support a future effort, let alone expansion.” Both at DCYF and other organizations, Summer Together planning and implementation relied on staff who already had a full portfolio of responsibility for existing programs. The rapid and complex pace of implementing an initiative at the scale of Summer Together, and the new needs for cross-agency communication, liaising, and troubleshooting to ensure effective coordination highlighted the need to “identify specific staff people that would communicate around the [programs], independent of their grants and regular programming”.

Practically, managing the volume of communications that accumulated on any given day or week also sometimes proved challenging, particularly as staff worked directly with families to match and enroll participants in Summer Together programs: “I think that the process of prequalifying students was a stressful and heavy lift for our [small] administrative staff. There were a lot of applicants and not much time to get it all done.”

Within DCYF, the Microsoft Teams chat platform became the vehicle of choice for engaging with team members and topics related to Summer Together. The platform allowed communications to be centralized and team members noted that, “for the most part responses to outreach requests were responded to promptly.” However, as programs launched and real-time adjustments to policy and procedure surfaced and were institutionalized, team members also reported that the platform could “become distracting to keep up with” or that “important policy changes or announcements [could] get buried beneath multiple chat responses and threads.” One suggestion team members had for future usage of the platform was to have a team member designated to go through communications each day and pull the most important items or policy changes to send as a digest email. In this way, critical information and changes might have a better chance of being seen and internalized.

# Coordinated Access for Families

The creation of a coordinated, citywide system of summer programming holds promise for centralizing access to information about, and enrollment in, the range of summer options for families in San Francisco. A centralized system was discussed but ultimately could not be implemented on the timeline available for Summer Together in 2021. Instead, registration and enrollment was a hands-on process for DCYF, partner agencies, and provider staff, who strived to implement a process that ensured that children from the highest need families received the first opportunity to enroll in Summer Together. This was complicated by the necessity of utilizing multiple systems and mechanisms for managing the multiple waves of programming, registering parent/child preferences around content/geography, and tracking available program slots in RPD sites, private camps, and school- and community-based programs.

**A streamlined, centralized summer program clearinghouse and registration system can improve the registration process for families.**

Providers are concerned about the administrative “lift” of coordinating enrollment across multiple city and non-city organizations and feel that their own internal systems are more seamless and familiar. However, they also recognize that the benefits to a centralized system from the user-perspective of families. Providers and families reported that understanding the full range of program options was confusing for many families in summer 2021. Priorities identified for a new centralized system included:

- **A comprehensive, searchable database of all programs**—school-based, community-based, RPD sites, and private camps. This database should include clear program descriptions (e.g., location, schedule, program focus), as well as details about program requirements (e.g., meal provisions, transportation needs, attendance). A parent explained, “Make the enrollment process more centralized and transparent. [...] The program should also be more location based, so we can easily find the summer camp that is closer to our homes.”
- **Up-to-date information on availability.** The system should clearly display when session slots are full. A feature allowing a search of filter for open programs (or waitlisted programs) would be highly beneficial for ensuring providers fill all slots and families can identify their most preferred programs. According to a parent, “Programs were filled before enrollment opened. Too many different application sites, too little information. Had to depend on word-of-mouth to finally find available program. Also, programs were listed as open/available, but we were still denied access.”

*Administering a system like that, involving multiple city and non-city organizations, is very complicated...[but] from a citizen of SF and parent’s perspective, having a central system would be amazing. At least an easy-to-understand central clearinghouse.*

**--RPD Leader**

- **Sibling preferences.** Parents need to be able to request that siblings attend the same camp to remove the logistical and transportation barriers that arise when one household have children enrolled in multiple programs. As one noted, “I would have also enrolled my son in this program in addition to my daughter if there was more certainty. It's challenging when there's no guarantee that siblings will be in the same program for commuting purposes.”
- **An early launch.** Both providers and families plan for summer early in the year. Typically, many providers begin enrollment as early as February. Target populations should be identified and communicated to early, so providers are able to receive support in reaching and serving those populations. Families also need lead time to plan out their summers and find alternate activities and/or care should their desired sessions not have capacity for their children: “The lateness in enrolling made it difficult to set summer plans and schedule. [...] I can't tolerate the level of uncertainty of admission and schedule for my employment schedule.”

A new centralized system will help to improve communications and access to programs and should be designed to be easily accessible, navigable, and user-friendly for all families, including those who aren't tech-savvy. However, ensuring equitable access—particularly for the most vulnerable families—will continue to require outreach and support from Summer Together partners and providers.

Engaging both partners and providers in determining technical requirements of a registration system will help ensure that it not only centralizes information about programs for families but can ideally also generate information that is valuable for beyond enrollment. For example, with appropriate privacy controls, providers could use the system to access information about the participants assigned to their programs, to ensure they have the appropriate supports for all participants, including students with disabilities or students whose primary language is not English. The system could link to the DCYF Contract Management System (CMS) with a common identifier to minimize data entry for providers. The registration system can also be a key source of information for evaluation and monitoring of summer programs.

## Recommendations

Summer Together delivered on its promise to expand enriching summer program opportunities to San Francisco children and families in 2021, achieving this success by rapidly developing systems to leverage public and private investments of funds, increase staff capacity, and build expertise. Findings from this evaluation suggest the following ideas to strengthen coordination as Summer Together partners look ahead to sustaining citywide systems for future summers:

- Convening a year-round cross-agency planning/coordination team that includes all critical partners, including providers—community-based organizations, RPD sites, and private camps—to co-determine decisions, policies, and communication structures that ensure timely planning for high-quality programs.

- Re-examining Summer Together management functions and responsibilities, with an eye towards institutionalizing a sustainable model for cross-agency collaboration.
- Strengthening coordination between City agencies and SFUSD, particularly in regard to securing school facility usage and recruiting teacher/credentialed personnel for summer programs.
- Continuing to remove the procedural and reporting hurdles that provided funding flexibility for providers and ensured swift planning for Summer Together in 2021.
- Investing in a streamlined, common registration process and/or technology platform to increase summer enrollment efficiency and equity for all families.

# EVALUATION METHODS

For this evaluation, Policy Studies Associates (PSA) collected primary data from four primary stakeholder groups: system partners, Summer Together providers, parents/caregivers, and participants. In addition, PSA reviewed extant data on provided by DCYF, including background materials on Summer Together, and enrollment and participation data.

## System-Level Data

PSA conducted 21 interviews with leaders and staff of the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth & Their Families (DCYF), San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), San Francisco Recreation & Parks (RPD), and San Francisco Public Library (SFPL). In addition, PSA interviewed staff from Crankstart and the San Francisco Education Fund. PSA also conducted a focus group with members of the Summer Together Service Provider Working Group (SPWG).

## Data from Summer Together Sites

Relying on Summer Together site lists and contact information provided by DCYF, PSA included 210 Summer Together sites in primary data collection activities for the evaluation; these data collection activities and response rates are summarized below. In addition, PSA received enrollment data for 180 of the 210 sites. SFUSD-led academic programs were not included in PSA's evaluation of Summer Together.

**Exhibit 19. Summer Together sites included in the evaluation**

	Number of Sites	
	Primary Data Collection	Enrollment Data
DCYF-funded community-based	86	85
DCYF-funded school-based	54	46
RPD sites	37	31
Private camps	33	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>180</b>

## Provider Data

### SURVEY

PSA administered an online survey to Summer Together site directors, distributing 180 surveys<sup>7</sup> to Summer Together program leaders for whom we had accurate contact information. We received 112 survey responses from 106 different programs. Forty-two percent of responding providers represented community-based programs; 26 percent were from school-based programs; 17 percent were from private camps; and 15 percent were from RPD sites.

### FOCUS GROUP

PSA also invited Summer Together providers to participate in a virtual focus group in July 2021, designed to solicit provider feedback on the planning, coordination, implementation, and experience of Summer Together.

## Parent/Caregiver Data

### SURVEY

PSA provided guidance to Summer Together sites for the administration of a parent/caregiver survey, which was available in both online and paper formats.

A total of 2,898 parent surveys were completed and returned to PSA—51 percent through the online version and 49 percent on paper. Seventy percent of parent respondents had a child at DCYF-funded programs, while 15 percent had a child enrolled in a private camp and 15 percent at an RPD site. Eighty-five percent of parent/caregiver respondents reported that their child was in first through seventh grade. The mean and median grade of respondents' children was fourth grade.

The online version of the survey was available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Tagalog, and Vietnamese, while paper copies were distributed in English, Spanish and Chinese. Eighty-five percent of parents responded to the survey in English (2,453), nine percent in Spanish (250), six percent (177) in Chinese, and 11, five, and two in Arabic, Vietnamese, and Tagalog, respectively, together less than five percent of the total responses.

### FOCUS GROUPS

PSA also held five parent focus groups in DCYF-funded Summer Together programs identified by DCYF. A total of 35 parents participated in these focus groups. Two focus groups were conducted in English, one in Chinese, and two in Spanish. Four focus groups were conducted virtually, while one Spanish focus group was held in-person. PSA partnered with Clarity Research to conduct these parent focus groups.

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<sup>7</sup> The number of surveys, 180, presented here does not include four providers for whom we did not have email, three providers for whom we had an incorrect email address, and does not include either sites for whom we had contact information but were not Summer Together sites or duplicates that resulted from individuals who oversaw multiple programs.

## Participant Data

### YOUTH QUESTION CARDS

Instead of a traditional youth survey, PSA provided packets of Youth Question Cards to Summer Together programs to administer throughout the session. There were six versions of the Youth Question Cards, roughly aligned with the six-week summer period; each of these six versions included a unique set of questions. Questions across the cards asked participants to report on their Summer Together experience in four areas: enjoyment/satisfaction (e.g., “I have fun at this program”); relationships among their peers and between youth and program staff (e.g., “Adults at this program care about me”); social-emotional learning (e.g., “I feel safe at this program”); and supports for learning (e.g., “This program made learning fun”).

Each Youth Question Card consisted of three questions that used a three-point “smiley face Likert-type scale” appropriate for data collection with elementary school-aged children and older.<sup>8</sup> Participants indicated their level of agreement with each statement by circling one of the three options (Green/Smile=Agree, Yellow/Neutral= Unsure, Red/Frown= Disagree).

PSA mailed the Youth Question Cards to sites, along with small incentives for participants who completed each card, and return mailing materials. Sites were given the option to indicate language needs; some received cards in Spanish and/or Chinese, in addition to English.

PSA received a total of 15,213 completed question cards from 100 programs, with an average of 2,500 participants responding to each of the six cards. Seventy-six percent of cards were from DCYF-funded programs, 14 percent from RPD sites, and 10 percent from private camps. It is important to note that the survey cards and incentives were mailed in the first week of July, when many programs were already well into their Summer Together sessions, which impacted programs’ ability to administer all six Youth Question Cards packets.

Eighty percent of respondents were ages 6-12, with an average respondent age of nine. Ninety-six percent of the cards were completed in English, with 2.2 and 1.4 percent completed in Spanish and Chinese, respectively.

### YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS

PSA, with partnership from Clarity Research, also conducted focus groups with older youth participants, talking more than 100 middle and high schoolers in nine focus groups, led both virtually and in-person. Youth attended DCYF-funded Summer Together programs selected by DCYF staff to represent the OMI, SOMA, Mission, Western Addition, Chinatown, Excelsior, Visitacion Valley, Richmond, and Tenderloin communities of San Francisco. Participants were selected by their site to participate in the focus group to share their experiences.

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<sup>8</sup> Davies, J. & Brember, I. (1994). The reliability and validity of the “Smiley” scale. *British Educational Research Journal*, 20(4), 446-454. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1500790>

Russell, C. A. & Meredith, J. (2019). *Literacy Learning in Drop-In Library Programs: Evaluation of the Free Library of Philadelphia’s LEAP Program*. Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates.

# Enrollment and Participation Data

DCYF provided PSA with Summer Together enrollment data for 12,448 participants from 180 programs: 85 community-based programs, 46 school-based programs, 31 RPD programs, and 18 private camps. Data available in these files varied by provider type:

**Exhibit 20. Available enrollment and participation data, by program type**

	DCYF-Funded Program	RPD Site	Private Camp
Grade	X	X	X
Gender identity	X	X	X
Race/Ethnicity	X	X	X
Housing status	X		X
Home language	X		
Days attended	X		

