

Evaluation of the State of Connecticut Summer Enrichment Grants Final Report

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By

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) launched its Summer Enrichment Initiative in Spring 2021, to provide Connecticut students opportunities for socialization and fun as the state eased its COVID pandemic restrictions and prepared for the return to in-person school in Fall 2021. Summer Enrichment represents one of the six priorities that anchor the CSDE's *Accelerate CT Framework for Accelerating Educational Opportunity and Access* (CSDE, n.d). The Framework seeks to promote educational “renewal, reduce opportunity gaps, accelerate learning, and advance equity” (CSDE, n.d., p. 4) in the state’s response to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Summer Enrichment Initiative distributed over \$8.6 million to summer youth programs across Connecticut in Summer 2021. The CSDE awarded Expansion Grants of between \$2,500 and \$25,000 to 210 programs to expand existing enrichment opportunities and increase access for students who might otherwise not have access to summer programs. It also awarded Innovation Grants ranging from \$50,000 to \$250,000 to 25 programs to provide students innovative summer programming.¹

The Connecticut COVID-19 Education Research Collaborative (CCERC)² commissioned an evaluation study of the Summer Enrichment Initiative in July 2021 as camps were underway. The evaluation examined the following:

- a) the degree to which camps increased students’ access to summer programming
- b) how camps used Summer Enrichment funds and the types of programming they offered
- c) students’ enjoyment of camp activities and experiences, and
- d) how the camps readied students to return to school after a year of pandemic-related disruptions.

The evaluation also considered the challenges the camps faced and the successes they experienced.

Evaluation Design

The evaluation used a concurrent mixed-methods design. Survey instruments and interview and observation protocols were designed during July and August 2021. Student and site supervisor surveys were administered during August and September 2021. In total, 1,231 students in Grades 3 through 12, and 215 site supervisors completed the student and supervisor surveys, respectively. Quantitative data from the

¹ [Access a listing of grants.](#)

² portal.ct.gov/SDE/Performance/CCERC

two surveys were analyzed descriptively; bivariate analyses were used where relevant and appropriate. Open-ended responses from the surveys were analyzed thematically.

Between July 29, 2021, and August 26, 2021, members of the evaluation team conducted site visits at 10 of the 25 camps that received Innovation Grants. Site visitors conducted focus group interviews with students and staff and observed activities at each camp. In total, focus group interviews included 62 students and 42 staff members. Site visitor fieldnotes were analyzed qualitatively to extend survey results and provide insight into:

- a) students' camp experiences and engagement in camp activities,
- b) how the camps supported students' social emotional well-being and readied them for returning to school, and
- c) staff perceptions of program successes and challenges.

Major Findings

The Initiative Expanded Access to Summer Programming

Findings from the site supervisor survey suggest that the Summer Enrichment Initiative met its goal of expanding access to summer programming for Connecticut students. According to the 121 site supervisors who operated camps in both Summer 2020 and Summer 2021, these 121 camps served 17,087 students in 2020; in 2021, they served nearly double the students — 32,336. In total, Summer 2021 camps served over 108,000 Connecticut students. One reason for the increase in student participation is likely the scholarships and fee waivers that the Summer Enrichment funds made available. According to the site supervisor survey, nearly 39% of camps offered scholarships or fee waivers to 100% of their students. On average, 56% of students received a scholarship or a fee waiver to attend summer camp.

Students Enjoyed Their Camp Experiences

The Summer Enrichment Initiative aimed to provide students with opportunities for fun and socialization in light of disruptions created by the COVID pandemic. Both survey and interview data indicate that students overwhelmingly enjoyed their camp experiences. Just over 94% of students reported that they had “some” (21.9%) or “a lot” of fun (72.3%). Additionally, roughly 85% gave their camp an “A” (59.4%) or a “B” (25.3%). These positive experiences were corroborated by students interviewed at a sample of Innovation Grant camps. Many highlighted the fun they had at camp. As one elementary student said, “There is nothing that could be more fun than this!” Observations substantiated these findings; most students actively participated in camp activities and appeared engaged in the activities and with other students and staff.

Camp Staff Were Key Contributors to Student Engagement

Staff played a central role in students' enjoyment of and engagement in the summer programming. As Table ES1 reports, three-fourths of students (75.0%) who completed

the student survey reported that they liked their camp “Counselors, Teachers, and Adults” “a lot.” Students’ perceptions of camp staff (counselors/teachers/adults) also positively correlated with how much fun they had at camp ($r = .432$) and how highly they rated their camp ($r = .367$), the strongest relationships between students’ views of their camps and camp features or activities we found. At the Innovation camps we visited, students consistently described strong connections with camp staff. Students characterized staff as “friendly” and “warm” and appreciated the caring environments that staff created at the camps. For example, high school students at one camp described how staff provided them “a safe space” where they could have “discussions about things that bother us.” Other students described how camp staff helped students form positive relationships with each other. In addition to engaging students in camp activities, camp staff contributed to students’ positive camp experiences by attending to students’ social emotional well-being.

Students Most Enjoyed Free Time, Field Trips and Outdoor Activities

The camps supported by Summer Enrichment funds centered on a variety of focal themes. Some camps had a STEM-focus, while others focused on arts, life skills, college and career readiness, sports, and purposeful play, among other foci. Across these foci, the camps also engaged students in a variety of activities. As Table ES1 shows, students most enjoyed Free Time (81.7%), Field Trips (75.6%) and Outdoor Activities (70.6%). Students had more mixed responses to other types of activities, generally liking Sports, Arts & Crafts, and Food/Drink/Snacks. Student responses to Learning Activities (e.g., math, reading) were most mixed, with roughly equal percentages of students liking them “a lot,” “some” and “not very much.”

Table ES1. Student Ratings of Camp Activities/Characteristics.

Q9: How much did you like these parts of the summer program?	A lot!	Somewhat	Not very much	(Not part of camp)
Free time	81.7%	14.6%	3.8%	4.6%
Field trips	75.6%	18.1%	6.3%	36.8%
Counselors, teachers, and adults	75.0%	21.8%	3.2%	1.2%
Outdoor activities	70.6%	24.6%	4.9%	3.9%
Sports	63.9%	23.9%	12.2%	8.2%
Food, drink, and snacks	62.5%	27.8%	9.7%	3.6%
Arts & Crafts	52.3%	32.7%	15.0%	6.9%
Computer or Technology activities	48.9%	34.1%	17.0%	36.4%
Acting, Music, or Dance activities	42.1%	31.9%	26.0%	28.8%
Learning activities (math, reading, or science)	35.5%	34.1%	30.5%	30.3%

Students' Readiness for Returning to School was Mixed

The Summer Enrichment Initiative was designed to increase students' socialization and re-engagement with their peers, with an eye toward readying them for the return to school. Thus we explored the degree to which the Initiative fostered students' excitement about and readiness to return to in-person school in Fall 2021. Survey and interview data provide mixed results. Most site supervisors felt their camps were mostly "very effective" (48.8%) or "extremely effective" (26.5%) in building students' preparation for and enthusiasm to return to school. The vast majority (84.7%) attributed this to "staff relationships with students," while 57.2% felt that Learning Activities prepared students to return to school. Students were more ambivalent. While 47.5% of students were excited to return to school, 21.6% were neutral and 30.8% felt negative about returning to school. Additionally, while 57.7% of students said that their camp "definitely" or "probably" had gotten them excited to go back to school, 42.3% said that their camp had "probably" or "definitely not" done so. Students at the site visit Innovation camps expressed a similar ambivalence. This ambivalence related to students' perception of school as often being "boring." As a high school student at one camp said, "If anything [the camp] made me less excited about [returning to school]. This is an environment that I would like to learn in and I know that my school is just not that."

Condensed Start-Up Time Posed Challenges

Among the most prominent challenges identified on the site supervisor survey and staff interviews related to navigating the short timeline between when grants were awarded and when camp started. Camps would have preferred to receive funds earlier to support program planning, student recruitment, and hiring and training staff.

Recommendations

Start Earlier

Site supervisors were grateful for the Summer Enrichment funds but expressed a desire for future funding cycles to start earlier, perhaps at the beginning of the calendar year. This would allow camps sufficient time to plan, arrange for appropriate staffing, recruit students (especially high school students), and otherwise maximize the use of funds. It could also provide time for camp staff/directors from different types of summer programs to offer insights and be involved in the grant planning process.

Support and Implement a Mix of Camp Activities

The Summer Enrichment Initiative-funded camps provided students a wide array of focal themes, e.g., STEM, purposeful play, sports, et cetera, from which to choose. Our findings suggest that offering a mix of activities within these themes might increase student enjoyment. Initiative administrators and camp providers might, in particular, consider how they can integrate some unstructured time, outdoor activities, and field trips into camp programs.

Foster Camp-School Partnerships to Improve Student Engagement

The majority of students involved in this evaluation enjoyed their camp experiences. Their experiences did not, however, necessarily foster their enthusiasm for returning to school. The CSDE could facilitate partnerships between camps and schools with the goal of integrating high-engagement enrichment activities into the school day and the curriculum. Many of the camps that received Innovation Grants partnered with a range of community and educational agencies, including schools. These partnerships could serve as key resources to improve and extend students' engagement and learning throughout the school year.

Strengthen Partnerships between CSDE and Camp Providers to Recruit and Train Staff

Supervisors and students viewed camp staff positively. Students' relationships with camp staff played a central role in students' camp experiences. At the same time, many supervisors indicated they had difficulty fully staffing their programs and also expressed the need for more targeted training for staff on how to support students' social emotional learning and well-being. The CSDE could solicit insight from camp providers on how they recruited and trained staff to provide guidelines and information for future summer initiatives. CSDE could also partner with camp providers to help identify and provide this training.

Introduction

In Summer 2021, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) distributed over \$8.6 million to a range of summer youth programs with the goal of providing students across Connecticut opportunities for socialization and fun as the state eased its COVID pandemic restrictions and prepared for the return to in-person school in Fall 2021. Summer enrichment is one of six priorities of the CSDE's *Accelerate CT* initiative.³ In 2021, The CSDE awarded Expansion Grants of between \$2,500 and \$25,000 to 210 programs to expand existing enrichment opportunities and increase access for students who might otherwise not have access to summer programs. It also awarded Innovation Grants ranging from \$50,000 to \$250,000 to 25 programs to provide students innovative summer programming.⁴

This report presents findings from an evaluation of the Summer Enrichment initiative commissioned in July 2021 by the Connecticut COVID-19 Education Research Collaborative (CCERC).⁵ The evaluation study used a mixed methods design to identify the following: range of students served; how camps used Summer Enrichment funds; the activities offered across camps; students' camp experiences and engagement; and how the camps readied students to return to school after a year of pandemic-related restrictions and disruptions. We also considered the challenges the camps faced and the successes they experienced.

Evaluation Design and Methods

Planning and execution of the evaluation was done on an abbreviated timeline. The evaluation was commissioned by CCERC in July 2021 as summer camps were already underway. Survey instruments and interview and observation protocols were constructed during July and August in consultation with CSDE personnel. Between July 29, 2021, and August 26, 2021, members of the evaluation team conducted site visits of a sample of the camps awarded Innovation Grants. We administered student and site supervisor surveys during August and September 2021.

Quantitative Instruments & Data Collection

Site Supervisor Survey

We developed a 31-item, on-line site supervisor survey in collaboration with CSDE program personnel (see Appendix A for a facsimile of the survey). The survey consisted of closed and open-ended questions and was designed to collect summative information on the following: student enrollment and attendance; financial expenditures; self-assessments of various camp activities; camp successes and challenges; staff

³ portal.ct.gov/SDE/COVID19/AccelerateCT

⁴ [Access a listing of grants.](#)

⁵ portal.ct.gov/SDE/Performance/CCERC

preparation; how the camps prepared students for returning to school in the fall. The survey also served as each site's final report for the CSDE.

In late August 2021, we emailed all 235 site supervisors a link to the survey. Over the next several weeks, we reached back out to those who had not responded. In all, 215 site supervisors, which represented 91.5% of all camps, completed the survey. Approximately 89% ($n=191$) of these supervisors oversaw Expansion Grant sites, and 11% ($n=24$) oversaw Innovation Grant sites.

Student Survey

In Summer 2021, we developed a 27-item questionnaire for Summer Enrichment students in Grades 3 through 12 (see Appendix B). The instrument underwent revisions based on feedback from CSDE program personnel. The final version of the survey asked students whether they had previously attended a summer camp and how they learned about the 2021 camps. It also asked about their experiences at camp and which activities they found most and least satisfying. Finally, students were asked the degree to which the camp prepared them for school in the fall.

We contacted site supervisors at all 235 summer camps via email, requesting that they distribute the survey to students at their program during a two-week window between August 2 and 13, 2021. The email included a link to an electronic Qualtrics survey. We also mailed printed copies of the survey upon supervisor requests. We relied on supervisors to administer the survey due to the large number of sites and the variety of activities the camps offered; supervisors could best determine the appropriate time of each camp's day for students to complete the survey.

Student Survey Participants

In total, 1,231 students completed the student survey. Most surveys (86%) were completed online. The online and print survey data were merged into a spreadsheet for analysis. We cannot calculate a precise response rate because the total student population of all camps is unknown. Additionally, the survey design prioritized student anonymity; we cannot trace student survey responses to learn the exact number of camps that administered surveys to their program participants. Further, our sample is not necessarily representative of all students who attended camps in Summer 2021, as some camps enrolled a different group of students each week, the survey excluded children below Grade 3, and not all camps administered the survey. What we do know is the surveys were distributed to all camps on August 2, which elicited a large sample of students with which to generalize about the larger population. Moreover, because slightly over half (51.0%) of students in our sample had been at their camp for five or more weeks and another 28.6% had been enrolled between three and four weeks (See Table 1), we know that most of students would be good informants about their camp experience. With this mind, we still issue a caution in making inferences from the analysis.

Table 1. How Long Students Attended Camp at Time of Survey.

Q4. About how many weeks have you been at this summer program so far?

Length of Time	Number	Percent
1-2 weeks	249	20.4
3-4 weeks	350	28.6
5 or more weeks	623	51.0
Total	1,222	100.0

Survey participants included students entering Grades 3 through 12 (Table 2). The majority of students who completed the survey (76.3%) were entering Grade 8 or below. Elementary grade students — entering Grades 3 through 5 — comprised the largest group of survey participants (43.5%). High school students — entering Grades 9 through 12 — were the smallest group of survey participants (15.1%).

Table 2. Self-Reported Grade Levels Among Survey Responders.

Q1. What grade are you going to be in this year?

Students	Number	Percent
Grades 3-5	528	43.5
Grades 6-8	399	32.8
Grades 9-12	183	15.1
Other	105	8.6
Total	1,215	100.0

In addition to grade level, students also self-reported their gender and race/ethnicity on the survey. The sample included 547 male students, 549 female students, and 11 who identified as nonbinary, gender-fluid, or transgender (unspecified). Roughly 2% of the gender write-in responses were invalid.

Table 3 displays how students who completed the survey identified themselves. In total, 45.3% of students self-identified as White; 26.5% reported they were Black or African American; 24.3% identified as Hispanic/Latino; 5.4% as Asian; 1.8% as American Indian or Alaska Native; and .8% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Another 10.4% selected the “other” category; most of these students wrote a brief description, including such national heritages as American, German, or Jamaican. Additionally, 25 students used the “other” write-in option to indicate their identity as biracial or multiracial. As Table 3 indicates, in our sample Black or African American students were over-represented relative to the race/ethnicity distribution of the 2020-21 state school-age

population⁶; they comprised more than twice the percentage of Black or African American students in Connecticut. White and Hispanic/Latino students were slightly underrepresented in our survey sample.

Table 3. Race/Ethnicity of the Student Sample (n=1,231).

Q14. What is your race or ethnicity? (Check any that apply.)

Race/Ethnicity	Survey Sample		State
	Number	Percent ⁷	Percent
White	558	45.3	49.9
Hispanic/Latino	299	24.3	27.8
Black or African American	326	26.5	12.7
American Indian or Alaska Native	22	1.8	0.3
Asian	66	5.4	5.2
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	10	0.8	0.1
Other	128	10.4	N/A

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the two surveys were analyzed descriptively, such as generating average scores and frequency distributions for items. Bivariate analyses were used where relevant and appropriate. Open-ended survey items were analyzed thematically.

Qualitative Data Collection & Analysis

The evaluation team conducted site visits of a sample of the Summer Enrichment Programs across the state of Connecticut between July 29 and August 13, 2021. The sites selected represented the range of camp themes, e.g., purposeful play, STEM, arts, et cetera. Site visits collected information on students’ camp experiences, focusing especially on peer and staff relationships and students’ engagement in and enjoyment of camp activities. Site visits further explored whether and how camp participation shaped students’ eagerness to return to school. Additionally, the site visits considered staff experiences, their assessment of camp successes and challenges, and whether and how the funds supported innovations.

⁶ Source: edsight.ct.gov/

⁷ Because students could check more than one race/ethnicity, the percentages in this column do not add up to 100%.

Sites Visited

Members of the evaluation team visited 10 of the 25 camps that had received Innovation Grants. The camps represented the range of program duration, focal themes, and ages of students served by Innovation Grantees. The camps visited included those focused on STEM, arts, purposeful play, sports, social emotional well-being, life skills, and college and career readiness.

Data Collection

Site visits occurred between July 29 and August 26, 2021. Nine were conducted in person; one was held via Zoom due to COVID-19 safety precautions. During site visits, a member of the evaluation team conducted student focus group interviews with approximately three to four students each. Students were identified by site supervisors and represented the ages of students the camps served. Student focus group interviews asked students about their engagement in and enjoyment of camp activities; their interactions and relationships with peers and staff; and whether they felt the camps prepared them to return to school (Appendix C). Site visitors also conducted focus group interviews with three to four staff members at each site. Staff interviews asked about the innovations supported by Summer Enrichment funds; student engagement in camp activities; and camp successes and challenges (Appendix D). Site visitors audio-recorded all interviews. In total, focus group interviews included 62 campers and 42 staff members.

In addition to focus group interviews, site visitors observed camp activities, focusing on availability of resources; student engagement in activities; student-staff and student-student interaction; and overall camp organization.

Data Analysis

Analysis of site visit data occurred over several stages. After completing each site visit, team members drew on focus group interviews and observations to construct field notes. Recordings of focus group interviews were cross-referenced with fieldnotes to ensure accuracy. Two team members jointly analyzed the fieldnotes using Dedoose software developing codes (Miles et al., 2020) to address evaluation study questions. Codes included: innovations; activities; social emotional well-being; facilities; critiques; general assessment; preparation to return to school; challenges; and successes. Team members met multiple times to review coding, check interpretations, and resolve any discrepancies.

Findings

Students Served by Summer Enrichment Camps

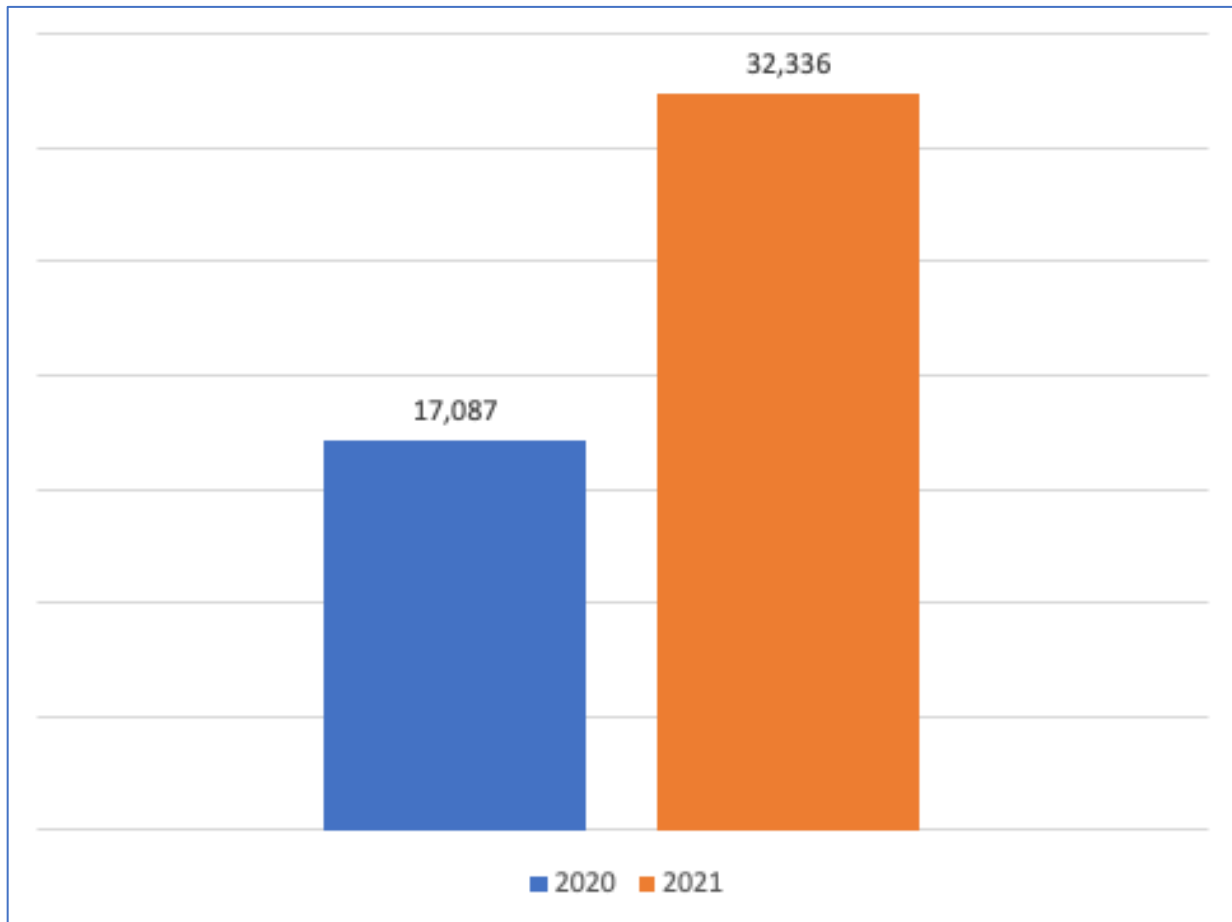
Student Enrollment

Based on the site supervisor survey, over 108,000 Connecticut students were served by summer camps in 2021. Determining camp student enrollment is difficult due to the wide range of camps. For example, two Innovation Grant camps served large numbers of students on a one-time visit basis. Other camps served different groups of students for one to two weeks, while others served the same group of students for over five weeks. The median number of students served at all sites was 95 students.

Site supervisors were asked whether their camps operated in 2020 and, if so, how many students attended in 2020 and 2021. According to the 121 sites that provided enrollment data for Summer 2020 and Summer 2021, median camp enrollment more than doubled — from 54 students in Summer 2020 to 124 students in Summer 2021. Put in terms of total students, while these 121 camps served 17,087 students in 2020, they served nearly double — 32,336 students — in 2021 (Figure 1).

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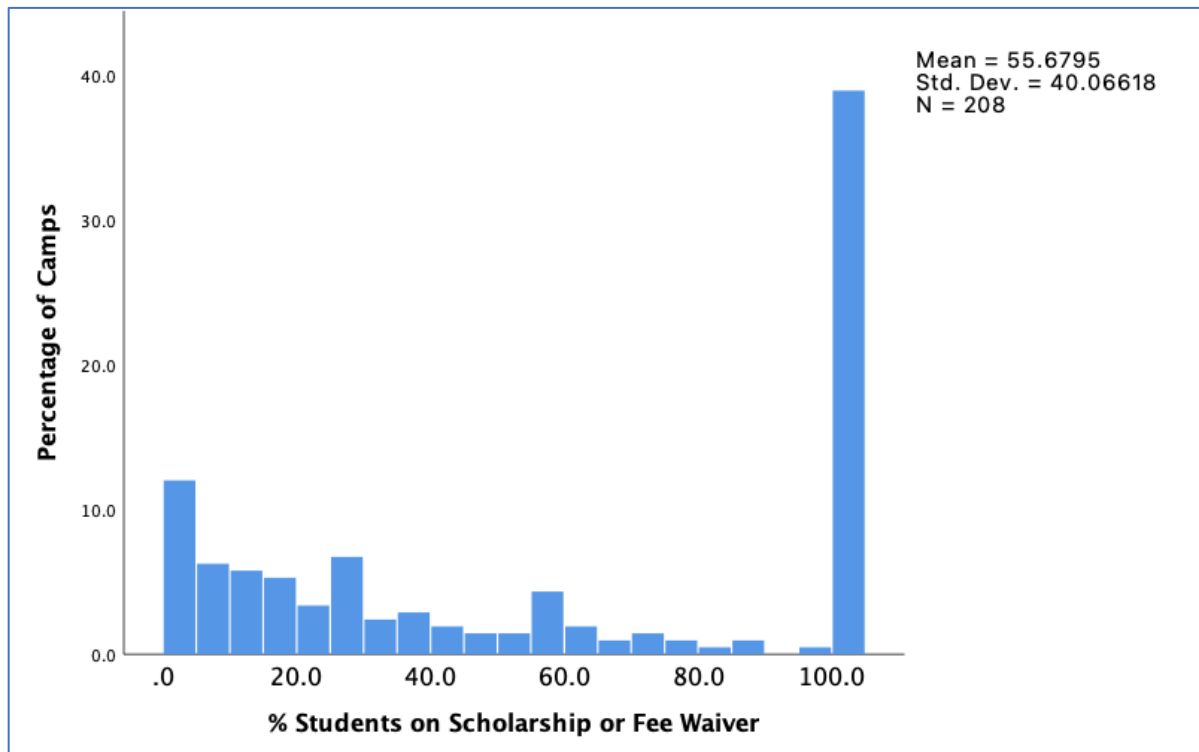
Figure 1. Camp Enrollment in 2020 and 2021 (n=121 camps).



According to site supervisors, actual enrollment was, on average, 112% over projected in 2021.

One reason student enrollment increased is likely due to scholarships and fee waivers made available by Summer Enrichment funds. A little over one-quarter of site supervisors reported they used the funds to support scholarships. Nearly 39% of camps offered scholarships or fee waivers to 100% of their students – with or without using the Summer Enrichment funds (Figure 2). On average, 56% of students were on a scholarship or received a fee waiver to attend summer camp.

Figure 2. Percentage of Students on Scholarship Across Camps.



Student Attendance

Site supervisors were asked to estimate weekly attendance levels among their campers. Overall, 64.3% of the students who were registered attended between 90% and 100% of the time (Table 5). Another 25.8% attended between 80% and 90% of the time. Supervisors were also asked to indicate reasons why students missed camp. The most common reason was family vacations (65.1%), followed by COVID-related reasons (40.5%) (Table 6). Student work obligations was a factor as well; 19.1% of supervisors identified this as a reason for students missing camp. Family funds did not appear to be an issue, with only 5.6% supervisors believing this to be the case.

Table 4. Estimated Weekly Attendance Among Students as Reported by Site Supervisors.

Q20. How would you estimate the weekly attendance levels among your campers? (During any given week, what percentage of students attended who were registered?)

Attendance Rate	Number	Percent
90%-100%	137	63.7
80%-90%	55	25.6
70%-80%	15	7
60%-70%	5	2.3
50%-60%	1	0.5
Total	213	99.1

Table 5. Reasons for Missing Camp as Reported by Site Supervisors.

Q21. What would you say are some of the reasons for missed attendance? (Check all that apply.)

Reason	Number	Percent
Family funds	12	5.6
Family work obligations	41	19.1
Student work obligations	16	7.4
Family vacations	140	65.1
COVID-related	87	40.5
Unknown reasons	83	38.6
Other:	58	27
Total	215	

How Camps Used Grant Funds

The Summer Enrichment initiative provided camps funds to create and implement innovations and to expand student enrollment. Site supervisors were asked whether their grant funds were used to create new student activities, hire more staff, purchase additional materials, and train staff. They were also asked to write in any other major uses of funds. Survey results show that three-quarters of camps used the funds to offer new activities, hire more staff, and buy materials (Table 7). Forty percent of camps spent funds on staff training. Over half ($n=115$, 54%) the camp supervisors wrote in other ways they utilized funds. For instance, 23.7% of all supervisors used funds for scholarships, 10.7% for transportation, 6.5% for field trips, and 3.7% for food.

Table 6. Use of Grant Funds as Reported by Site Supervisors ($n=215$).

Q. How did you use the Summer Enrichment funds this summer? (Check all that apply.)

Used For	Number	Percent
New student activities	160	74.4
Hiring more staff	165	76.7
Purchasing additional materials	163	75.8
Staff training	86	40.0
Other: Scholarships	51	23.7
Other: Transportation	23	10.7
Other: Field trips	14	6.5
Other: Food	8	3.7

Activities Camps Offered

The 235 camps receiving funding ranged widely in type, format, and students served. There was no typical camp. For instance, some camps focused on purposeful play; others focused on college and career readiness; some were STEM programs; others focused on a specific skill or activity (e.g., tennis, computer programming, or theatre). Some camps served groups of students on a weekly basis, and others ran all summer. Finally, some camps were nontraditional. For example, one museum served thousands of students who visited the museum over the summer months.

We surveyed site supervisors to gather information on the types of activities they offered. The responses suggest that camps relied heavily on outdoor activities, with 72.1% reporting using outdoor activities “a lot” (Table 8). Arts and crafts and sports were also a large part of many of the camps. Learning activities, such as developing skills in reading or math, were employed “a lot” by 40.7% of camp supervisors and “a moderate amount” by another 32.5%.

Table 7. Summer Program Activities as Reported by Site Supervisors (n=215)

Q17. Please indicate the extent to which these activities were part of your summer program.

Activity	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	None at all
Arts & Crafts	54.2%	31.8%	9.8%	4.2%
Sports	49.5%	29.5%	12.4%	8.6%
Acting, Music, or Dance	22.5%	39.7%	26.8%	11%
Computer or Technology	16.6%	28.3%	29.3%	25.9%
Learning (e.g., math, reading)	40.7%	32.5%	20.1%	6.7%
Free time	11.6%	40.6%	41.5%	6.3%
Field trips	24.3%	22.4%	22.9%	30.5%
Outdoor activities	72.1%	24.2%	1.9%	1.9%

Use of Funds and Activities Offered at the Site Visit Innovation Camps

Staff and supervisors at the site visit Innovation camps described using grant funds in a variety of ways. Like many of the summer camps, the Innovation camps used Summer Enrichment funds to increase the number of students they served. This included offering tuition waivers.

The site visit Innovation camps also used Summer Enrichment funds to hire staff, purchase materials, and provide transportation to implement new programs and activities. These programs and activities ranged from multitown sports leagues, to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM), and Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STREAM) workshops, to field trips and experiential learning at diverse community and arts-based organizations, to career and college readiness workshops. Though the programs and activities varied, many integrated social emotional supports with learning activities. Many of the camps also instituted activities that engaged students in their local communities through field trips. Summer Enrichment funds covered the costs of transportation and fees associated with these field trips.

The site visit Innovation camps also partnered with local schools and a variety of community organizations both to provide workshops to students on site and as additional camp sites. One camp partnered with a local school and other agencies to offer students nature-based activities and to bring yoga and martial arts workshops to the camp. Another camp engaged students in arts- and science-based activities at a community-based organization during the morning and then transported students to a local high school for performing arts and digital design activities that incorporated culturally responsive teaching methods. A third camp partnered with local agencies that provided creative arts and science activities in addition to the sports activities the camp provided. Summer Enrichment funds assisted in covering costs for staff and transportation associated with these activities.

Students' Camp Experiences

One major goal of the Summer Enrichment Initiative was to provide Connecticut students with fun activities that would contribute to their social, emotional, and physical well-being after a year or more of pandemic stress and uncertainty. Data from the student survey and site visits suggest that the Initiative achieved this goal. The large majority of students rated their camps highly and viewed camp climate and activities very positively. We examine these different dimension of students' camp experiences below.

Recruitment and Attendance

The survey asked students if they had attended a summer program prior to this summer. Most of the students (69%) had previously attended a summer program (Table 9). For roughly 30%, however, 2021 was the first time they attended a summer program.⁸ Students were also asked to select from a list of options about how they

⁸ First-time campers were not too dissimilar across grade levels: elementary (27.9%), middle (22.6%), and high school (31.9%).

learned about the summer program. Nearly 51% of students learned about the summer program from their families (Table 10). Less frequent forms of recruitment for summer programs included participants' friends (17%), school systems (12%), and invitations directly from the summer program (8%). Other write-in entries included "my [family] signed me up" (0.8%, $n=10$) and "SGOF" (Save Girls on FYRE — an independent nonprofit seeking to break the cycles of social immobility and absence of opportunity for girls of color) (0.4%, $n=5$). Tables 9 and 10 show the first-time attendance and recruitment patterns across the sample.

Table 8. First-Time and Repeat Attendees at Summer Camps.

Q2. Was this your first time going to a summer program?	Number	Percent
Yes, this was my first time at any summer program	375	30.6
No, I've been to a summer program before	851	69.4
Total	1,226	

Table 9. How Students Learned About Their Summer Program.

Q3. How did you learn about this summer program? (Check any that apply.)	Number	Percent
My family	716	50.5
My friends	242	17.1
My school	176	12.4
The summer program invited me	110	7.8
Other	172	12.1

Nearly three-quarters (72.3%) of students indicated they had "a lot" of fun at their summer program.

Student Overall Ratings of their Camps

One of the main goals of the Summer Enrichment initiative was to bring joy into children’s lives after a long and socially disruptive pandemic. Students were asked three questions in the survey that spoke to their level of enjoyment with camp. When asked what grade they would give the camp, 59.4% scored their camp an “A,” while 25.3% scored it a “B” (Table 11). Around 15% gave their camp a grade of C or below. Students were also asked how much they enjoyed the camp. Nearly three-quarters (72.3%) indicated they had “a lot” of fun at their summer program, while another 21.9% had “some” fun (Table 12). Less than 6% of students reported having only “a little” or “no” fun. Lastly, 69.8% of students said they would attend their camp next summer if they could, another 26.2% might attend, and 3.9% would not (Table 13).

Table 10. Student Letter Grade Rating of Camp.

Q5. What grade would you give the summer program?

Grade	Number	Percent
A	642	59.4
B	274	25.3
C	64	5.9
D	29	2.7
F	72	6.7
Total	1,081	100.0

Table 11. Student Enjoyment Rating of Camp.

Q6: How much fun did you have at the summer program?	Number	Percent
A lot	881	72.3
Some	267	21.9
A little	59	4.8
None	12	1.0
Total	1,219	100.0

Table 12. Student Indication of Returning Again Next Year.

Q7: If you could come to this summer program again next year, would you?	Number	Percent
Yes	849	69.8
Maybe	319	26.2
No	48	3.9
Total	1,216	100.0

Students' Perceptions of Camp Climate

Students were asked about the culture and climate at their camp and the extent to which it created a positive learning environment. Table 14 shows that most students viewed the climate favorably. For instance, two-thirds (66.0%) of students reported that peers were “always” or “mostly” nice to one another. Another two-thirds (66.2%) of students reported “always” or “mostly” having lots of choices during their time at camp. About 18% of students agreed the rules at their programs were “always” or “mostly” too strict, while almost 64% agreed the program’s rules were “never” or “once in a while” too strict. Finally, well over half (56.6%) indicated they “always” or “mostly” learned new things while at camp.

Table 13. Student Perceptions of Camp Climate.

At your summer program...	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Once in a while	Never	N
Students were nice to each other.	23.7%	42.3%	25.1%	6.4%	2.4%	1,150
I learned new things.	33.2%	23.4%	20.5%	15%	8%	1,143
If some students were acting up, an adult did something about it.	50.4%	24.5%	14.8%	6%	4.3%	1,127
Kids were given lots of choices.	33.9%	32.3%	23.7%	6.6%	3.5%	1,161
The rules were too strict.	7.4%	10.1%	18.6%	27.3%	36.6%	1,123

Students' Enjoyment of Camp Activities

Because camp themes and activities varied significantly, students were asked which camp aspects and characteristics they most enjoyed. Table 15 shows how much students enjoyed each part of their summer program. Not all camps offered all activities listed on the survey.

Overwhelmingly, students indicated their preference for “free time” during summer programming; about 73% of students reported liking free time “a lot”; 13% reported enjoying it “somewhat”; and approximately 3% reported “not very much.” Additionally, 63% of students indicated they enjoyed outdoor activities “a lot.”

Of the camps that offered field trips — approximately 66% of sites in the sample — 47.7% of those students said they liked field trips “a lot.” Approximately 46% of participants enjoyed arts and crafts activities “a lot,” while 29% enjoyed them “somewhat”; 13% enjoyed them “not very much.” When camps offered sports-based activities, the results were similar: About 56% of students enjoyed sports-based activities “a lot,” approximately 21% enjoyed them “somewhat,” and about 11% enjoyed them “not very much.”

Students found acting, music, or dance activities less enjoyable. While approximately 27% of students indicated these types of activities were not offered at their camp, only 28% of students indicated that they enjoyed these activities “a lot,” 21% enjoyed them “somewhat,” and 17% did not enjoy them very much. Students rated their enjoyment of computer and technology activities similarly: Twenty nine percent enjoyed them “a lot,” 20% “somewhat,” and 10% “not very much.” Students also reported mixed enjoyment of “learning activities” such as math, reading, and science. Favorability results between “a lot,” “somewhat,” and “not very much” were closely distributed: 23%, 22%, and 19%, respectively.

Table 14. Student Ratings of Camp Activities/Characteristics.

Q9: How much did you like these parts of the summer program?	A lot!	Somewhat	Not very much	Total (p)	Not part of camp (p)
Free time	81.7%	14.6%	3.8%	100.0%	4.60%
Field trips	75.6%	18.1%	6.3%	100.0%	36.80%
Counselors, teachers, and adults	75.0%	21.8%	3.2%	100.0%	1.20%
Outdoor activities	70.6%	24.6%	4.9%	100.0%	3.90%
Sports	63.9%	23.9%	12.2%	100.0%	8.20%
Food, drink, and snacks	62.5%	27.8%	9.7%	100.0%	3.60%
Arts & Crafts	52.3%	32.7%	15.0%	100.0%	6.90%
Computer or Technology activities	48.9%	34.1%	17.0%	100.0%	36.40%
Acting, Music, or Dance activities	42.1%	31.9%	26.0%	100.0%	28.80%
Learning activities (math, reading, or science)	35.5%	34.1%	30.5%	100.0%	30.30%

Relationship Between Camp Characteristics and Student Satisfaction

Given the diversity in camp themes (e.g., arts, STEM, purposeful play, et cetera), in order to gain further insight into students’ camp experiences, we examined the relationship between students’ satisfaction with camp activities or characteristics and students’ overall camp satisfaction. Table 16 below presents statistical correlations between student satisfaction with specific camp activities or characteristics and two overall camp satisfaction items. The absolute value of the Pearson correlation index speaks to the strength of the relationship; the correlation index ranges between 0.00 and 1.00, with 1.00 being a perfect correlation and 0.00 meaning no correlation. Correlations in the range of 0.2 and 0.3 are generally considered low in strength, between 0.4 and 0.6 moderate strength, and above 0.6 strong. The “sign” before the correlation score indicates either a positive or negative relationship. In this case, all correlations are positive (+) and thus are all direct correlations; as scores on one variable increase, so do scores on the second variable, and vice versa.

In Table 16 we observe the strongest correlation occurred between student perceptions of counselors/teachers/adults at camp (how much they liked them) and how much fun they had at camp ($r=.432$). The next largest association was between “how much fun” students had and participating in outdoor activities ($r=.386$). Computers/technology, and arts and crafts activities were not seemingly associated with students having fun ($r=.150$ and $r=.168$, respectively). Again, these correlations are all positive in sign, meaning that as scores on one variable increase, so do the scores on the other variable — and vice versa. By rule, correlations do not imply a causal relationship, but they represent a necessary condition of such relationships. Based on our data, students who expressed positive feelings about camp staff also generally reported having fun at camp. Similarly, student perceptions of camp staff were modestly and directly correlated with the letter grade (e.g., A, B, C) they gave their camp ($r=0.367$). Another moderate correlation occurred between perceptions of camp staff and camp outdoor activities ($r=.386$). The remaining correlations in Table 16 are relatively weak in magnitude but all positive.

Table 15. Correlations Between Student Perceptions of Camp Characteristics/Activities and Their Overall Satisfaction with Camp.

Camp Activities and Characteristics	Responses (n)	How much fun did you have at camp?	What grade would you give the camp?
Counselors, Teachers, and Adults	1147	.432**	.367**
Outdoor Activities	1139	.386**	.223**
Acting, Music, or Dance Activities	1131	.226**	.175**
Learning Activities	1125	.225**	.277**
Food, Drink, and Snacks	1153	.223**	.219**
Field Trips	1137	.222**	.159**
Free Time	1147	.221**	.171**
Sports Activities	1165	.217**	.158**
Arts & Crafts Activities	1151	.168**	.185**
Computer or Technology Activities	1127	.150**	.127**
How much fun did you have at camp?	1219	--	.449**
What grade would you give the camp?	1180	.449**	1

** CORRELATION IS SIGNIFICANT AT THE .01 LEVEL (2-TAILED).

* CORRELATION IS SIGNIFICANT AT THE 0.05 LEVEL (2-TAILED).

Students' Experiences at the Site Visit Innovation Camps

Students at the site visit Innovation camps described their camp experiences very positively. Students enjoyed being at the camps. Many highlighted the fun they had at camp. An elementary student reported, "There is nothing that could be more fun than this!" A high school student at another camp described the camp as "one of the best summer programs that I've been to."

Students' views of their camp experiences reflected their relationships with camp staff. While we did observe staff at one camp struggle to maintain students' engagement in camp activities, overall, the tenor of staff-student interactions was positive. During focus group interviews, students described strong connections with camp staff. Several described camp staff as "friendly" and "warm." An elementary student said she "loved" her camp teacher because her teacher "always asks if I'm okay." Students also appreciated the safe environments that the staff created at the camps. High school students who attended one of the site visit camps said the staff provided them "a safe space" where they could have "discussions about things that bother us." Similarly, a middle school student said that he felt he could "be safe" at the camp he attended. When asked what he liked about the camp, he said, "being happy." An elementary student at another camp described how camp staff helped students form positive relationships with one another. When students "got angry" with each other, staff helped them work their problems out.

Students' positive views of their camp experiences also reflected their engagement in and enjoyment of camp activities. Students described being fully engaged in camp activities. Students at the sports and purposeful play camps enjoyed engaging in basketball, kick ball, soccer, tennis and weight lifting. At the camps that offered field trips, all students identified field trips as their favorite activities. Students described field trips to Lake Compounce, Mystic Aquarium, Kimball Farms, the zoo, and area colleges. Students said that the field trips provided "opportunities to learn new things" and "turned fun stuff into learning." College visits provided by one camp offered students opportunities to explore their futures. A student at the camp said the college visits, along with other camp activities, "empowered" her to "make decisions" about her future. Additionally, students at the camp appreciated the mental wellness and self-care activities the camp also offered. Despite the different camp focal themes, many of the camps supported students' social emotional well-being through the activities they offered, as well as through the positive relationships staff built with students, as noted above.

Those camps that specialized in the arts engaged students with activities that exposed them to dance, theater, literature, art, and music. One high school student who attended an arts-based camp stated, "I love the fact that there's an actual performing arts space ... you can't live without music or the performing arts." Activities at these camps helped students learn skills related to the performing arts from staff campers and discover their own talents and interests.

The STEM-focused camps engaged students in coding, web design, and digital gaming as well as science and nature-oriented activities. Students described these activities as allowing them “to discover new things.” One student said he enjoyed making a Lego Sundial and learning about the math that went into creating it. Another student enjoyed learning the “whole idea and concept of coding.”

Though students overwhelmingly described their camp experiences positively across the student focus group interviews, some students did identify aspects of the camps that they felt could be improved. Students in one camp wanted to exert more choice over activities. Students in two other camps expressed wanting more opportunities to work with a broader range of students in their camps. They felt this would help them “form friendships.” Finally, students in another camp said that, because of COVID-19, they were not able to take as many field trips as they would have liked.

Students’ Readiness for Returning to School

The pandemic has caused a degree of social isolation and anxiety among many school-age children. The Summer Enrichment initiative was created, partly, in response to the long-duration pandemic that disrupted so many of Connecticut students’ lives. Summer programs were designed to help children resocialize with one another and have fun outside their homes. Though providing these opportunities represented the Initiative’s central goal, it was also hoped that these opportunities would spark students’ excitement for and help ready them to return to in-person school in Fall 2021. We surveyed site supervisors and students on their perception of whether and how the camps achieved this secondary goal.

Site Supervisor Perceptions of Camp Effects on Students’ Readiness to Return to School

Site supervisors reported on how effective their programs were in preparing students for returning to school. Nearly half (48.8%) believed the summer experience was “very effective” in terms of building students’ preparation and/or enthusiasm for school in the fall (Table 17). Though about 9% of camp supervisors indicated that this was not a program priority, when asked what aspects of camps appeared to contribute most to student preparation and enthusiasm for school, an overwhelming majority (84.7%) reported “staff relationship with students” (Table 18). Next in line were “outdoor activities” (58.1%), “learning activities” (57.2%), and “arts and crafts activities” (47%). Note that not all camps offered all the choice options in the survey (e.g., acting, music or dance).

Table 16. Student Preparation and Enthusiasm for Returning to School as Reported by Site Supervisors.

Q22: How effective was your program in building students' preparation and/or enthusiasm for returning to school?	Number	Percent
Extremely effective	57	26.5
Very effective	105	48.8
Moderately effective	30	14.0
Slightly effective	3	1.4
This was not a program priority	20	9.3
Total	215	100.0

Table 17. Aspects of Camp That Contributed to Student Preparation for School as Reported by Site Supervisors ($n=215$).

Q23: What contributed most to students' preparation and/or enthusiasm for returning to school? (Check only those that apply.)	Number	Percent
Staff relationship with students	182	84.7
Arts & Crafts activities	101	47.0
Sports activities	82	38.1
Acting, Music, or Dance activities	56	26.0
Computer or Technology activities	70	32.6
Learning activities (e.g., math, reading)	123	57.2
Free time	60	27.9
Field trips	81	37.7
Outdoor activities	125	58.1

Students' Perceptions of Returning to School

We also asked our sample of students directly about how they felt about returning to school. Response choices were presented as five “smiley” faces that display their feelings along a continuum (Table 19). Of the 1,179 students that responded to this question, 47.5% chose a face with a smile, another 21.6% were neutral (choosing neither a frown nor smile), and a collective 30.8% selected a face with a frown. The survey also asked students the extent to which the *summer program* had gotten them excited to go back to school. Though students responded across the board, they generally responded favorably. For instance, 57.7% of students answered “definitely yes” or “probably yes” to the question (Table 20).

Table 18. Student Perceptions on Returning to School.




Q8: How did you feel about going back to school?						Total
Percent	22.1	25.4	21.6	11.2	19.6	100.0
Number	261	300	255	132	231	1,179

Table 19. Extent to Which the Summer Program Got Students Excited to Go Back to School as Reported by Students.

Q11: Has the summer program gotten you excited to go back to school?	Number	Percent
Definitely yes	292	24.7
Probably yes	390	33.0
Probably not	241	20.4
Definitely not	259	21.9
Total	1,182	100.0

Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of Camp Activities and Returning to School

To explore possible associations between student enjoyment of specific camp activities and their level of excitement in returning to school, we calculated a set of bivariate correlations (Table 21). We issue a caution when drawing inferences here, as statistical associations of this type do not imply a causal relationship. Nevertheless, the correlations may shed some light on whether certain aspects of camp were at all connected to student readiness for school. Student perceptions of learning activities (e.g., math, reading) seemed to be associated modestly (and directly) with their feelings toward going back to school ($r = .372$) as well as their thoughts on how much the camp itself had excited them returning ($r = .404$). The remaining correlations were also direct (or positive) but not appreciably large in magnitude.

Table 20. Correlations Between Student Perceptions of Camp Characteristics/Activities and Their Feelings About Returning to School.

Q9: Camp Activities and Characteristics⁹	Responses (n)	Q8: How do you feel about going back to school? ¹⁰	Q11: Has the summer program gotten you excited to go back to school? ¹¹
Learning Activities	1,125	.372**	.404**
Counselors, Teachers, and Adults	1,147	.166**	.247**
Acting, Music, or Dance Activities	1,131	.163**	.242**
Outdoor Activities	1,139	.152**	.181**
Arts & Crafts Activities	1,151	.147**	.212**
Computer or Technology Activities	1,127	.111**	.180**
Sports Activities	1,165	.099**	.100**
Field Trips	1,137	.094*	.094*
Food, Drink, and Snacks	1,153	0.036	.120**
Free Time	1,147	0.019	0.051
How do you feel about going back to school?	1,209	1	.571**

** CORRELATION IS SIGNIFICANT AT THE .01 LEVEL (2-TAILED).

* CORRELATION IS SIGNIFICANT AT THE 0.05 LEVEL (2-TAILED).

Students' Readiness to Return to School at the Site Visit Innovation Camps

During focus group interviews in the site visit Innovation camps, we asked students how they felt about returning to school in Fall 2021 and whether and how their camps prepared them to do so. Students expressed a range of feelings about returning to school. Several students across the camps said they were looking forward to making new friends, working with new teachers and/or “learning new things.” On the whole, however, students expressed ambivalence about returning to school. As one elementary student described it, he was “excited and not excited.”

Students' ambivalence reflected their view that school was often “boring.” This contrasted with the engagement students experienced at their camps. As a high school

⁹ Students rated their level of enjoyment with each aspect of camp using survey item Q9

¹⁰ This item is based on survey item Q8. Higher scores on this item mean more excited, lower scores mean less excited.

¹¹ This item is based on survey item Q11. Higher scores on this item mean more excited, lower scores mean less excited.

student said when asked if the camp made him excited to return to school, “If anything [the camp] made me less excited about it. This is an environment that I would like to learn in and I know that my school is just not that.”

Though the students we interviewed at the site visit Innovative camps did not appear excited to return to school, both students and staff felt that the camps did prepare students to return to school through the schedules, academic activities, and social interaction they provided students. Staff and students cited the camp’s schedule as preparing students for school. A staff member at one camp noted, “Coming here they have to follow a routine, they have to have a schedule, they even have to eat in the cafeteria. They are doing things that they would typically do in school as far as the structure.” An elementary student echoed the staff’s statement, “Waking up early ... going from 8 - 3, all day prepares me to go back [to school]”.

Students and staff also highlighted the learning activities the camps offered as readying students to return to school. A staff member from one of the camps felt that exposing students to new learning experiences provided them “more of a perspective on goals, and what they should be taking in school.” Additionally, having the opportunity to refresh prior skills learned in school prepared students to go back to school. A high school student in a different camp felt that the camp learning activities “helped me to remember all of the important concepts in Algebra.”

Finally, students and staff felt that enabling students to interact with peers and adults was critical to preparing them for school. This was especially true due to the isolation many students experienced due to the pandemic. A high school student said: “Some of us were completely remote ... so, having human interaction and working with other kids will prepare us for school more.” Middle school students at another camp said because the camp prepared them to “deal with other students,” they looked forward to meeting new teachers and making new friends at school. This was echoed by a staff member at a different camp who stated: “For those that had been isolated, coming here every day and seeing people, and having conversations, is part of that [school] routine.” A staff member at one camp noted, however: “It’s July! Kids don’t want to think about school yet.”

Program Challenges

The findings above indicate that the camps were successful in expanding the number of students served and providing students with engaging activities that students enjoyed. The camps were also successful in creating positive climates and providing students positive relationships with caring adults.

Site supervisors and staff did highlight some challenges. The site supervisor survey included short answers about any challenges supervisors faced during program implementation. Common challenges for programs included navigating the short timeline between when grants were awarded and when camp started (i.e., camps would have preferred to receive funds earlier in their program planning process); coordinating

staffing (e.g., recruitment, hiring, training) for their counselors; managing around COVID (i.e., they had to change or eliminate some activities); and addressing higher than expected student behavioral issues.

Program Challenges as Reported by Site Supervisors

The following are quotations from site supervisors regarding the various types of challenges they reported their programs having faced:

Short Timeline

“Because this program was made possible thanks to Summer Enrichment funding, our largest challenge was the short timeline between when we confirmed funding and when the program was scheduled to begin. The largest challenge was recruitment—many young people had already committed to summer plans and were not able to join a program that required this level of commitment.”

“The announcement of the grant came extremely late in the spring/early summer. It was extremely difficult to work with schools preparing their own programs while readying for the summer. Many parents also we already committed to summer plans for childcare as the summer was so close. More time would have been beneficial.”

“The short timeline from announcement of the grant to the launch of the program (less than two months) made it challenging to recruit students, especially as the end of school year approached.”

Coordinating Staff

“[C]ounselors were young and inexperienced and needed more support than we expected.”

“Staffing was also a challenge as they struggled to adapt to the needs of the youth.”

“Finding qualified people who wanted to work / offer services.”

“Shortage of staff to accommodate larger number of campers.”

“Staffing was a major obstacle this summer.”

“Our greatest challenge, like many camps, was finding qualified staff for our head counselor positions.”

“Hiring enough qualified staff with the proper certifications was very difficult. And then retaining them for the summer season was a

challenge. So many college age students /staff presented with their own mental health issues after this covid year and a half.”

“Staffing was difficult to find as well as training when hiring staff later in the season to keep up with enrollment. Higher than expected enrollment of campers with special needs, difficult to find staff with skills and training needed to support these campers.”

COVID

“COVID was the biggest challenge bringing less children to the program.”

“Continuing to operate within the safety protocols for Covid-19 and keeping up with cleaning and distancing. As a performing arts camp, there were some struggles among campers with singing and learning choreography while wearing masks the entire time. We are very pleased to say that there no Covid cases among any staff or campers during our 6-week program.”

Student Behavioral Issues

“The primary challenge across all of our sites was not having enough social work staff to attend to children’s mental health needs as they arose or give in-depth trainings for youth counselors on how to handle mental health concerns. Staff observed unprecedented levels of social-emotional and mental health needs this summer that sometimes manifested in interpersonal conflicts between students, a result of not having been in classrooms or around each other for over a year.”

“More behavior/psycho-social issues than in a typical summer, presumably a result of the stress from COVID.”

“We did experience more challenging behavioral issues than we ever had experienced in the 8 years prior of running the camp and many were with our scholarship students...we are considering hiring a social worker to help us next year to relieve some of the pressure on our faculty.”

“We noticed some behavior problems in younger children due to the lack of social interaction because of the pandemic. We did many one-on-one meetings with the children who were having a hard time adjusting to being back with their peers.”

“Children exhibited a lot of behavioral issues especially at times of math and reading enrichment especially toward the end of the program day.”

“We were also faced with the challenge of addressing social and emotional acute behavior of a particular youth in need of other supports.”

“ ... teachers witnessed emotional distress from the traumatic year and were able to refer students to additional resources, but it was difficult to measure the impacts of mental health challenges on student academic growth. This summer has been enlightening as to how we can continue to support our students recover.”

Because the pandemic had the strong potential to affect programs, site supervisors were asked specifically about several ways COVID-19 impacted their camp. A little over a quarter of camps (27.4%) indicated that some students had to quarantine and could not attend during this time (Table 22). The same happened to 14.9% of staff. Only a handful of programs had to close for any period of time.

Table 21. COVID-19 Effects on Program as Reported by Site Supervisors (n=215).

Q24: How did COVID-19 affect your program? (Check any that apply.)	Number	Percent
Some students had to quarantine and could not attend the program during that time	59	27.4
Some staff had to quarantine and could not work during that time	32	14.9
Had to close camp for less than a week	10	4.7
Had to close camp for more than a week	4	1.9
Other	28	13.0

Program Challenges at the Site Visit Innovation Camps

Site visit data further illuminate these challenges. Staff we interviewed at the Innovation camps described three types of challenges: implementation, enrollment, and COVID. Staff struggled with the quick turnaround time from notification that they had received the grant to the program’s start date. As one staff member reported, “We built this in three weeks!” Most of the challenges that staff in the site visit Innovation camps identified, however, were administrative. These included hiring staff and securing supplies in a timely manner. Notably, staff did not feel that these challenges negatively impacted the campers’ experience.

Staff at the Innovation camps described three types of challenges: implementation, enrollment, and COVID.

For some programs the quick turn-around impacted enrollment numbers since they were not able to advertise widely prior to the start of camp. One staff member noted: “We could have handled twice as many [students].” Staff in other camps, however, had the opposite challenge — high enrollment numbers. While the grant allowed for some camps to expand their services to more students, doing so made it difficult for staff to identify students’ individual needs. As one staff member said, “Since it was such a large group, being able to know all of the kids’ needs was a challenge.”

Lastly, staff cited the pandemic as a “major, major obstacle.” Some camps had to close classrooms at different points during the summer due to COVID. Several of the site visit camps experienced closures due to COVID. Indeed, these closures posed a challenge to conducting the site visits themselves and, as we noted, one site visit had to be conducted virtually.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, this evaluation suggests that the Summer Enrichment Initiative achieved its primary goals of making summer camps accessible to more students, providing students fun and engaging experiences, and fostering positive peer and adult-student relationships for a large number of Connecticut students who had endured a long and socially isolating pandemic. The Initiative also helped ready students to return to schooling in the fall, though this was much more mixed.

As the State prepares for future summer enrichment programming, state administrators and camp providers may want to consider the following recommendations.

Start Earlier

Site supervisors were grateful for the Summer Enrichment funds but expressed a desire for future funding cycles to start earlier, perhaps at the beginning of the calendar year. This would allow camps sufficient time to plan, arrange for appropriate staffing, recruit

students (especially high school students), and otherwise maximize the use of funds. It could also provide time for camp staff/directors from different types of summer programs to offer insights and be involved in the grant planning process.

Support and Implement a Mix of Camp Activities

The Summer Enrichment Initiative-funded camps provided students a wide array of focal themes, e.g., STEM, purposeful play, sports, et cetera, from which to choose. Our findings suggest that offering a mix of activities within these themes might increase student enjoyment. Initiative administrators and camp providers might, in particular, consider how they can integrate some unstructured time, outdoor activities and field trips into camp programs.

Foster Camp-School Partnerships to Improve Student Engagement

The majority of students involved in this evaluation enjoyed their camp experiences. Their experiences did not, however, necessarily foster their enthusiasm for returning to school. The CSDE could facilitate partnerships between camps and schools with the goal of integrating high-engagement, enrichment activities into the school day and the curriculum. Many of the camps that received Innovation Grants partnered with a range of community and educational agencies, including schools. These partnerships could serve as key resources to improve and extend students' learning throughout the school year.

Strengthen Partnerships between CSDE and Camp Providers to Recruit and Train Staff

Supervisors and students viewed camp staff positively. Students' relationships with camp staff played a central role in students' camp experiences. At the same time, many supervisors indicated they had difficulty fully staffing their programs and also expressed the need for more targeted training for staff on how to support students' social emotional learning and well-being. The CSDE could solicit insight from camp providers on how they recruited and trained staff to provide guidelines and information for future summer initiatives. CSDE could also partner with camp providers to help identify and provide this training.

References

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Appendix A

Student Survey

Summer Program Student Survey

Thank you for taking the time to share feedback about your experience at the summer program. The University of Connecticut is using this survey to learn more about how things went for you. The information you share will help improve future summer programs. The survey is anonymous, meaning no one will know what you say, and should take about 10 minutes.

<p>1. What grade are you going to be in this year?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3rd• 4th• 5th• 6th• 7th• 8th• 9th• 10th• 11th• 12th	<p>2. Was this your first time going to a summer program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes, this was my first time at any summer program• No, I've been to a summer program before
---	--

3. How did you learn about this summer program? (check any that apply)
- My family
 - My school
 - My friends
 - The summer program invited me
 - Other: _____

<p>4. About how many weeks have you been at this summer program so far?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1-2 weeks• 3-4 weeks• 5 or more weeks	<p>5. What grade would you give the summer program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A• B• C• D• F
---	---

<p>6. How much <u>fun</u> did you have at the summer program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A lot• Some• A little• None	<p>7. If you could come to this summer program again next summer, would you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes• Maybe• No
--	---

8. How do you feel about going back to school? (please choose one)



9. How much did you like these parts of the summer program?

	Not very much	Somewhat	A lot!	(not part of camp)
Arts & Crafts activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Acting, Music, or Dance activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computer or Technology activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning activities (math, reading)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food, drink, and snacks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Counselors, teachers, and adults	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Free time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Field trips	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outdoor activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. At your summer program...

	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Once in a while	Never
Students were nice to each other.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I learned new things.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If some students were acting up, an adult did something about it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kids were given lots of choices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The rules were too strict.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. Has the summer program gotten you excited to go back to school?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Probably not
- Definitely not

12. What did you like **most** and **least** about this summer program?

Most

Least

13. What is your gender? (for example, male, female, non-binary)

14. What is your race or ethnicity? (check any that apply)

- White
- Hispanic/Latino
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other: _____

END OF SURVEY

Thank you!

Appendix B

Site Supervisor Survey (Print Version)

CSDE Summer 2021 Enrichment Site Supervisor Survey and Final Report

Q1 **Summer Enrichment Program: Final Report Survey**

This survey of site supervisors serves as the Final Report of the State of Connecticut's AccelerateCT Summer Enrichment grants program. Please answer the questions as accurately as possible. The information collected will be used to evaluate the initiative and to inform future programming.

If you are responsible for more than one program, please complete a separate survey for each. Please complete the survey by Sept 13.

Q2 Organization Name _____

Q3 Program Name _____

Q4 Your Name and Role:

Your Name _____

Your Program Role/Title _____

Q5 Summer Enrichment Grant Type

Expansion

Innovation

Q6 Total Students *Planned* to be Served in Summer 2021 _____

Q7 Total Students Served in Summer 2021 _____

Q8 Total Students Receiving Scholarships/Fee Waivers _____

Q9 Total Grant Awarded (\$): _____

Q10 Total Grant Expended (\$): _____

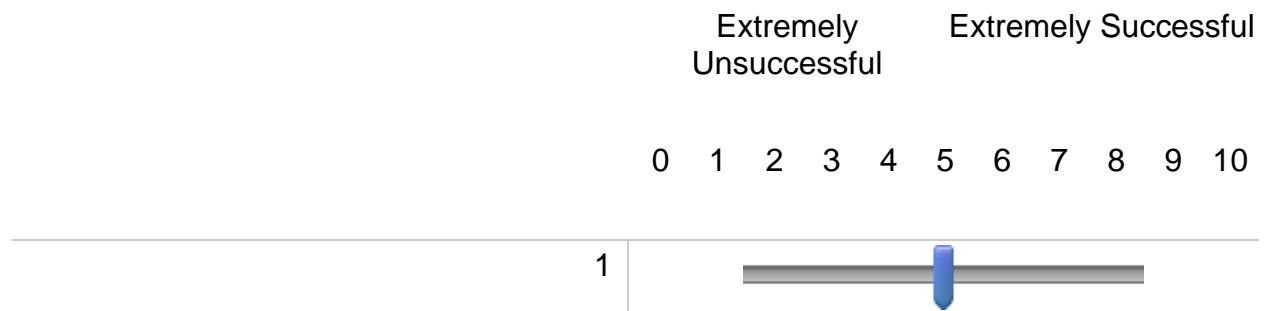


Q11 If total grant expenditures differ from total grant awarded by more than 10 percent, please explain the reason for the budget variance.

Q12 How many total students did your program serve last year, in 2020?

- Total number of 2020 students: _____
- N/A we did not operate in summer 2020

Q13 How would you rate the success of your program in achieving your goals of the Summer Enrichment Grant Program? (scale of 1-10 with 1 being extremely unsuccessful and 10 being extremely successful)



Q14 Please provide a rationale for your rating above. What were at least three notable successes of your summer enrichment grant program?

- success #1 _____
- success #2 _____
- success #3 _____

Q15 What challenges, if any, did your summer enrichment grant program encounter?

Q16 How did you use the Summer Enrichment funds this summer? [check all that apply]

- New student activities

- Hiring more staff
- Purchasing additional materials
- Staff training
- Other: _____

Q17 Please indicate the extent to which these activities were part of your summer program

	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot
Arts & Crafts activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sports	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Acting, Music, or Dance activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Computer or Technology activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning activities (e.g., math, reading)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Free time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Field trips	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Outdoor activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q18 What kinds of resources do you think would help you improve student participation and engagement in the future?

Q19 Overall, how would you rate your staff's preparation?

- More than adequate
- Adequate
- Borderline adequate
- Inadequate

Q20 How would you estimate the weekly attendance levels among your campers?
(During any given week, what % of students attended who were registered)

- 90%-100%
- 80%-90%
- 70%-80%
- 60%-70%
- 50%-60%

Q21 What would you say are some of the reasons for missed attendance? (check all that apply)

- transportation
- family funds
- family work obligations
- student work obligations
- family vacations
- COVID-related
- unknown reasons
- Other: _____

Q22 How effective was your program in building students' preparation and/or enthusiasm for returning to school?

- Extremely effective
- Very effective
- Moderately effective

- Slightly effective
- Not effective at all
- This was not a program priority

Skip To: Q24 If How effective was your program in building students' preparation and/or enthusiasm for returning... = This was not a program priority

Q23 What contributed most to students' preparation and/or enthusiasm for returning to school? (check only those that apply)

- Staff relationship with students
- Arts & Crafts activities
- Sports
- Acting, Music, or Dance activities
- Computer or Technology activities
- Learning activities (math, reading)
- Free time
- Field trips
- Outdoor activities

Q24 How did COVID-19 affect your program? (check any that apply)

- Little to no effect
- Some students had to quarantine and could not attend the program during that time
- Some staff had to quarantine and could not work during that time
- Had to close camp for less than a week
- Had to close camp for more than a week
- Other: _____

Q25 How, if at all, will the innovation/expansion you implemented this summer inform your program in the future?

Q26 Finally, what improvements would you suggest to the State of Connecticut if the Summer Enrichment grant program were to continue next summer?



Appendix C

Student Focus Group Protocol

Student Focus Group Interview Protocol

Date:

Interviewer:

Program:

Number of students Interviewed:

Grades/Ages of students:

(Note, assign interviewees numbers or initials. Do not write down names on your notes.)

Hello. Thank you for talking with me today. Before we start, you can you tell me your **first name only** and age?

My name is _____. I am from the University of Connecticut and I am part of a team evaluating the Summer Enrichment programs in Connecticut. I am going to ask you a few questions about your experiences in the program. The information you share will be used to help improve/make better summer programs in the future.

I am recording our conversation. I won't share the recording with anyone but other people on our evaluation team. We just want to make sure we get down what you actually say. I will also be taking notes. I will not use your names in my notes. I will not tell anyone at the program what you say in this interview. When we write the evaluation reports, we will not use anyone's real name. We will not identify you, the staff, or the program in any reports.

Since this is a group interview, you will know what each other says. Please don't share what is said in our interview with other people out of respect to yourself and to each other.

Now I am going to ask you a few questions. There's no set order of who can answer. In order to make sure everyone can respond to each question, I may call on you.

Everyone has different opinions. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. What has been your favorite activity or part of the summer program? Tell me what the activity was and then tell me why it was your favorite (Possible probes: Can you describe that a bit more? Why did you like that so much? If a student disagrees with another student's answer you can probe why that student didn't

like that activity. Just reinforce that everyone has different opinions and perspectives.)

2. If you were to attend this program again, what changes, if any, would you make to make the program more fun or more interesting for you.
3. One goal of the summer initiative was to help kids get ready for and excited about going back to school. Did the program get you ready for and/or excited about going back to school in the fall? If so, what about the program did that for you? (Probe for specific examples if relevant.)
4. Have any of you attended a summer program before? What kind of program did you attend? Did you like this program better, less than or about the same as that program? Why?
5. Did any of you attend this summer program before? If so, has there been anything different this year about the program? If so, please describe what's been different. Did that make the program better for you? (Probe for specific examples.)

Thank you, again, for talking with me. What you shared will help to improve summer programming in the future.

Appendix D

Staff Focus Group Protocol

Staff Focus Group Interview Protocol

Date:

Interviewer:

Program:

Number of Staff Interviewed:

Positions of staff:

(Note, assign interviewees numbers or initials. Do not write down names on your notes.)

Hello, my name is _____. I am from the University of Connecticut and am part of a team evaluating the Summer Enrichment programs that have received funds from the the State of Connecticut this summer. Thank you for speaking with me/us today.

Why don't we go around and just do quick introductions. Please let me know your name and your position in the program this summer.

Thanks again for speaking with me today. As I said, I'm part of a team evaluating the Summer Enrichment programs for the State of Connecticut. The goal of the evaluation is to identify what activities and program features contribute to children and youth's engagement, social and emotional well-being, and enthusiasm for returning to school in the fall. The information will be used to inform future programs.

I am going to ask you a few questions. There's no set order to who responds. I will make sure that each of you has an opportunity to respond to each question. I hope you will answer each question, but if you do not want to answer a particular question you do not have to. You can say "pass" or something like that.

I do want you to know that I am recording our conversation. I won't share the recording with anyone in the program or outside of the evaluation team. We want to make sure we get down what you say accurately. I will also be taking notes. I will not talk about what you shared in this interview with anyone here at the program. When we write the evaluation report, we will not use real names or identify you, the program, or the supervisors. Since this is a focus group, you will each know what each other says. Please do not share what is said in our conversation out of respect to yourself and to each other.

1. First question, please tell me what you think has been the most successful activity or part of the summer program and why you think it was successful. (Possible probes: Can you describe that a bit more? Why do you think it was successful?)
2. One goal of the summer initiative was to support students' social and emotional well-being after the past year of COVID related challenges. How do you think the program has done that, if you think it has? (Probes: For example, How do you think it helped students create relationships? How did it help students feel more confident or deal with any anxiety or concerns?)
3. Another goal of the summer initiative was to get kids enthusiastic about going back to school. How do you think the program helped to do that, if it did? (Probe for specific examples if relevant.)
4. Every program faces some challenges. What has been challenging this summer and why do you think it was challenging (Possible probes: Can you describe that a bit more? What made it challenging?)
5. Have any of you worked in this program before? If so, what, if anything, was different this summer? Please think about the activities you provided students, the number of staff, the number of students. You might also think about if you saw any difference in the students' participation, interactions or behaviors.

IF time: If you were to work in the program again next summer, what, if any changes would you make and why?

6. Is there anything else you think I should know about the program?
7. Do you have any questions of me?

Thank you, again, for talking with me. What you shared will help us identify recommendations for improving summer programming in the future.



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