NORTH CAROLINA
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction

Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

Voices and Context from the Summer Programming Field.

Findings from the Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration UNC-Qualitative Research Partnerships

HB82 SL 2021-7, HB196 SL 2021-23

Date Due: April 2023
DPI Chronological Schedule, 2022-2023

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION VISION: Every public school student in North Carolina will be empowered to accept academic challenges, prepared to pursue their chosen path after graduating high school, and encouraged to become lifelong learners with the capacity to engage in a globally-collaborative society.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MISSION: The mission of the North Carolina State Board of Education is to use its constitutional authority to guard and maintain the right of a sound, basic education for every child in North Carolina Public Schools.

ERIC DAVIS
Chair: Charlotte – At-Large

JILL CAMNITZ
Greenville – Northeast Region

JOHN BLACKBURN
Linville – Northwest Region

ALAN DUNCAN
Vice Chair: Greensboro – Piedmont-Triad Region

REGINALD KENAN
Rose Hill – Southeast Region

DONNA TIPTON-ROGERS
Brasstown – Western Region

MARK ROBINSON
Lieutenant Governor: High Point – Ex Officio

AMY WHITE
Garner – North Central Region

J. WENDELL HALL
Ahoskie – At-Large

DALE FOLWELL
State Treasurer: Raleigh – Ex Officio

OLIVIA OXENDINE
Lumberton – Sandhills Region

JAMES FORD
At-Large

CATHERINE TRUITT
Superintendent & Secretary to the Board: Cary

VACANT
Southwest Region

NC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Catherine Truitt, State Superintendent :: 301 N. Wilmington Street :: Raleigh, North Carolina 27601-2825

In compliance with federal law, the NC Department of Public Instruction administers all state-operated educational programs, employment activities and admissions without discrimination because of race, religion, national or ethnic origin, color, age, military service, disability, or gender, except where exemption is appropriate and allowed by law.

Inquiries or complaints regarding discrimination issues should be directed to:
Thomas Tomberlin, Director of Educator Recruitment and Support, NCDPI
6301 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-6301 / Phone: (984) 236-2114 / Fax: (984) 236-2099

Visit us on the Web: www.dpi.nc.gov

0422

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION 2
NC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION 2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 6
INTRODUCTION 10
Background 11
Literature Overview: Voluntary Summer Learning Programs 13
DEFINITIONS 21
General Background 21
Methodology and Analysis 25
Demographic and Framework 28
North Carolina State University (FI) and Duke University (SSRI) 31
Purpose of research 31
Program Literature and Context 32
Research Questions 35
Methods 36
Design Overview 36
Data Collection 37
Analysis 39
Findings 40
Discussion 66
Conclusion 71
References 74
Appendices 76
University of North Carolina at Greensboro SERVE Center 78
Purpose of research 78
Program Literature and Context 78
Purpose of Study 79
Research Questions 80
Methods 80
Design Overview 80
Data Collected 81
Selection and Recruitment of PSUs 81
Sources of Data 82
Data Collection Procedures 83

Analysis 84
Findings 86
Discussion 101
Conclusion 104
References 106
Appendices 108
Educational Policy Initiative at Chapel Hill (EPIC) 128
Purpose of research 128
Program Literature and Context 128
Research Questions 129
Methods 130
Design Overview 130
Data Collection 130
Selection and Recruitment of PSU's 131
Sources of Data 132
Analysis 133
Findings 135
Discussion 153
Conclusion 154
Appendices 156
East Carolina University Rural Education Institute 171
Purpose of Research 171
Program Literature and Context 172
Research Questions 175
Methods 175
Design Overview 175
Data Collection 177
Selection and Recruitment of PSU's 177
Data Collection Procedures 178
Analysis 180
Findings 183
Discussion 191
Conclusion 194
References 196

Appendices 199
References 223
RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP BIOGRAPHIES 227

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our work in North Carolina for summer learning and its programming continues to evolve. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) has partnered with four University of North Carolina System (UNC System) institutions to focus on evidence-based practices from the field so that the structures around recovery and acceleration remain a consistent priority for students across the state. These UNC System partnerships have utilized qualitative methods of inquiry to yield a deeper understanding of the context, perspectives, and voices of the:

- **Summer Extension**: Legislated school extension learning recovery and enrichment program to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 on at-risk students (*HB 82/ SL2021-7*). This program required LEA's and Charter schools to develop a school extension learning recovery and enrichment program that existed outside of the instructional calendar (2020-2021 academic year) and concluded prior to the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year.

- **Summer Bridge:** This grant program (*PRC 176*) funded high-quality, evidence-based learning and enrichment programs in the summer to address the academic impact of lost instructional time and respond to the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of students. This program was designed for students deemed "at-risk" or those the PSU has demonstrated to have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. (NCDPI, n.d.)

- **Career Accelerator Programs**: This grant program (*PRC 177*) funded high-quality, evidence-based learning and workforce-aligned summer programs for students deemed "at-risk" or those the PSU, identify as having been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. (NCDPI, n.d.)

North Carolina State University Friday Institute/Duke University Social Science Research Institute (FI/Duke), Education Policy Initiative at Chapel Hill (EPIC), UNC-Greensboro (SERVE), and East Carolina University Rural Education Institute (REI) embarked on a year-long evaluation journey using case studies to examine the impact and implementation of summer learning programs across the eight State Board of Education (SBE) regions in North

Carolina. This research presents a unique opportunity for our state. These studies rely on an additional mechanism to fully understand the scope and context of the impact of students' loss of instructional time (*Impact Analysis of Student Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic*[1]) as well as providing actionable steps and leverage promising practices that enhance the design of these summer learning opportunities.

This qualitative analysis presented in this report is composed of a single, mixed method, and multi-case studies that explore the themes that emerged within the scope of each research team's evaluation across their assigned SBE regions. These narratives additionally include tables, graphics, images, and abbreviated vignettes dependent on the methodology used in these studies.

The Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration (OLR) identified common themes from across these qualitative research partnerships with a focus on eliminating opportunity gaps:

Themes for Summer Learning Extension (HB 82) (FI/Duke, ECU, and EPIC)

- There was a focus on recovery strategies to support student engagement, strengthening of skills, and the unique credit needs of students.
- Summer learning extension programs encouraged connection, camaraderie, and a culture of support for students, families, and staff.
- Even though there were specific requirements for the program format, academic instruction, enrichment, and SEL component, there was autonomy to how sites implemented their programs to address the student and staff needs tied to summer learning extension opportunities.
- Understanding the needs of students was a priority and focus for summer learning extension programs. This included diagnosing their academic/ readiness skills, and addressing the overall safety (COVID), mental health and wellness, nutritional access, and social-emotional support for students.
- Instructional programs were enhanced through the incorporation of small class sizes. This also encouraged student re-engagement and minimized classroom disruptions (discipline).

[1] https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/NCSBE/2022/03/02/file_attachments/2091616/JLEOC%20Report%20HB196.%20Impact%20on%20Lost%20Instructional%20Time%20for%20SBE%20March.pdf

- There were barriers to implementation for this type of summer learning opportunity that impacted students and staff.

Themes for Summer Bridge Academy (Program Report Code 176) (FI//Duke, ECU, and EPIC)

- There was a continuum of academic and non-academic outcomes exemplified within summer bridge programs.
- Administration, preliminary planning, and overall structure of summer bridge opportunities were key to the implementation and impact of programs.
- Districts made intentional efforts to strengthen communication with parents and enhance family support.
- There were barriers to implementation for this type of summer learning opportunity that impacted students and staff.

Themes for Summer Career Accelerator Program (Program Report Code 177) (EPIC and UNC-G)

- Programs presented a variety of career opportunities for students within their schools and the broader community.
- Community partnerships were explored and strengthened during summer career accelerator programs.
- Students were re-engaged in school through their participation in this program.
- Students were exposed to educational partnerships and opportunities that added to their workforce development, personal knowledge, and career interests.
- There was flexibility with programming, such that students were exposed to new and diverse experiences not traditionally offered during the school year.
- Timing, coordination, and consistency of district expectations presented challenges for preparation and programming.

Implications for Policy and Promising Practices:

- ***Increase support for fiscal and human resources tied to summer learning***. This was shown as a resurfacing theme for all studies and had implications for staff shortages,

recruitment of highly qualified staff, transportation & technology access, and promoting educational equity.

- ***Program length and timing*** the start and end date, duration, length of the day, communication, and overall state and district guidance, matter for the organizational design of summer learning programs. There are several implications for teacher/administrator burnout, academic teaching assignments, student attendance, course/enrichment offerings, and overall targeting/ enrollment efforts for these types of programs.
- ***Integrate mental health support*** into the design for all academic planning.
- ***Extend practices from summer learning throughout the school year*** (i.e. additional time for relationship building, and recruitment strategies) as leverage for student buy-in to academic support.
- ***Create networks of teacher support: professional learning***, collaborative sharing across district sites, curriculum and instruction resources, and materials. This also includes fostering educator input, autonomy, and flexibility for their curriculum.
- ***Relationship building, family, and community engagement*** helped with fostering trust between students and peers, students and staff, and families. It was viewed as a catalyst for improving academic outcomes for students.

Based on these findings, state and local leaders, policymakers, and lawmakers can better understand the context of summer learning programs and interventions across the state and identify promising practices that will enhance and support the needs of our students across the state.

The following sections provide more detail about the overview of individual research team projects. This includes the data sources used, analysis methods, findings, and interpretation of results. Key considerations and actionable recommendations for the Summer Bridge, Summer Extension, and Career Accelerator programs have also been included in each report. References and appendices can be found directly under each individual research team's report.

INTRODUCTION

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be felt across the educational landscape. Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) supported state educational agencies' emergency relief to address the impact that COVID-19 has had and continues to have on elementary and secondary schools across the nation (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). In North Carolina, the ESSER I state reserve supported an initial plan to administer grants and contracts to address emergency-related priorities. The ESSER II state reserve totaled approximately $62 million and was used for disease mitigation and to address learning loss with summer programming (National Conference of State Legislatures, para 4, 2022). The ESSER III state reserve, about $350 million, is focused on teacher retention and learning recovery programming, including summer learning and enrichment options for at-risk students.

In response to mitigating the impacts of COVID on at-risk students, Senate Bills HB 82[2], and HB 96[3] were introduced and passed during the 2020-21 school year in North Carolina. Summer Extension/ Bridge and Career Accelerator programs were implemented across public school units as directed by these bills (PRC's 177 and 176). The goals of these grant programs were to fund high-quality, evidence-based learning and enrichment programs (which include workforce opportunities) in the summer to address the academic impact of lost instructional time and respond to the educational, social, emotional, and mental health needs of students in grades K-12.

Aligned with Superintendent Truitt's first iteration and vision of Operation Polaris[4], the Office of Learning Recovery (OLR) was created in March 2021 at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and interfaced with the District and School Transformation and additional programmatic divisions at the agency. Most recently, with the expansion of this vision of Operation Polaris (2.0), the mission of the OLR "is to serve Public School Units (PSUs) by providing the information and support needed to make evidence-based

[2] https://www.ncleg.gov/Sessions/2021/Bills/House/PDF/H82v7.pdf
[3] https://www.ncleg.gov/Sessions/2021/Bills/House/PDF/H96v6.pdf
[4] https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/operation-polaris#Tab-10-4943

decisions to mitigate the impact of lost instructional time and accelerate learning for all students" (NCDPI, 2023, p. 5).

The OLR addresses the impacts of the COVID pandemic on learning loss, associated lost instructional time, and the overall interruption of services within North Carolina. The Office of Learning Recovery's work around research and evaluation is central to understanding the successful implementation of such programs. With the establishment of the OLR, Superintendent Truitt sought to develop a research and evaluation unit within the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and to engage various UNC system research partnerships. In facilitating these partnerships, NCDPI has leveraged qualitative research studies to explore students, teachers, and administrative voices within the context of these programs.

In January 2022, OLR used ESSER II monies to partner with four UNC System university partners to support this work to evaluate the impact of PRC's 177 and 176 utilizing qualitative inquiry[5]. These four UNC System partnerships include North Carolina State University Friday Institute/Duke University Social Science Research Institute (FI/Duke), Education Policy Initiative at Chapel Hill (EPIC), UNC-Greensboro (SERVE), and East Carolina University Rural Education Institute (REI).

The facilitation of these partnerships and the qualitative methodological approach used in examining the contexts of summer learning programs has positioned North Carolina as a national leader within the field. This report provides the key findings, narratives, and context on the implementation, and impact of summer learning programs in North Carolina.

BACKGROUND

The North Carolina General Assembly passed SL2021-7 School Extension and Recovery[6] on April 29, 2021. This law required PSUs to implement a school extension and enrichment program for at-risk students as defined in NC General Statute[7]. Table 1 shows Summer 2021 demographics by region.

[5] https://www.dpi.nc.gov/media/13077/download?attachment
[6] https://ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/SessionLaws/HTML/2021-2022/SL2021-7.html
[7] https://www.ncleg.net/enactedlegislation/statutes/html/bysection/chapter_115c/gs_115c-105.41.html

Table 1

Summer 2021 Demographics by Region

SBE Region	Male	Asian	Black	Hispanic	American Indian	Multiracial	White	Free-reduced price lunch	Multilingual	Academically intellectually gifted	Students with disabilities
State	54.1	2.5	37.0	25.5	1.5	5.1	28.5	56.6	15.0	2.6	21.4
North Central	54.6	2.0	39.7	32.2	0.4	4.6	21.0	58.2	18.8	2.3	22.5
Northeast	53.3	0.6	59.6	12.5	0.4	5.1	21.8	62.3	6.7	2.3	19.1
Northwest	53.5	3.2	7.9	24.0	0.1	6.5	58.3	63.1	15.6	1.5	27.2
Piedmont Triad	54.3	3.1	36.4	25.1	0.3	5.0	30.1	57.9	15.5	3.4	22.8
Sandhills	54.1	0.7	39.4	23.1	10.4	6.0	20.5	61.6	10.5	2.2	19.9
Southeast	53.8	1.4	32.8	27.2	0.4	5.9	32.1	51.6	15.3	2.6	20.3
Southwest	54.1	4.5	43.2	24.1	0.2	4.3	23.7	50.2	15.7	3.2	19.0
Western	54.1	1.0	8.9	22.6	1.8	5.3	60.4	57.6	12.4	2.1	24.2

Note: Table reflects percentage of students

OLR evaluated PSU program proposals with guidelines developed by the OLR and other DPI staff [8]. With the support of the State Board of Education, State Superintendent Truitt, and OLR; ESSER II funding was identified to support the overall evaluation of these types of summer learning opportunities utilizing a qualitative research approach.

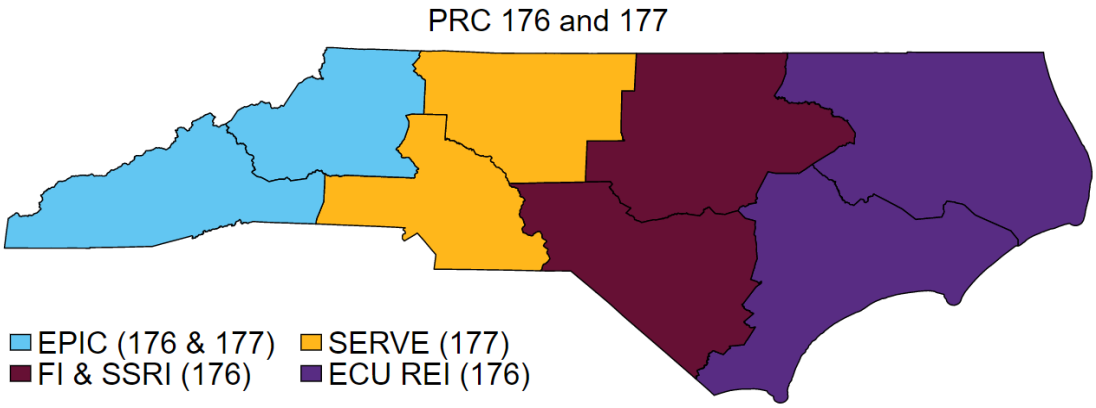
Evaluating student performance outcomes for summer learning program opportunities is a priority for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. OLR continues to work with SBE regions to identify promising practices[9] as well as programs that are being implemented in the state that address the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of students. These qualitative studies in North Carolina offer a unique and in-depth understanding of the perspectives, voices, and context of summer learning programs. These studies enhance the work of scaling impactful initiatives and innovative practices for North Carolina students.

The UNC System research partnerships that led these summer learning program evaluations were assigned by regions throughout North Carolina (Figure 1).

[8] https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OCFhAP6rnFbtuokBmv2Uws5ghUvrapG4/view
[9] https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/operation-polaris/office-innovation/promising-practices-clearinghouse

Figure 1

SBE Regions of UNC System Research Partnerships



Note: Summer Extension Programs (HB 82): EPIC, FI/SSRI, ECU

The programmatic aspects of these summer opportunities for students are intended to maximize learning outcomes for students. Identifying and utilizing existing data sources from the UNC System qualitative research partnerships has leveraged, extended, and scaled the impact of this topic amongst various stakeholders. Furthermore, the unique focus on qualitative research within these regions created a platform to understand different perspectives on approaches, methodologies, and evidence-based policy decision-making in the future.

These qualitative research partnerships explored the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of the summer bridge and career accelerator programs. The focus of these studies was centered on the implementation, impact, improvement, perspectives, and experiences of the learning recovery programs summer bridge, school extension, and/or the career accelerator.

Based on these findings, NCDPI will be able to understand how to target, design, and support: student re-engagement, academic recovery, and acceleration through the evaluation of these types of summer learning opportunities.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW: VOLUNTARY SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS

During the summer months, students across North Carolina are invited to participate in *voluntary learning programs* that will focus not only on academic recovery but also on

enrichment opportunities. Evidence-based recommendations that support the development of these types of programs are essential to their consistency and success. There are several pivotal research studies that indicate voluntary summer programs play a significant role in minimizing the impact of learning loss (McCombs et al., 2011). Within the literature, these voluntary summer programs share common factors that make them effective (Hall et al., 2017; McEachin et al., 2018). The literature demonstrates that summer learning programs with these common characteristics lead to maximized positive outcomes for youth.

- A minimum of 5-6 weeks of full-day programming with three to four hours of academics per day.
- A structure that ensured sufficient and maximize time on task.
- Small class sizes with low ratios of students to adults (less than 15 students per adult).
- Program curriculum that is well-aligned with the academic year.
- Consistent student attendance.

(Augustine et al., 2014; Bell & Carrillo, 2007; McCombs et al., 2011, 2014; McLaughlin, 2009; Terzian et al., 2009).

Voluntary summer programs have also been shown to mitigate the achievement gap between students from low-income and higher-income households. The National Learning Study (2016) evaluated the effectiveness of voluntary, district-led summer learning programs offered at no cost to low-income urban elementary students. This six-year study found that programs had these standard features: transportation, meals (at no charge, provided at least five days a week), three scheduled academics a day, and small classes taught by certified teachers. Successful summer learning program structures have duration, class size, attendance, personnel, enrichment, and academic curriculum as common characteristics.

Initial findings released from the National Summer Learning & Enrichment Study a multi-method evaluation that examined lessons about Summer 2021 and intentions for Summer 2022 from both local (LEA) and state (SEA) education agencies across the country (Davis et.al, 2022). This study showed that LEA's recommended involving stakeholders, making learning engaging, and planning early for these types of summer learning opportunities. Additionally, funding, personnel allotment, and high dosage tutoring support are critical mechanisms for

practitioners and policymakers to consider in serving students with the highest needs within these summer programs (McCombs & Augustine, 2021).

Nevertheless, within these programs' structures, there were variations in the instructional quality across sites. The challenges around program quality and consistent attendance (approximately 75 percent of the time) led to improved outcomes in mathematics in the following spring, and high attendees in the second summer benefited in their social and emotional outcomes (Augustine et al., 2016). Browne (2019) adds statistically significant outcomes for students who frequently attended this program in math and reading. Even more so, frequent attenders in 2014 outperformed students not assigned to a program in both math and ELA on both fall tests and later in the spring (p. 12).

McEachin et al. (2018) research on *Summer Effective Programming* found that to maximize the benefit of academic experiences (especially in literacy), summer learning programs should align instruction to school year activities and be tightly focused on addressing needs with high-quality instruction. It was noted that program quality is a common characteristic of successful summer programming. This research reiterated the importance of hiring teachers with grade-level and subject-matter experience and (when possible) familiarity with students, was essential. Their research shows that to maintain high-quality instruction: anchoring literacy programs in an evidence-based curriculum, providing professional development to teachers, tying small group instruction explicitly to learning goals, providing teachers with instructional support (i.e., coaching), and the school's site culture (orderly environment) are additional factors that make summer learning effective. Districts need to consider teacher preparation for instructional planning and transition time between the summer programs' start and end dates (Schwartz et al., 2018).

A follow-up longitudinal study of the National Summer Learning Project (NSLP), five school districts in Boston, Dallas, Duval County, Pittsburgh, and Rochester expanded opportunities for low-income students in urban settings (McCombs et al.,2020). Phase III of this research examined the long-range effects of summer programming within three academic years after the initial interventions had ended. According to this research, after the second summer of programming, academic benefits for attendees decreased in magnitude and were not statistically significant. However, when benchmarked against typical achievement gains at the same grade level, they remained large enough to be educationally meaningful (pp. 16-18). Several of the

recommendations focused on identifying the productive use of academic time such as offering at least five weeks of programming with at least three hours of academic instruction per day. District leadership and administrators are encouraged to examine the scheduling and use of academic time in their summer programs.

Summer learning program effectiveness is enhanced by high-quality instruction. This is a critical component of the structure of voluntary summer programs. Another study that focused on academic time conducted by Lynch et al. (2021) in their meta-analysis of a summer achievement program showed that achievement gaps in math were closed for children in lower-income areas. More time (hours) spent on math programs during the day, previewing math content (instead of remediation), and a specific math program focus were characteristics of these programs that impact effect size. Students involved in this program also had significant socio-emotional and behavioral outcomes.

There is also a focus within the literature on recommendations that decision-makers need to develop and invest in programs only if they are intentionally designed to meet specific needs, are of sufficient dosage, and can be well implemented. A recent landscape analysis conducted by the Wallace Foundation focused on the additional main sources to understand the systems of support for, and decision-making about, high-quality summer learning for school districts (Davis et.al, 2022). It was found in this study that not only do community partners play an essential role in supporting district-led programs but if they are well-integrated, they provide a system of support for summer learning. Also, the structure of federal and, in some instances, the state supports for summer learning programs allowed district leaders to independently develop their programs to suit local contexts and their needs. This also included blending funding streams to address their summer learning opportunities.

An additional study conducted by RAND (2019) examined the effectiveness of summer programs for K-12 students so that practitioners, funders, and policymakers can make evidence-based investments. The evidence in this report used ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) criteria Tier I, Tier II, Tier III, and subsequent federal requirements. Their research evaluated summer programs serving K-12 students, evidence that they met ESSA Tier I-III standards, and the characteristics of these programs. The researchers add that program effectiveness should be focused on students' outcomes and needs. The recommendations in this research also show the need for a continuous evaluation of math, science, social and emotional well-being/ physical

health, and career preparation. This is an additional consideration, especially in the design of enrichment opportunities for summer learning programming.

Research has shown that well-designed enrichment opportunities mitigate opportunity gaps for low-income students, promote consistent attendance, and enhance their socio-emotional and personal development (Schwartz et al.,2018). An additional study through the National Institute on Out of School Time identified a need for understanding the qualities and practices associated with successful and effective programming for summer learning in 12 different school districts across Massachusetts and Rhode Island (Hall et al., 2017). Four specific program components emerged in their summer learning research. These include project-based learning, high academic and enrichment experiences integration, extensive partnering between schools and local organizations, and high-quality teaching. It was recommended that summer programming aligns with other youth development areas (i.e., bullying, media literacy, and civic engagement).

The design and implementation of these programs are critical to their overall effectiveness (SCORE, 2022). The programmatic work tied to summer learning opportunities accelerates the need for districts to integrate these design principles based on evidence-based recommendations. The synthesis of literature presents these takeaways for district and school leaders to consider as they continue to coordinate and design their summer programs.

OLR identified common themes from across these qualitative research partnerships with a focus on eliminating opportunity gaps:

Themes for Summer Learning Extension (HB 82) (FI/Duke, ECU, and EPIC)

- There was a focus on recovery strategies to support student engagement, strengthening of skills, and the unique credit needs of students.
- Summer learning extension programs encouraged connection, camaraderie, and a culture of support for students, families, and staff.
- Even though there were specific requirements for the program format, academic instruction, enrichment, and SEL component, there was autonomy to how sites implemented their programs to address the student and staff needs tied to summer learning extension opportunities.
- Understanding the needs of students was a priority and focus for summer learning extension programs. This included diagnosing their academic/ readiness skills, and

addressing the overall safety (COVID), mental health and wellness, nutritional access, and social-emotional support for students.

- Instructional programs were enhanced through the incorporation of small class sizes. This also encouraged student re-engagement and minimized classroom disruptions (discipline).
- There were barriers to implementation for this type of summer learning opportunity that impacted students and staff.

Themes for Summer Bridge Academy (Program Report Code 176) (FI//Duke, ECU, and EPIC)

- There was a continuum of academic and non-academic outcomes exemplified within summer bridge programs.
- Administration, preliminary planning, and overall structure of summer bridge opportunities were key to the implementation and impact of programs.
- Districts made intentional efforts to strengthen communication with parents and enhance family support.
- There were barriers to implementation for this type of summer learning opportunity that impacted students and staff.

Themes for Summer Career Accelerator Program (Program Report Code 177) (EPIC and UNC-G)

- Programs presented a variety of career opportunities for students within their schools and the broader community.
- Community partnerships were explored and strengthened during summer career accelerator programs.
- Students were re-engaged in school through their participation in this program.
- Students were exposed to educational partnerships and opportunities that added to their workforce development, personal knowledge, and career interests.
- There was flexibility with programming, such that students were exposed to new and diverse experiences not traditionally offered during the school year.

- Timing, coordination, and consistency of district expectations presented challenges for preparation and programming.

Implications for Policy and Promising Practices:

- ***Increase support for fiscal and human resources tied to summer learning***. This was shown as a resurfacing theme for all studies and had implications for staff shortages, recruitment of highly qualified staff, transportation & technology access, and promoting educational equity.
- ***Program length and timing*** the start and end date, duration, length of the day, communication, and overall state and district guidance, matter for the organizational design of summer learning programs. There are several implications for teacher/administrator burnout, academic teaching assignments, student attendance, course/enrichment offerings, and overall targeting/ enrollment efforts for these types of programs.
- ***Integrate mental health support*** into the design for all academic planning.
- ***Extend practices from summer learning throughout the school year*** (i.e. additional time for relationship building, and recruitment strategies) as leverage for student buy-in to academic support.
- ***Create networks of teacher support: professional learning***, collaborative sharing across district sites, curriculum and instruction resources, and materials. This also includes fostering educator input, autonomy, and flexibility for their curriculum.
- ***Relationship building, family, and community engagement*** helped with fostering trust between students and peers, students and staff, and families. It was viewed as a catalyst for improving academic outcomes for students.

Based on these findings, state and local leaders, policymakers, and lawmakers can better understand the context of summer learning programs and interventions across the state and identify promising practices that will enhance and support the needs of our students across the state.

The following sections provide more detail about the overview of individual research team projects. This qualitative analysis presented in this report is composed of a single, mixed

method, and multi-case studies that explore the themes that emerged within the scope of each research team's evaluation across their assigned SBE regions. These narratives additionally include tables, graphics, images, and abbreviated vignettes dependent on the methodology used in these studies. This includes the data sources used, analysis methods, findings, and interpretation of results. Key considerations and actionable recommendations for the Summer Bridge, Summer Extension, and Career Accelerator programs have also been included in each report. References and appendices can be found directly under each individual research team’s report.

DEFINITIONS

GENERAL BACKGROUND

American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA)
Signed into law on March 11, 2021, The American Rescue Plan Act, commonly known as ARP or
ARPA is a result of federal legislation designed to aid the country's response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. This relief package provided funding in several areas such as state and local aid, education, rental assistance, transit, stimulus payments for individuals, and other provisions (W.H. Gov, n.d).

At-Risk
A student at risk is a young person who, because of a wide range of individual, personal, financial, familial, social, behavioral, or academic circumstances, may experience school failure or other unwanted outcomes unless interventions occur to reduce the risk factors. Circumstances that often place students at risk may include but are not limited to:
not meeting state/local proficiency standards

- grade retention
- unidentified or inadequately addressed learning needs
- alienation from school life
- unchallenging curricula and/or instruction
- tardiness and/or poor school attendance
- negative peer influence
- unmanageable behavior
- substance abuse and other health risk behaviors
- abuse and neglect
- inadequate parental, family, and/or school support, and
- limited English proficiency

(NCSBE, 2000)

Career Preparation/Work-Based Learning
An educational strategy that provides students with real-life work experiences where they can apply academic and technical skills and develop employability skills. Examples of WBL include apprenticeship, business/industry, field trips, cooperative education, entrepreneurial experiences, internship, job shadowing, mentorship, school-based enterprise, and service learning. (NCDPI, n.d.)

Career and Technical Education
CTE provides high school students the opportunity to take courses in eight program areas so that they can explore interests and careers while building and strengthening their career-specific knowledge and skills. The eight education program areas are Agricultural; Business, Finance, and Information Technology; Career Development; Family and Consumer Sciences; Health Science; Marketing and Entrepreneurship; Technology Engineering and Design; and Trade and Industrial. (NCDPI, n.d.)

Competency-Based Assessments

A Competency-Based Assessment is a process or tool, where an assessor, using the benchmarks provided, determines levels of competence within a given standard. The unit of progression in a CBA is mastery of knowledge and skills and is learner-focused, not time focused. The CBA should be considered part of the learning process whereby identifying gaps are seen as learning opportunities to develop knowledge and skills. (Witty & Gaston, 2008)

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES)
Passed Congress on March 27th, 2020. This bill allotted $2.2 trillion to provide fast and direct economic aid to the American people negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Of that money, approximately $14 billion was given to the Office of Postsecondary Education as the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (USDE, 2021)

COVID-19 Pandemic
The disease was caused by SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that emerged in December 2019. In response to the pandemic, North Carolina *Orders* 117 *and 120* were issued by Governor Roy Cooper closing schools for the remainder of the school year. In response to school closures resulting from the Covid-19 public health emergency, Governor Roy Cooper directed the North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) in collaboration with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to develop a plan to ensure access to a quality education for students through the remainder of the school year; provide students with remote learning while school buildings are closed; and to ensure that all school employees – including janitors, bus drivers, teaching assistants and cafeteria workers – will work in safe environments and be paid. (Covid-19 Response for North Carolina Schools, 2020).

Credit Recovery
Term used to refer to a block of instruction that is less than the entirety of the Standard Course of Study for that course. Credit recovery delivers a subset of the Standard Course of Study or blueprint of the original course to specifically address deficiencies in a student's mastery of the course and target specific components of a course necessary for completion. SBE Policy CCRE-001, Section 7

Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER)
A $190 billion program created by the U.S. federal government's economic stimulus response bills, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP Act), passed by the 116th and 117th U.S. Congress. Originally created under the CARES Act to assist schools with creating healthy learning environments, return students to classrooms, and address local needs (OESE, n.d)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
Signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015. This bipartisan measure reauthorizes the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students (USDE, n.d.)

End-of-Course (EOC) Tests

These tests are designed to access the competencies defined by the Standard Course of Study for three mandated courses: NC Math I, English II, and Biology. Tests are taken during the last two weeks of school for students on a traditional calendar and the last week of the course for students on a block schedule. (NCDPI, n.d.)

End-of-Grade (EOG) Tests
These tests are in English language arts/reading and mathematics (grades 3-8) and science (grades 5 and 8) that are taken by students during the last ten days of the school year. (NCDPI, n.d.)

Grade Promotion
Refers to end-of-the-year, grade-to-grade advancement decisions made during the student's enrollment in a district. For these studies, a unique focus is on the high school promotion requirements set forth by the North Carolina State Board of Education: SBE Policy GRAD-004, SBE Policy CCRE-001, SBE Policy GRAD-008.

Grade Retention
A practice where children must repeat a grade level in school because they failed to meet required benchmarks or standards. (NC Legislation G.S.115C-218.85)

Local Education Agency (LEA)
Synonymous with a local school system or a local school district, indicating that a public board of education or other public authority maintains administrative control of the public schools in a city or county. (NCDPI, n.d.)

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI)
The NCDPI is led by the State Superintendent and administers the policies adopted by the State Board of Education. It offers instructional, financial, technological and personnel support to all public school systems in the stat**e.** (NCDPI, n.d.)

Post-Secondary Education
Level of education following successful completion of high school, it is a higher-level education, and it includes universities and colleges, also trade technical and professional schools. (myFutureNC, 2020)

Promising Practices
The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has researched, compiled, disseminated, and promoted practices with the goal of improving educational opportunities for all 1.5 million public school students in North Carolina. NCDPI has identified these effective practices that improve student performance related to the following strands: *Learning Recovery and Acceleration, Strengthening Literacy, Student Support Services, Reforming Accountability and Testing, Human Capital, and District and School Transformation*. These practices are housed as a clearinghouse and support teachers, administrators, district personnel and any other education advocates seeking strategies that have been proven successful. (NCDPI, n.d.)

Program Report Code (PRC)

A Program Report Code is the number assigned to a source of funding, if that funding is to be distributed to the PSUs via the allotment system for state and federal funds.

Public School Units (PSUs)
Public School Unit - Defined as a district, charter, or lab school.

School Extension Learning and Enrichment Program
Legislated school extension learning recovery and enrichment program to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 on at-risk students (*HB 82/ SL2021-7*). This program required LEA's and Charter schools to develop a school extension learning recovery and enrichment program that existed outside of the instructional calendar (2020-2021 academic year) and concluded prior to the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. Eligible students who participated in this program had access to either 150 hours or 30 days of instructional programming (instructional time does not include transitions, lunch, or physical activity). (NCDPI, n.d.)

Summer Bridge Academy
This grant program (*PRC 176*) funded high-quality, evidence-based learning and enrichment programs in the summer to address the academic impact of lost instructional time and respond to the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of students. This program was designed for students deemed "at-risk" or those the PSU has demonstrated to have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Approved programs were to provide a minimum of 50 hours of programming, no less than 25 of which will be dedicated to academic learning acceleration. (NCDPI, n.d.)

Summer Career Accelerator Programs (CAP)
This grant program (*PRC 177*) funded high-quality, evidence-based learning and workforce aligned summer programs for students deemed "at-risk" or those the PSU identify as having been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The program was designed to respond to the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of students in grades 6-12. A continuation of the Summer CAP program (*PRC 188*) will occur in Summer 2023. (NCDPI, n.d.)

Summer Learning Programs
Intervention programs that support accelerated learning during the summer months. They may also seek to promote positive youth development, college preparation, and career development outcomes. These types of programs typically take place over four to eight weeks and may be held at schools, summer campgrounds, places of worship, cultural centers, and at other youth-focused community-based organizations.

Academically focused summer learning programs differ from traditional summer school programs in that they: integrate recreational, cultural, and/or enrichment activities; blend remediation with enrichment activities and more advanced curricula; are attended by students of varied skill levels; often seek to build positive relationships among peers and with adults; are not mandatory; and usually take place over a full day. (Moore & Terzian, 2009)

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

A strengths-based, developmental process that begins at birth and evolves across the lifespan. It is the process through which children, adolescents, and adults learn skills to support healthy development and relationships. Social and Emotional Learning includes the following five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Weissberg et al., 2015)

United States Education Department (USED)
Provides federal assistance to state and local agencies primarily responsible for education and works to ensure both equal access (e.g., disadvantaged, disabled, at-risk students) and educational excellence. The department engages in four major types of activities: establishes policies related to federal education funds, administers distribution of funds and monitors their use; collects data and oversees research on America's schools; identifies major issues in education and focuses national attention on them; and enforces federal laws prohibiting discrimination in programs that receive federal funds (USED website).

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

Artifact Analysis
The systematic examination of the material, aesthetic, and interactive qualities of objects contribute to an understanding of their physical, social, and cultural contexts. The emphasis of artifact analysis is on the object itself. (Given, 2008)

CAQDAS (MAXQDA, ATLAS.ti, DEDOOSE)
Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software. A term that refers to a category of computer programs that have been developed specifically to aid researchers in completing a range of tasks associated with analysis and interpretation of qualitative data. (Allen, 2017)

Case Study
A contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context" (Yin, 2004)

Coding
A word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2016).

Deductive Coding
A qualitative coding approach to data that is "top-down" where a predetermined set of codes are used (from literature/ or a framework). (Saldana, 2021)

Document Analysis
Document analysis is a form of qualitative research that uses a systematic procedure to analyze documentary evidence and answer specific research questions. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008)

Field Notes

An ethnographic record, which is used to provide a description of the "culture" you're working with/ or in within a research study. These notes are most often taken during observations, but a researcher could also be used with other research methods. (Flick 2019)

Focus Groups
A qualitative data collection method where a researcher assembles a group of individuals to discuss a specific topic, aiming to draw from the complex personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of the participants through a moderated interaction. (Kitzinger, 1994)

Inductive Coding
A qualitative coding approach to data which is "bottom-up". Codes are derived from the data. Participants' words or *in vivo* codes are used to code the data. These codes are built and modified throughout the coding process. (Saldana, 2021)

Interviews
Form of data collection in qualitative research studies. There are two forms of interviews: Closed or Structured Interviews and Open-Ended Interviews. Open-ended interviews allow subjects to express themselves more freely and gain insight into events. (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994)

Inter-rater reliability (Cohen's κ):
A statistical measurement designed to establish agreement between two or more researchers coding qualitative data. Calculating IRR does not generate data used in results, but instead provides an artifact and a claim about the process of achieving researcher consensus. Common statistical calculations used in IRR include Cohen's kappa (κ), Krippendorff's alpha (α), Fleiss' kappa (κ), or correlational measures such as Pearson's r. (Hammer & Berland, 2014)

Interview Protocol
An instrument of inquiry in research that asks questions for specific information related to the aims of a study (Patton, 2014). These types of protocols also are utilized as an instrument to facilitate conversations about a particular topic (i.e., someone's life or certain ideas and experiences.

Iterative/ Iteration
A process in qualitative analysis that identifies a "loop-like" pattern of multiple rounds of revisiting data. As additional questions emerge, new connections are unearthed, and more complex formulations are developed along with a deepening understanding of the material. (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009)

Mixed Method
Type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e. g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.

Multiple-Case Design

Type of research design where more than one case is used to gather data from various sources and draw conclusions from the facts. They confirm or corroborate evidence which enhances the study's validity. (Yin, 1994)

Non-Participant Observations
In qualitative research a relatively unobtrusive qualitative research strategy for gathering primary data about some aspect of the social world without interacting directly with its participants. (Williams, 2008)

Observation Protocol
A method for recording observational notes in the field. Include in this protocol both "descriptive" (e.g., notes about what happened) and "reflective" (i.e., notes about your experiences, hunches, and learnings) notes. (Creswell & Baez, 2020)

Oral Histories
The systematic collection of living people's testimony about their own experiences. For these research studies, there are personal narratives of school leaders, parents, and students that openly discuss the impact of school extension programs on student reengagement and learning recovery. (Riessman, 2007)

Participant Observation
Participant observation is the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities. It provides the context for development of sampling guidelines and interview guides. (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002)

Photo Voice/ Elicitation
A visual research methodology used to bring awareness to a social phenomenon by providing individuals the opportunity to use personal photos to explore lived experiences. Photo images are used as a medium to connect to an experience. Through the analysis of photographs, differences in interpretation of the experiences are compared adding a richness to understanding the overall phenomenon (Appling, 2015).

Qualitative Inquiry
A research approach that explores the understanding and meanings for individuals or groups ascribed to a social human problem. This type of research involves emerging questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants setting; analyzing the data inductively, building from particulars to general themes; and making interpretations of the meaning of data. There are five types of qualitative inquiry: phenomenological research, grounded theory, ethnography, case study and narrative (Creswell, 2018).

Sampling
Sampling occurs when researchers examine a portion or sample of a larger group of potential participants and use the results to make statements that apply to this broader group or population. The extent to which the research findings can be generalized or applied to the larger group or

population is an indication of the external validity of the research design (Fritz & Morgan). *Purposeful and convenience* sampling are mostly used in qualitative research.

Single-Case Design
This type of research design is used to study unique or extreme cases, to confirm or challenge a theory, or for cases which the researcher did not have access to before. (Yin, 1994)

Site Visit
An evaluation activity intended to gather first-hand. information about a program, usually with the intent to incorporate. findings with other data collected. (Bachrach, 2004)

Surveys/Questionnaires
The collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions. (Check & Schutt, 2011)

Transcription
The action of providing a written account of spoken words. In qualitative research, transcription is conducted of individual or group interviews and written verbatim (exactly word-for- word).

DEMOGRAPHIC AND FRAMEWORK

Association for Career & Technical Education (ACTE)
Provides a tool for program self-evaluation that includes a framework with 12 elements of a high-quality secondary or postsecondary CTE program, ranging from standards alignment and integrated curriculum to data and program improvement (ACTE Quality CTE, 2021)

Community Learning Exchange (CLE)
Community Learning Exchanges are assemblies held within the local community in which students, families, school personnel, and stakeholders meet to exchange ideas and strategies that sustain positive school environments and school safety, and to foster progressive community change. (Guajardo,et al., 2015)

Dogwood Health Trust (DHT) Partnerships
The Dogwood Health Trust is a foundation that partners with community organizations in the western part of the state to improve the health and well-being of people and communities, with education as one of its focal areas. For these research studies, DHT has community partners within 18 of the 28 districts in education regions 7 and 8, in its support of EPIC's recruitment of school districts and high schools across the western region. (Dogwood Health Trust, 2023)

Low Performing Designation
A unit in which schools received a school performance grade and school growth score as provided in G.S. 115C-83.15 have been identified as low performing schools, as provided in G.S. 115C-105.37." (G.S. 115C-105.39A(a)). Source: GS_115C-105.37.pdf (ncleg.gov)

Latham Clinical Schools Network (LCSN)

This network is a formal partnership with 43 school districts in eastern NC. Thirty of the 43 school districts in the LCSN are in nonmetropolitan counties, and six of them are classified Completely Rural (U.S.D.A., 2017).

National Implementation Research Network (NIRN)
Active Implementation Framework, which is built around a three-component model of effective interventions – practices, implementation, and contexts. The Active Implementation equation posits: Effective Practices + Effective Implementation + Enabling Contexts = Improved Outcomes As follows, we have organized our proposed study to address three aims: Aim 1 – Effective Practices (the 'what'), Aim 2 – Effective Implementation (the 'how'), Aim 3 – Enabling Contexts (the 'why'). (NIRN, Fixen & Blase, 2008)

PSU School Designation
Charter schools are public schools of choice authorized by the State Board of Education and operated by independent non-profit boards of directors. State and local tax dollars are the primary funding sources for charter schools, which have open enrollment and cannot discriminate in admissions, associate with any religion or religious group, or charge tuition. Charter schools operate with freedom from many of the regulations that govern district schools, but charter schools are held accountable through the State assessment and accountability system. (NCDPI, n.d.)

Research Practitioner Partnership Framework (RPP)
A holistic model that is inclusive and participatory in the identification of issues, tracking of data, development of solutions towards transformative practice, and improved outcomes using a participatory action research design (Coburn & Penuel, 2016).

Race/ Ethnicity
The general racial category that most clearly reflects individuals' recognition of their community or with which the individuals most identify. (USED, 2021)

Rural Distant
Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urban Cluster. (NCES, 2022)

Rural Fringe
Census-defined rural territory less than or equal to 5 miles from an Urbanized Area, and rural territory less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an Urban Cluster. (NCES, 2022)

School Grade
Every district and charter school receives an A-F letter grade-based 80 percent on the school's achievement score (calculated using a composite method based on the sum of points earned by a school on all the indicators measured for that school), and 20 percent on students' academic growth (compares the actual performance of the school's students to their expected performance based on a statewide statistical model). The letter grades are computed on a 15- point scale (85-100=A; 70-84=B; etc.). (NCDPI, n.d.)

Sex
The genetic, hormonal, anatomical and physiological characteristics on whose basis one is labeled at birth as either male or female. (OBM, 2021)

State Board of Education Region(s)
Geographically defined, set by the General Assembly, to create a unified system of statewide support to North Carolina Local School Administrative Units. The State Board of Education consists of the Lieutenant Governor, the Treasurer, and eleven members appointed by the Governor for eight-year, overlapping terms, subject to confirmation by the General Assembly. Eight of the appointed members of the Board represent the eight education districts of the state. These districts are drawn by the General Assembly (NCDPI, n.d.). For the purposes of the requirements associated with these qualitative research studies, each research partner was assigned a specific SBE Region (see Figure 1.)

Stakeholders
For the purposes of these case/mixed method studies, stakeholders include certified & non-certified school staff, school and district leadership, students, and local communities.

Urbanicity
As defined by federal guidance:

- *City*: Territory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City
- *Suburb*: Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area
- *Town*: territory inside an Urban Cluster that is outside of an Urbanized area.
- *Rural*: Census-defined rural territory that is outside of an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is outside of an Urban Cluster. (USED & IES, n.d)

NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY (FI) AND DUKE UNIVERSITY (SSRI)

When Summer Learning Succeeds: Context, Conditions, and Strategies, that Maximize Impact.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH[10]

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration (OLR) serves public school units (districts) by providing the research and support needed to make evidence-based decisions to combat learning loss and accelerate learning for all students. In late 2021, OLR sought university partners to develop qualitative studies of summer learning programs to better understand districts' experiences and to identify practices and processes that can support success. Through this effort, the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University, and the Social Science Research Institute (SSRI) at Duke University joined together to conduct a comparative case study examining strategies and implementation conditions of elementary school extension programs during the summers of 2021 and 2022.

Reporting requirements for the 2021 North Carolina House Bill 82 / SL 2021-7, Summer Learning Choice for NC Families, stipulated that districts report the results of a competency-based assessment given to students in grades K-8 at the beginning of the program. While quantitative analyses of these assessments shed light on the extent to which district summer programs helped students recover academically, they are unlikely to provide deep insights into why these programs were or were not successful in improving student achievement. Moreover, these legislatively mandated program assessments fail to capture anticipated student outcomes, such as socio-emotional improvements and impacts on teachers and families.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to expand upon the aforementioned quantitative findings by examining the implementation of elementary school summer programs targeting at-risk students following the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic school years. Specifically, this study

[10] We acknowledge and appreciate the partnership with and funding from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's, Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration (OLR). Its mission, including the direct research-to-action lens, aligns directly with our own. We additionally acknowledge and value the critical contributions of the teachers, administrators, parents, and students who participated in this project and contributed their insight and perspective; this project would not have been possible without their involvement. Any questions about this project may be directed to jessica.sperling@duke.edu and sbkellog@ncsu.edu.

examines the implementation of elementary school summer programming in 2021 and 2022 using a comparative case study design. Over these years, we examine factors facilitating program implementation across sites, including mechanisms used for supporting social emotional growth and differences in experience between 2021 and 2022.[11] This project aims to identify effective components of summer learning programs and the conditions necessary for their success.

This project aimed to achieve four primary goals:

1. Explain how some districts successfully helped students recover academically while others struggled. This study aims to develop a richer understanding of how summer programs were implemented and factors that supported or impeded their success.
2. Examine how 2022 summer program implementation differed from 2021 implementation in order to identify key assets and improvements. This study looks across two years with two very distinct contexts of COVID affecting the prior year's teaching, learning, and district operations. Given this, the study seeks to understand the ways in which administrators addressed contextual challenges in each year and key learnings and steps developed across the two years.
3. Explore non-academic outcomes for students, teachers, and families to develop a richer picture of impact and guide future studies. This study aims to better understand how summer programs addressed non-academic student outcomes and their impact on teachers and families. This recognizes that the pandemic has also taken a toll on students' social, emotional, and physical well-being.
4. Provide the OLR and districts with recommendations to improve future programs. With the aforementioned primary and secondary focus, this study aims to provide education stakeholders with detailed, actionable information pertaining to areas of strength, challenges, and necessary supports to improve program implementation and assessment efforts.

Program Literature and Context

[11] Please note that the initial study design intended to examine differences in high- and low-performing 2021 sites into 2022. However, as 2022 programs were formed, they were not necessarily the same programs as in 2021; even if held at the same school site, they sometimes drew from different schools' students and incorporated different teachers and administration. We therefore shifted to focus on key trends across schools and years, as well as differences between 2021 and 2022 overall.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused school closures across the nation, disrupting education for nearly 1.5 million students. Across the U.S., schools were fully or partially closed for approximately 71 weeks (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2022), limiting instructional time for students; this posed important, and often negative, impacts on academic and non-academic student outcomes. The Center on Reinventing Public Education (2022) reported that average student test scores in fall 2020 were lower than previous years, and there were larger gaps in progress by winter 2021. The impacts of the pandemic on academic achievement were greater for students of color, who experienced significantly greater declines in test scores, compared to white students by fall 2020; by 2021, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities were at risk for experiencing widening gaps in learning (Office for Civil Rights, 2021). Moreover, because students of color and economically disadvantaged students were less likely to participate in tests in 2020-21, the full impact of the pandemic may be underestimated (Office for Civil Rights, 2021).

In response to school closures due to the pandemic, districts offered remote and hybrid learning options, when possible, to prevent and recover student learning loss. However, despite these options, students received less direct instructional time and teachers covered less material compared to in-person learning models. Districts transitioned to in-person summer learning programs in 2021 to further combat learning loss and widening achievement gaps due to the pandemic. Historically, summer learning programs have been implemented to prevent "summer slide," (i.e., learning loss experienced during the summer break). Research suggests that summer programs have positive effects on student academic achievement. One study found that 93 percent of students that participated in a summer learning program did not experience the "summer slide," and 41 percent achieved at least one year of literacy growth (Zeng et al., 2016). Summer programs may offer smaller class sizes and individualized instruction, and the effects of programs can vary based on factors such as student demographics, attendance, and program duration (McCombs et al., 2011).

The North Carolina Session Law 2021-7 was enacted by the General Assembly in 2021 to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on at-risk students. The purpose of the program was to provide in-person instruction on specific subjects and offer additional enrichment activities to students in kindergarten through grade 12 to address learning loss and additional negative impacts students experienced due to COVID-19 during the 2020-21 school year. Each local

public school unit (PSU, or district, hereafter referred to as district) was required to identify and prioritize at-risk students and submit a plan to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) that met the following program requirements for elementary schools:

- Program Format. Students were required to participate in at least 150 hours or 30 days of instruction, including time built into the instructional day for teachers to provide individual or small group instruction to at-risk students.
- Reading Instruction. Reading instruction was required for all students in kindergarten through eighth grade, including the integration of the district's Read to Achieve (RTA) reading camp, an additional educational program outside of the instructional calendar provided to third grade students who do not demonstrate reading proficiency, as well as first or second grade students who demonstrated reading comprehension below grade level.
- Math and Science Instruction. Math instruction was required for all K-5 students and science for all students in grades 3-5.
- Enrichment Activities. A daily period of physical activity and one enrichment activity were required for students, though districts had flexibility in the type of enrichment activity offered (e.g., sports, music, or arts program).
- Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Schools were also required to provide in-person social-emotional learning support for all students in the program.

The inclusion of an SEL requirement recognizes that the effects of COVID-19 also had implications for students' emotional and mental health (Office for Civil Rights, 2021). The pandemic caused changes in routines, extended social isolation, and concerns about health and safety. Students may have faced unstable housing or food insecurity due to business closures as well as challenges adapting to remote learning or reacclimating to school once reopened. The new challenges and stressors introduced by the pandemic impact student mental and physical health, but also have implications for student academic outcomes. Stress can lead to irritability or mood swings and difficulty concentrating and can disrupt normal brain development (Hilliard & Mangum, 2020). A 2020 survey of students in Tennessee cited worry, stress, and lack of motivation as barriers to learning (Patrick et al., 2021), with growing achievement gaps based on socioeconomic status (Rosanbalm, 2021).

SEL is an important component of education that promotes "prosocial interaction and resilience to stress," teaching students how to manage emotions and emphasizing activities that engage and motivate students to learn (Rosanbalm, 2021, p. 4). The academic benefits of implementing SEL practices in classrooms were widely known prior to the pandemic, including improved self-esteem and attitudes about school along with reduced conduct problems and delinquency (Rosanbalm, 2021). Research suggests that the implementation of SEL components can positively influence students' attention, executive function, and stress responses (Blair & Raver, 2014) and can also increase social competence and conflict-resolution skills (Jones et al., 2011). Integrating SEL components in summer learning can thus be an important element for promoting student well-being and may complement academic instruction to positively affect student success, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study primarily seeks to understand why some elementary programs succeed in helping students recover while others struggle. Research Question 1 (Q1) and related sub questions are intended to help the OLR, and districts better understand how summer programs were implemented and explain why some schools and/or districts were successful at helping students recover. This invokes an implementation science lens, as it examines methods that support the application of evidence-based knowledge and research, to the extent this was utilized and accessible to policy and practice.

Q1. Implementation: What strategies, instructional approaches, and conditions are critical to feasible and successful implementation of elementary summer learning programs?

- How were specific components of summer programming (e.g., individual and small-group tutoring) implemented, and what differentiates implementation of distinct components?
- What school, district, and state-level factors supported or impeded planning, implementation, and assessment efforts?
- How did districts change and/or plan to change implementation from the summer of 2021 to 2022, and what facilitated, prompted, or fostered such change?

  A secondary area of inquiry recognizes that success is measured by more than test scores.

Research Question 2 (Q2) and related sub questions explore non-academic outcomes, whether anticipated or unexpected, and consequences of summer learning programs for students, school personnel, and families. We address school personnel and families, in addition to students, because they are also critical to implementing effective educational programming and supportive environments; ultimately, they are essential to students' educational engagement and gain.

Q2. Impact: How do elementary summer programs impact <u>non-academic outcomes</u> for students, teachers, and families?

- In what ways, and to what extent, were non-academic student outcomes addressed during summer learning programs and perceived as successful?
- How did summer programs impact school personnel, both professionally and personally?
- How did summer programs impact parents/primary caregivers, including in knowledge of students' educational needs and perspective on school support?
- How can the OLR and districts change programming components and/or supports to better address non-academic outcomes for program stakeholders?

METHODS

Design Overview

This study uses a comparative case study design focused on program implementation and impact. Comparative case studies examine the similarities, differences, and patterns across two or more cases that share a common focus or goal; they can guide our understanding of why a program or policy succeeds or fails to accomplish its goals (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004; Goodrick, 2014). A comparative case study was particularly well suited for this evaluation because one of the primary goals is to better understand why some districts saw improved academic gains during the summer while others experienced little or no improvement. Case studies are particularly useful for providing detailed, actionable information to education stakeholders so they can replicate effective program components and avoid common pitfalls likely to hinder their success. Geographically, our study focused on elementary programs in State Board of Education (SBE)

Regions 3 and 4 in North Carolina, located in central North Carolina. These regions of focus were informed by OLR priorities. The study included six districts across the two regions.

We focus on both 2021 and 2022 elementary school programs for two reasons. First, we are specifically interested in the ways that experiences from Year 1 (2020-21) influenced adjusted design into Year 2 (2021-22). This informs, from an asset-based perspective, how the OLR can facilitate, promote, and scale adjustment strategies that districts are already making and may elevate the ingenuity and creativity of district personnel. In addition, it allows for an examination of cases where desired adjustments were not able to occur or where implementation did not reflect expectations. Second, we hypothesize that the pandemic particularly affected elementary students during these two years. Understanding how schools monitored and adjusted implementation, as well as the contextual factors unique to each school year, is critical for helping the OLR and districts chart a way forward in years to come. For example, summer programming in 2021 followed the height of the pandemic and a year in which schools were continually navigating significant challenges and changes in instructional format; this could have influenced their ability to plan for summer 2021 programming. While summer programming in 2022 still occurred after an academic year in which COVID-19 was present and affected instructional design and capacity, it followed a less tumultuous year for districts. This change in context is critical, and we hypothesize that the less tumultuous summer 2022 experience may be more similar to school environments going forward and more salient when considering recommendations for future efforts.

Data Collection

This study used varied forms of qualitative data collection within our case studies to address these questions, given the value of qualitative data for a close understanding of process and experience. This includes document and textual data (program plans) and primary data collection with varied participants and stakeholders. Empirical components of this project proceeded in four phases. First, in early spring 2022, we examined 2021 program secondary data (assessment scores, program plans) to provide context and help determine specific districts and sites of focus for primary data collection. With districts selected, we then collected primary data in two phases. In mid to late spring 2022, we conducted interviews with district and school personnel to understand the 2021 experience. Participating districts were then invited to

participate in a second phase, focused on the 2022 program year, which would include site visits with observations. Five of the six districts agreed to participate in at least part of the 2022-focused study component, but one district's summer programming ended too early for observation to occur. In summer 2022, we conducted observations of nine 2022 programs in action across four districts; we additionally conducted focus groups with students on-site in two districts, and we conducted follow-on interviews with select district, school, and parent representatives in fall 2022 to further address 2022 experience.

Interviews and focus groups lasted approximately 30-60 minutes, in acknowledgement of limitations on school personnel time. Across all interview-based data collection, interview respondents were provided with financial incentives to participate, which recognized the time they contributed, and they were contacted up to four times to seek participation. Recruitment of participants at times presented a challenge for the research team, even with incentives and repeated outreach; this was likely reflective of the many demands placed on teachers and administrators and their related time constraints.

Table 1 provides an overview of data sources included in this study; Table 2 provides an overview of districts engaged and participation by district.

Table 1

Data Source Overview

Data Source	Description	Program Year Focus	Participant Number (2021 focus, 2022 focus)
Student Assessment Report	Results from competency-based assessments, required by SL 2021-7, implemented in summer 2021 (secondary data)	2021	N/A
Program Plans	Implementation plans required by SL 2021-7 for 2021 summer learning programs	2021	N/A
District-Level Interviews	Interviews conducted with district-level administrators involved in planning and implementing summer learning programs	2021, 2022	13,1
Site-Level School Interviews	Interviews conducted with principals, teachers, and other school-level personnel involved in delivering summer learning programs	2021, 2022	20,6
Classroom Observations	Classrooms observed during site visits; includes teaching in action and small-group observation	2022	0,9*
Student Focus Groups	Groups of students interviewed together during site visits	2022	0,12

Parent/ Caregiver Interviews	Interviews conducted with parents or caregivers of students who attended summer learning programs	2022	0,1
*Refers to number of classrooms observed			

Table 2

Site Participation Overview

District	District Description*			Data Collection		
	Region	**Total district Enroll-ment**	**Community Race / Ethnicity** (% White, Black, Hispanic, Asian)	**District-Level Participants** (2021 focus, 2022 focus)	**Site-Level Participants** (2021 focus, 2022 focus)	**Classrooms Observed (2022 focus)**
Chapel Hill/Carrboro	3	11,926	68, 11, 7, 11	–	–	2
Chatham	3	8,524	72, 11, 12, 2	4/0	4/0	0
Clinton	4	2,973	45, 31, 17, 1	1/0	0/1	2
Granville	3	7,055	58, 30, 8, 1	2/0	3/3	2
Moore	4	12,457	77, 12, 7, 1	3/1	2/2	3
Montgomery	4	3,686	63, 18, 15, 1	3/0	11/0	0
Total	**n/a**	**50,946**	**n/a**	**14**	**26**	**9**

*Sources: North Carolina School Report Card, IES NCES Common Core of Data. Total enrollment reflects 2020-21 per North Carolina School Report Card and IES NCES Common Core of Data; race/ethnicity reflect 2015-19 ACS data per IES NCES Common Core of Data.

See Appendix B for detailed data collection processes for each phase. Appendix C includes added information on data collection reflection, adaptations, and limitations. All research processes were approved by the NCSU IRB (IRB # 24756) and by the Duke University campus IRB via reliance agreement.

Analysis

Analysis of 2021 program administrative academic data was primarily intended to determine site selection. The research team used Tableau to examine state-provided assessment data. The 2021-focused interview-based data collection was conducted via rapid analysis as the data collection phase was completed and, using audio recordings and transcripts, further analyzed using qualitative analysis software through summer and fall 2022. Drawing upon Saldaña's (2016) coding methodology, the team utilized an open coding schema at this phase.

The 2022-focused site visit data was collected using observational field notes with structure informed by the CASEL (2021) framework and was then coded using qualitative software. The 2022-focused focus group and interview data was recorded, transcribed for analysis, and analyzed using qualitative analysis software. The coding schema used was informed by the 2021-focused schema and augmented based on additional emerging themes and with added focus on 2021/2022 comparison. With this, we examined changes, aligned findings, and noted unique findings across the 2021 and 2022 years. Our overall analysis addresses our primary research questions, including how districts changed program implementation from the summer of 2021 to 2022; what facilitates, prompts, or fosters such change; and the implications for the OLR and districts to better address both academic and non-academic outcomes for program stakeholders. In writing the results, a key document was used to avoid identifying specific districts; instead, districts were labeled with letter indicators.

FINDINGS

Q1. Implementation: What strategies, instructional approaches, and conditions are critical to feasible and successful implementation of elementary summer learning programs?

Findings below are divided into two areas: 1) Administration and Organization and 2) Curriculum and Instruction. However, there are intrinsic connections between these two areas. In addition, there is critical overlap in social-emotional supports; these are core non-academic outcomes (Q2) that also facilitate feasible and successful program implementation (Q1). For ease and to avoid repetition, social-emotional supports are referenced in Q1 and described in more detail in Q2.

Administration and Organization

Finding 1: Determining the optimal program length is vital to allow adequate instructional time and prevent burnout of administrators, teachers, and students.

<u>2021 Program Year</u>

Due to the state-mandated 150 hours or 30 days of instruction, summer extension programs were effectively an extension of the regular school year in 2021. Among the six districts in our study, five programs implemented a full day of school Monday through Thursday; one district implemented a slightly shortened school day Monday through Friday. Select educator respondents explained that summer school began the day after the regular academic year concluded. This had negative consequences for teacher planning time, as recognized even by administrators (e.g., "We ended school and then we started on a Monday. … Teachers definitely need more time to plan.") and did not allow time for teachers to recharge from the school year. The lengthy schedule — both each day and number of weeks — led to feelings of exhaustion for many who participated in summer school programming. Respondent educators felt as if they never had a break, leading to fewer being interested in participating in 2022 summer school in certain districts.

Notably, select respondents shared that students were inundated with too much information during the lengthy school days, noting that many stopped coming after the July 4th holiday: "There's just a lot of burnout. Teachers and kids and you just saw that last hour or two was just like, 'Can we survive and go home? We're all exhausted right now.'" Another respondent described the impact of a full day of learning on students, indicating how the teachers observed, "the kids don't need to be here all day, and we noticed that in the kids."

Specific reading needs also contributed to burnout among teachers and issues for students. In 2021, summer programs incorporated the Read to Achieve (RTA) summer reading camps, which were expanded to address needed literacy skills due to COVID-19-related learning loss; these were often in addition to other scheduled blocks of time for literacy instruction. While additional reading instruction was perceived as valuable, a respondent staff member at one district noted that a consequence of this expansion was that students in RTA reading camps did not get a recess and those RTA students in grades 1-3 did not receive math instruction "because they had to have all those hours for reading." This affected many students and teachers; three respondent districts noted significantly expanding the number of students who attended reading compared to prior years, and one cited the "sheer number of students who needed to be in the camp" due to the pandemic. Classroom teachers explained how the requirement for 72 reading instructional hours was daunting and unrealistic, with one district administrator sharing, "72

hours of reading instruction, if that's what's required, there's only so many ways you can spread that across a day."

When describing the implications of 2021 programming, educator respondents noted apprehension from some parents about sending their children to summer programming in 2022. These parents did not like the length of programming in 2021 and did not want their children to lose another summer; this may have affected attendance in 2022.

2022 Program Year

Changes in schedule were clear when speaking about planning for 2022 programming, including adjustments to the start date to provide teachers with a small break and time to plan for 2022 summer school (e.g., one district pushed back its start date by a week). Summer 2022 programming was shortened in some districts — from six weeks to three or four weeks — due to feedback from teachers and issues with students dropping out after the July 4th holiday. Select schools adopted shorter school days so as not to overwhelm teachers and students. While the legislation for summer 2021 required a specific number of hours dedicated to subject-specific instruction, districts had more flexibility with their time in 2022. Educators observed that the shorter school days were helpful to students who otherwise appeared exhausted by overwhelming amounts of hours of instruction during the 2021 summer programming.

Program lengths and durations varied across districts. The District C summer program provided a week-long break in the middle of the summer programming to provide a break for students and prevent burnout. Respondent administrators stated that, as a result, they had more time to plan and prepare for summer programming in terms of assigning students, hiring and training staff, and gathering resources. This also allotted time for a break for students and teachers. An administrator in District C explained that the break between the end of the school year and the start of the extension program "… was pretty nice. I mean it gave the kids a moment … because we started pretty much really close to when school got out … so it gave them a little bit of a break." In summer 2022, one district administrator reported planning and scheduling programming to ensure teachers had time off before the start and after the end of summer programming.

Although changes in program length had benefits for avoiding burnout, they also had select consequences. Teacher respondents noted that the change from a six-week program in 2021 to a four-week program in 2022 was detrimental to student learning, reporting:

> *I loved having two weeks extra for summer, but I think for those kids they would have benefited more from those two extra weeks. Because just off the data that I had … I saw lot more growth my first year than this year. And I think part of it was probably just less instructional time. … [E]ven the four weeks was split up.*

This short time period in 2022, made shorter for some by lack of attendance, may not have been enough time to see substantial gains. An administrator from District D described the tension between academic gains and burnout, stating, "At the end of the day, the kids are tired. They're spent anyways. So. But I think, having those extra two weeks does make a significant difference."

Finding 2: High-quality teachers who were supported promoted a positive experience for students in summer programming, but staffing summer programming with effective educators was challenging, particularly for enrichment activities.

<u>2021 Program Year</u>

The incorporation of teachers with experience, commitment, and needed skills was a challenge for some districts. Administrators at one district noted that one of the lower-performing schools has struggled with teacher turnover, which had a negative effect on the outcomes of summer programs and academic performance. Specifically, they reported that, "in third grade, there are 14 positions and 10 of the 14 are beginning teachers this year." This focus on teachers is critical, as one district indicated that dedicated teachers were the primary reason for program success. A district-level respondent explained that student success "rests on the shoulders of just really dedicated teachers, although they were tired, they still brought the very best that they had every single day." One district noted the importance of individual teachers' skills with data. Specifically, it reported that knowledge of "how to pull that data, evaluate it, and know how to really get a clear look at what needs to be addressed" is an important skillset for teachers to have.

Finding staff to teach enrichment programming during the summer was also a particular challenge. Consequently, staff noted that specials were either offered on a rotating basis or were limited to specials they were able to staff, or that some specials were simply not offered at all. Schools also reported having to share these roles across multiple sites; for instance, two or more sites shared music, PE, and guidance counselors with other schools in their district. In addition, District C reported being unable to provide as much social-emotional support, as there were no school psychologists available to take on the position. One administrator explained that staffing challenges have a broader context: "We were just allotted two school psychologist positions … but we can't even hire one. We've had it open for years. Just in rural communities, there are not school psychologists just hanging out." Lack of enrichment was problematic in many respects. One respondent noted "there was nothing above and beyond to make it something different." Rather, the focus during summer extension programs was on remediation; consequently, many parents chose not to send their students. Staff also reported that specials served as a critical "break" for students from more intensive math and reading instruction and as a needed break for teachers as well.

A supportive administration and positive school culture were instrumental to teachers feeling successful in the classroom with their students. Teachers noted that they face fewer behavioral issues due to the smaller class sizes over the summer, but when problems arose, "administration took care of those behaviors, so the teacher could continue teaching." Further, teachers expressed gratitude for the trust their administration placed in them to do their jobs successfully. One teacher explained, "It's a lot more laid back, and our principal trusts what we're doing, so we have pretty much free range because he knows our integrity. We're going to be doing what's best for the kids." Respondents reported that differences in school culture impacted whether veteran teachers chose to teach in the summer or not. Specifically, they noted that some schools "have a culture about student centeredness and [experienced teachers] were more willing to work because of the culture of the building"; school culture thus relates to teacher recruitment and retention. Others noted that being data oriented was beneficial for teachers and relevant in the context of the broader school. A district noted that the higher-performing schools "have a culture of data collection … and are very data driven"; these schools had training, buy-in, and administrator support on the use of i-Ready, specifically, and were "constantly pulling data to reference how to support students."

Funds for positions also played a role. Specifically, respondents noted how it would be beneficial if they were provided more monetary support to hire non-academic positions, such as counselors and social workers, and be able to continue offering specials during summer programming. Further, flexibility to allocate the money received would be useful as district administrators may have various needs at different times. An administrator commented:

> *But as long as funding is available, I hope that we are going to be able to make sure that we are still able to offer those specials classes, and as much wraparound services as we possibly can with those positions that are that important to the SEL aspect of things.*

Some respondents reported that some schools' recruitment packages worked better than others, and that influenced teacher engagement. Yet, while administrators were able to provide incentives to attract more teachers to participate, some teachers did not find the extra money to be worth their time.

2022 Program Year

In the 2022 program year, student respondent data, in which students highlighted a positive experience and teacher interaction in summer programming, reinforced the importance of teaching quality. Overall, student respondents described their experience in the program as positive, including positive interactions with teachers and with engaging instructional content and activities. Student respondents viewed teachers positively; they were described as nice, fun, and helpful with thinking through instructional content. One fifth grade student commented that they "liked when teachers read to them and helped figure out how to answer questions." Respondents also described getting help from and working through more challenging concepts with teachers.

Administrator respondents reiterated that quality instruction was a vital component of the summer programming. Respondents from Districts B and D said they could select teachers rather than have them assigned, which was beneficial for quality. An administrator from District B stated that this enabled them to be more strategic with pairing teachers with students based on the needs of their population to "meet kids on their level." An administrator respondent from District D stated:

> *I will say that we had a lot of teachers with National Board certification teaching. … Some of our principals had watched for BTs that were just quality beginning teachers,*

and they were invited to teach. Our principal sort of went after those that they knew really would make a difference for kids.

Yet, administrators also described challenges related to the teacher shortage that were reflected in the 2022 summer programming. In some cases, there were few applications for 2022, which may be related to summer 2021 teacher burnout. For example, District B had just 12 teacher applicants; an administrator from District B commented:

We did not have a lot of interest in summer school, and I think it was because we had a lot of teachers who were burnt out last year, and they were just like "Listen! I just take my summer off. I'm burned out, tired."

In certain schools, respondents indicated that staffing the 2021 summer was easier than 2022, as teachers wanted to return to the classroom in summer 2021.

Some districts reported offering pay incentives to teachers to meet the staffing demand for summer 2022 programming. Additionally, to recruit teachers, administrator respondents in Districts C and D stated that funds were used to provide additional pay and bonuses. An administrator respondent from District D explained that the incentives attracted many National Board-certified teachers, indicating high-quality teachers who were invited to teach in summer programming, and said:

We did pay more [in 2022]. We sort of listened to what was going on in our region, and most of our region was paying either ten or fifteen dollars more an hour to get the teachers to work in the summer, so we actually did incentivize that way, so that we got our best of the best of the best.

The administrators noted an intent to match teachers to their specific skill and experience areas, but this did not always occur. Where possible, administrator respondents reported meeting teacher requests to teach specific grade levels and co-teach with other teachers. They also indicated a need to be strategic in staff placement, including matching teacher experience and capacity with student needs. However, some teacher respondents noted instances in which teachers were assigned to grades that they did not teach in the school year, which they found to be a misuse of teacher talent and experience: "My teammate teaches kindergarten, and she got put in third grade. She's never done third grade ever. So, how beneficial could that be if she doesn't know that content?"

To address teacher shortages, teachers were hired for summer programming from across the district, rather than drawing only from the schools that fed into the summer program. However, respondents also noted it was challenging to work with students with whom they had not yet built a relationship, because it was hard to fully understand each student's unique academic and social-emotional needs. One teacher noted wishing to see the students' report cards or information from the year to understand what the students really needed.

Various forms of support for teachers also facilitated implementation. These supports included pay incentives for teachers with bonuses, professional development opportunities, training in curriculum resources and technologies, and opportunities to connect and share ideas with other teachers. In District C, teachers received training on the literacy curriculum used during programming, which helped them complete lessons more quickly. An administrator in District D stated:

> *We had an extra hour every day, half an hour before school, and half an hour after school, to get together and talk about what they were doing and what was happening. So they were able to share lesson plans, and they were able to work together and move those kids around and try to figure out what was the best fix for them*

Teacher supports, including teacher assistants, were provided in some districts. For example, District B had a program that placed high school students interested in pursuing a career in education as classroom assistants. Another example included an administrator respondent in District B who helped teachers by performing tasks, such as composing binders of materials, so that teachers could move directly into and focus on instruction when programming began.

Finding 3: Student attendance, parent communication, and family buy-in was a concern for districts.

<u>2021 Program Year</u>

Challenges related to student attendance were clear in interviews with district-level administrators. Many administrators noted that students were inconsistent with attending summer programs for many reasons. District C respondents reported experiencing challenges with attendance due to logistical confusion, including students assigned to a location other than their

regular schools, changing teacher assignments, and transportation procedures different from the regular school year. Some respondents also reported many families were concerned about COVID-19 safety and had to have conversations with caregivers to convince them the schools were safe for children. Another administrator called attention to the effects of a lack of parental buy-in and student engagement: "There was nothing above and beyond to make [summer programming] something different. I know that was some of the feedback we received from some parents. And so those students just didn't attend because they didn't feel the need." District-level administrators at District B also highlighted that students stopped attending summer programming when enrichment was not provided to them, further emphasizing the importance of incorporating subjects and activities beyond core academic skills.

Communication with families was seen as useful for augmenting attendance; teachers and counselors made phone calls home to parents and believed the one-on-one conversations were beneficial in promoting attendance. However, some respondents indicated challenges contacting families. Site-level respondents in high-poverty areas reported that parents tended to be less communicative, as they were often working or busy. Lack of consistent internet outside the school building also created hurdles in communication. Also, teachers not assigned to their base school reported having less contact with families.

2022 Program Year

In 2022-focused data, the lack of student and parent buy-in for summer programming participation was again an important challenge across districts. An administrator in District D commented, "Our school board is concerned that we did have families turning down the opportunity." Since the summer extension program was not mandatory, families had the option of whether their child would attend; respondents indicated that only a fraction of the students who were recommended to attend based on assessment scores joined the program. This can be attributed to competing with summer camps in the community that emphasize fun summer activities (e.g., swimming) rather than academic instruction; schools also compete with family summer vacation plans. Respondents also felt that parents wanted their children to enjoy their summer break rather than attend the summer extension program. An administrator from District D commented, "It's that the parents don't feel like they want to tell the kids that they have to go to summer school."

To overcome these obstacles, site administrators communicated with parents about student progress early (i.e., mid-academic year). This included multiple attempts to contact parents or caregivers, including initial and follow-up letters, emails, and phone calls, and one-on-one conversations. District B reported using Spanish translators to explain the purpose and importance of the programming to promote attendance. Site administrators also emphasized the implications of not reaching academic benchmarks to parents, including the possibility of retention. An administrator from District D explained that they were able to convince some parents to allow their children to participate in summer programming, "… because they do want that reading retention label taken away."

As with 2021, respondent teachers highlighted attendance in program year 2022 as a primary challenge and a barrier to academic gains. One teacher lamented:

> *I had a kid that showed up one day a week out of the four weeks we were there. And so, it was like how can that student really be learning and growing if they're just there one day a week?*

Teachers suggested implementing stricter attendance requirements and allowing students on the program waitlist to join if current students were not meeting those requirements. That said, administrator respondents commented that there were more attendance issues related to COVID-19 during 2021 programming, which presented a challenge to achieving desired outcomes. In summer 2022, fewer students were absent due to COVID-19, which resulted in more and consistent instruction time.

Finding 4: Gaps in communication from DPI and on state requirements led to frustration and challenges.

<u>2021 Program Year</u>

Respondents expressed mixed views about the communication they received from DPI. More positively, one administrator noted how they saw an improvement in communication in the 2022 year compared to 2021, which they appreciated:

> *As far as like, the Office of Early Learning goes, I think we've had greater support from that group of folks this year than ever before they even came and visited our district last month for our principal's meeting to kind of explain some of the outcomes of Senate Bill*

> *387. I think communication and support has improved even more this year from at least from the grades. ... At least from the folks that I work with on a daily or weekly basis.*

On the other hand, there were other administrators who either expressed frustration or made suggestions. Some spoke of ways the OLR could offer more support. When asked what support they would like to receive from OLR, one administrator expressed confusion: "To be honest, I sincerely don't know what they're doing."

District administrators also expressed frustration with the state requirements and timing of communication they received OLR. They noted they received information about 2021 programming later than they would have liked, such as number of hours schools needed to complete in each subject area and data reporting measures. Select districts reported that they were not aware of the requirement to use iReady or report pre and post data until later than they would have liked. This presented challenges for the logistics of summer programs. They also received conflicting information on which data they needed to collect, and in what format to collect it. One administrator described issues with data quality that resulted from this confusion:

> *We were given one set of criteria of what data they were going to be asked to collect. And that was changed two weeks in, and then it was changed four weeks in, and then it was changed when we finally had to submit it. Keeping track of 22 schools' worth of kids across 14 sites, daily attendance for, I would say a quarter of our population, in an Excel spreadsheet is ridiculous.*

<u>2022 Program Year</u>

Summer 2022 program data indicated a positive change in DPI communication relative to the prior year. For instance, one District D administrator stated that they were aware much earlier in the academic year that they would be receiving funds for summer programming compared to 2021; this was valuable because it provided more time for planning in terms of hiring and training staff and assigning students. In 2021, they had just two months to plan for the summer program, which allowed little time to organize and implement these key program inputs. Administrators across districts described 2022 summer program planning as "more organized" (compared to "rushed," "unorganized," and "last minute" in 2021). This allowed time for greater direction from the district, which provided guidance on specific curricular and instructional resources to be used

during the summer. In addition, the shorter program duration and daily contact hours (see Finding 1) also facilitated organization.

Curriculum and Instruction

Finding 5: Small classes and small-group instruction benefited students academically and socially.

2021 Program Year

All districts in this study aimed to reduce student/teacher ratios for summer extension programs. Program plans provided to NCDPI reported that student/teacher ratios were 1 teacher per 10-15 students. School and district staff indicated in interviews and focus groups that they met these targets with a few exceptions. One district administrator responded that because they had so much interest in the program and "did not want to turn students away because they all had gaps," some elementary classes had as many as 25 students.

Respondent teachers repeatedly expressed satisfaction with the smaller classes they led during summer school. They noted that they could go at a more flexible pace and personalize learning to meet students' needs. Respondents also noted that small class sizes benefited their students to reacclimate or reintegrate them into school at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially as some students had physically never been in school before. Specifically, an administrator responded that the small class size improved test scores and helped students feel better prepared for the subsequent school year:

> *I don't know the exact numbers off the top of my head, but we were able to recover some test scores. … I think that was a huge help to the start of this school year, just being able to have that lower student-to-teacher ratio and really being able to dig into some of the deficits that were created by COVID. I think that was very impactful. … [T]here were just so many positive things that came out of the summer school*.

School and district staff respondents also noted that it was valuable to have time built into the instructional day for teachers to provide small group instruction, and to a lesser extent individual instruction, to at-risk students. The data from respondent districts suggests the frequency and intensity of small-group instruction increased during summer extension programs.

This was facilitated in part by smaller class sizes but also due to additional personnel, where that was available. Respondents from one district, for example, noted that volunteers from organizations like the Boys & Girls Clubs or Communities in Schools would work with one group of students on enrichment activities, while the teacher worked with small groups on literacy instruction. Respondents from another district also noted that the availability of additional staff to support small-group instruction facilitated the use of this approach:

> *So we were able to have a support person more during the day … to break up into groups and I could work with one group, a small-group reading and target different skills. … So out of a 90-minute [reading/math] block … 20 minutes is probably whole group and then the rest of it is small-group or individual [instruction].*

Small-group instruction in literacy was a key component of summer programming; school and district staff reported using guided reading activities, reading groups, and partner reading. One district also noted that aside from activities focused on foundational skills, they tried to incorporate "fun things that kids wanted to do" and "experiences with literacy" (i.e., Reader's Theater) that they wouldn't get during the regular school year.

2022 Program Year

The 2022 year saw a similar emphasis on small-group instruction across respondent districts, and administrator respondents frequently cited the importance of small groups for individual student success. During summer programming, teachers would provide whole group instruction, "… then [met] with small groups of students to reinforce and do interventions." An administrator respondent from District D felt that "the quality of teaching goes up significantly during the summer. … And I think that's partly because of the smaller groups." Student respondents additionally commented that they enjoyed and valued working in groups particularly to practice more complex instructional material and learn from other students. However, some students wanted to move away from small groups and other adjustments. For instance, students in grades with state End of Grade (EOG) exams desired added individual activities to address their specific needs and provide them with more experience working without a group, as would be the case in EOG state assessments. This desire for further preparation for the EOG exams may reflect the pressure of assessments that students felt; students clearly indicated this pressure in data collection events.

Beyond individual processes and EOG preparation, students discussed select other ways that they viewed opportunities for change. Student respondents wished for more activities, fewer instructional activities, fewer assignments, and less repetition. Some student respondents also indicated value in beginning instruction with basic or foundational concepts then building to more complex concepts. One third grade student described this process as a "wave that starts small (basics), then goes to big waves, with harder questions, then really big waves (end-of-grade questions)." This indicates potential processes that could be integrated into instructional design, whether in small groups or individually.

Finding 6: Educators valued curricular flexibility to meet student needs, but they also benefited from access to a wide range of "turnkey" curriculum materials.

2021 Program Year

Respondent summer school educators expressed their appreciation for flexibility over the summer. Specifically, they spoke positively about being able to alter their classroom practices to meet individual student needs. One respondent noted, "Having that extra time and the flexibility to change the plans was a huge advantage because it gave me more time to have every child be successful in a different way." In addition, respondents valued the ability to adjust the curriculum as needed; one appreciated "that they give us that freedom to implement what we want, staying within their framework … to do what's best for our schools."

Although flexibility was viewed as an asset, staff from all schools and districts reported that the district provided ready-to-use instructional resources that required little teacher preparation or planning. The ability to use these "turnkey" curricula as a base was seen as beneficial among both administrators and educators. One administrator respondent explained how they prepared teachers to use a curriculum that was purchased specifically for summer RTA reading camps:

> *We were able to pull in a research-based curriculum that really was designed for summer programs … with literacy and SEL integrated into it. And so teachers really liked that.*
>
> *We provided them training and PD[professional development] on it because they did not have to create their own summer curriculum, their own modules. The curriculum came with all of the student materials.*

Another administrative respondent noted that the prescribed or scripted nature of curricula helped "teachers know exactly, minute by minute, what they're supposed to be doing," and teacher respondents echoed the value of these structured plans, though they had the flexibility to adjust the lessons. Having access to prescribed curricula meant that teachers did not have to spend so much time planning for summer school, which teachers shared could be overwhelming if they were not given time to lesson plan.

2022 Program Year

In a 2022 focus group, respondents noted the value and need for specific training in curricula used. Respondent teachers reported that the Scholastic Lit Camp curriculum was relatively easy-to-follow, useful, and engaging for students. However, respondent teachers noted that they and their administrators could have had more training around the Scholastic Lit Camp curriculum when it was initially introduced:

> *It definitely seemed like they didn't know what was even in [the curriculum]. Like our administrators didn't. Especially that first year it was just kind of thrown at us like, here. And then two days from now, use it. So, more training would definitely be helpful.*

Teacher respondents also noted that they did not have sufficient time after receiving the curriculum to prepare lesson plans: "if I could get all the books and information a week or two in advance and be able to plan my own activities [as] opposed to following what they have, I feel like it would benefit the kids more." Select respondents felt that they lacked in-classroom support (i.e. instructional assistants) to implement the curriculum due to funding constraints:

> *The first year I had an instructional assistant that was split between three different kindergarten teachers. And the second year I didn't have an instructional assistant because of the way the funds were divided up. Only the teachers that were doing the reading camp got instructional assistants. And that was tough because in kindergarten, at my school at least, I'm used to having an instructional assistant to help you. And just having that other set of hands would have been very helpful and I think would have really helped those kids too.*

In addition, the desire for more preparation time, one teacher also noted a potential lack of fit for students. Specifically, this respondent noted that it was required to use the first-grade level curriculum even though most of her students were not on a first-grade level. This respondent

believed that this "was a mistake because … [it] was definitely harder than what they needed." Another respondent wished teachers "could even just have a say in what was picked in the curriculum" to make sure they were meeting students' needs.

Finding 7: Data software provides educators with usable data for assessment; additional funding for data software would improve access.

2021 Program Year

Nearly all districts in this study noted making extensive use of i-Ready, an online program for math and reading endorsed by the North Carolina State Board of Education. In addition to using i-Ready assessments to determine student needs prior to the summer program, school and district staff reported using the i-Ready Teacher Toolbox, a digital collection of standards-based lessons and resources. Two districts also reported making use of EngageNY, an online library of open reading and math materials developed by the New York State Department of Education. Respondents shared how programs like i-Ready and mCLASS helped them understand their students' performance so that they could adjust their teaching accordingly. When asked about critical supports from the state that would contribute to student success, one administrator shared how more support for these data software would be useful:

> *We purchased a program that is a data warehouse, and it consolidates all the data points that we have on a student and helps us quickly identify areas of need for an individual student, or students to target. That tool has been extremely instrumental in intervention groups during the school year and also feeding into summer school.*

While data is beneficial, Finding 2 indicates that teachers also must be equipped to use such data and that a data-driven school culture further supports realistic and effective use.

2022 Program Year

Interviews focused on the 2022 program year additionally indicated student academic assessment data was vital for student placement, determining whether and which students might benefit from participating in summer programming. Respondent districts used data from tools like EOGs, mCLASS, and i-Ready to identify skills gaps that could be met in summer programming. These tools were perceived as valuable because they allow for an individualized approach based

on students' specific, unique needs, and the summer programming provided more time to devote to targeted instruction. An administrator from District C commented the software "takes that diagnostic data, and it creates an individualized learning path for the child. … So you know, there is time built in for i-Ready and expectation. So they [teachers] were continuously using it."

Administrator respondents across districts reported consistently using assessment data to measure progress and assess continuous learning. With this data, administrators in all respondent districts described how they were able to determine how to best tailor instruction and implement interventions to meet individual students' needs. Examples of this included moving a student to another grade level to receive more foundational help or adjusting My Path on iReady to allow greater differentiation for students. Administrators across districts stated that teachers used assessment data from observations and assessments to determine the composition of small groups (i.e., make changes to student small groups based on indicated progress or skills gaps). Respondents also explained that consistent use of data was also useful for communicating student progress to parents.

Finding 8: Teachers experienced challenges with students' school readiness skills, particularly in 2021.

2021 Program Year

In addition to addressing students' focus and attention, respondents also indicated that many students were not independent in ways that may have been valuable or expected. Respondent teachers indicated they spent time teaching skills students were expected to have mastered (e.g., holding a pencil correctly). Respondent teachers also suspected students may have been reliant on their parents to do assignments for them or log them into the computer, which likely hindered their readiness to participate in summer learning.

Stamina among students (i.e., students' ability to pay attention throughout the day) and developmental delays were noted as a core issue in the 2021 program year. Because students had not been in school for up to 18 months due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students exhibited behavioral challenges and a lack of stamina; this forced summer program sites to adapt lesson plans and shift focus throughout the day. Site-level personnel realized early on in summer 2021 programming that both teachers and students needed breaks throughout the day, and reported

incorporating art, physical activity, and "brain breaks." Respondent teachers reported their site administration was supportive of teachers' decisions to incorporate breaks into the day. Site-level personnel at District E reported that when students did not have a mental break, student engagement decreased, and teachers reported feeling tired at the end of the day. Summer 2021 teachers also frequently mentioned the importance of movement for students in summer programming, which provided a respite to students during longer periods of instruction. Additionally, the respondents from specific summer program sites noted they believed many students did not engage in physical activity during the stay-at-home orders in the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic; they felt incorporating physical activity in the classroom and into the schedule was beneficial to overall student health.

2022 Program Year

Data from the 2022 program did not speak directly to school readiness issues as in 2021. This is likely because, during the 2021-22 school year, schools were not generally subject to COVID-related school closures; students thus had more recent school experience.

Finding 9: Across both program years, social-emotional learning (SEL) and wraparound services were provided to meet students' needs, though more resources and support were desired.

2021 Program Year

Critically and partly related to the COVID context of prior years, teachers strongly desired support for students' SEL, believing it would facilitate successful summer program implementation and academic achievement. However, the degree to which summer programming placed emphasis on SEL varied across districts in this study. District-level staff in District E stated that SEL had been a core focus of their district since 2019 and that SEL continued to be incorporated into summer programming. School counselors in District E wrote sample lessons for teachers, and they could access an internal website for more resources. Also, families in District E could request support from a counselor if needed during summer programming. Despite the staffing challenges (described below), district-level personnel in District F reported they employed

trauma counselors and guidance counselors and were able to have an instructional facilitator available at most school sites to support both SEL and academic programming.

Select common practices emerged across districts, including staff autonomy to implement SEL into daily activities. A common approach to integrating SEL among respondents was through a morning meeting and "optimistic closure" activity guided by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) signature practices. The morning meeting was intended to help kids "feel welcome" and "get them settled" for the school day, and the optimistic closure activity was a time for students to "reflect on their learning and the goals they set for the day."

Respondents reported that some of the curricula included SEL (e.g., Flocabulary), and other noncore academics were incorporated into reading materials (e.g., science, social studies). Many respondents from program sites expressed appreciation for the autonomy to implement SEL into their classrooms; they reported incorporating cooperative learning activities and "in the moment" SEL strategies when students experienced difficulties with peers or self-management. Site-level respondents at District D reported using strategic pairings between students and teachers; students who experienced difficulties with self-management were placed in classrooms with teachers who excelled at teaching these skills.

School and district staff respondents also noted that an increase in staffing, including counselors and an SEL coordinator, directly supported SEL activities:

> *Having those SEL activities every day and really putting a focus on social, emotional learning, which we still continue through the school year. We've actually hired a social emotional coordinator for the district. There was a lot of support for that position coming out of just looking at the needs of students. … I think that support was really important to provide for our students.*

After experiencing summer programming, many respondents from program sites reported they would like to receive more SEL support, including additional professional development on how to support students with unstable homes and trauma-focused professional development. One respondent described the need for resources and skills to be able to assist with students who have experienced trauma:

> *You have kids that have experienced a lot of trauma, which then prevents them from actually learning content in the class. How to kind of help with that, how to help them navigate that. And I'm not saying we're being counselors here, but how can we*

differentiate the content effectively enough where this kid is not going to miss because they've been in ISS or they've been homeless and they've been out for three or four days because they're trying to look for a place to live. How can we teach trauma? I don't know any other way to say that.

Administrators at District F reported wishing they had spent even more time on SEL components for students. Respondents felt that having the tools to meet students' SEL needs would contribute to students' academic performance and would lessen behavioral issues in the classroom.

2022 Program Year

The 2022 program year data collection included classroom observations; these, in addition to responses from interviews with district administrators, teachers, and parents/caregivers, permitted direct observation of classroom SEL implementation. Despite some uneven emphasis on SEL across districts, researchers observed evidence of development of supportive classroom environments and mechanisms for integration of SEL into academic instruction. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) posits components of a successful SEL-focused classroom as including a supportive classroom climate, integration of SEL into academic instruction, and explicit SEL instruction, with associated subcomponents for each area. Direct evidence of these practices is discussed below.

Across all observations, students appeared familiar with the routines of the day, which facilitates belonging and emotional safety. This was aided by posted daily schedules, countdown clocks or timers for each activity, and verbal reminders from teachers about what was coming next in the day. In one classroom in District D, observers noted that the teacher was responsive to individual student needs and identities; students presumably from different national backgrounds were asked about animals in their home country or their familiarity with concepts and objects on flashcards. In cases where there was no explicit evidence of teachers affirming student identities or being responsive to student needs, students still appeared to genuinely enjoy being with their teacher.

In all districts, observers noted that teachers were supportive when students made mistakes, which is evidence of fostering academic mindsets. Observers overheard teachers say, "That's okay — work with what you have, so you can get to what you don't know," (District C) and "That's

what happens when you practice — you get better and better and better," (District B). In District D, there were examples of teachers setting high expectations for students, such as encouraging students to select more challenging books to read. One teacher was observed telling students, "I know you know this," when they appeared to be struggling. In District A, researchers observed an example of culturally responsive teaching practice (i.e., in preparing to read a story that involved a donut, the teacher made sure to ask all students if they knew what a donut was or had ever had one).

Across all districts, researchers observed using interactive pedagogy, observed students appeared highly engaged throughout all class activities, and there was a high degree of collaboration. Across districts, classrooms were organized in stations, allowing students to move from and complete activities in the whole group, small groups, pairs, and individually. In Districts A and C, researchers observed teachers call on less-engaged students to ensure that all students had the opportunity to speak during class discussion. In District B, students were encouraged to work together and support each other's learning; throughout all observed activities, the teacher asked, "Are you using each other if you need help?" In District C, students worked together to solve math problems written on the board and were encouraged to help each other. In District D, observers noted that during small-group activities, students asked each other for help before turning to the teacher.

Community-building was additionally apparent in many classroom observations, though this was less consistently evidenced than practices referenced above. For example, students sat in circles in District A, but in groups or rows at all other sites and districts. All observed classrooms displayed student work, and classrooms in Districts A and C displayed images that reflected diversity. Classrooms in Districts B and C displayed and referred to shared class agreements. An administrator respondent in District D also stated that some classrooms used social contracts to "capture kids' hearts" and "build those relationships even with students." The same district used a Hispanic liaison to provide culturally relevant activities, reflecting the sizable Hispanic population in the community.

There was little to no evidence of student-centered discipline, but this was likely due to minimal examples of behavioral issues in any of the observed classrooms, except for a few student interruptions. Where interruptions occurred, teachers dealt with these interruptions, explaining proper social behavior and appropriateness for asking questions, reminding students of

expectations and consequences of their behavior. This was evidenced in District B, where students practiced breathing exercises, which helps students develop self-awareness and manage their emotions (Goralnik & Marcus, 2020), and the administrator respondent experienced no behavioral-related dismissals during summer programming.

There was limited evidence of teachers aligning SEL and academic objectives; researchers observed classrooms with academic standards posted or explained by teachers during instruction and class activities in Districts A and C. However, researchers did not observe the integration of academic goals with SEL goals. Although there were no examples of explicit SEL instruction during the times classrooms were observed, an administrator respondent in District D stated they used SEL curriculum in classrooms. District B used the Overcoming Obstacles curriculum each day, which incorporates a variety of SEL focused activities for students. The curriculum is research-based and teaches life skills such as relationship building, goal setting, decision making and empathy (Overcoming Obstacles, 2023). District C hired an individual focused on SEL and built SEL-based activities into the daily schedule.

Beyond specific CASEL-based SEL competencies observed during site visits, administrators across all respondent districts explained that they made efforts to be present and build relationships with and support students' emotional and social needs. Administrator respondents from District D reported that staff greeted students individually to help build relationships and meet any social-emotional needs at the start of the school day. Additionally, sites across districts focused on small-group instruction, which enabled building interpersonal skills and relationships with teachers. An administrator from District D commented that "you have a chance with a small group to work on those interpersonal skills, and to teach some of the stuff that they can't get when their class sizes are 25."

However, some respondents indicated gaps or issues in SEL instruction and incorporation. Teacher respondents noted that growth in SEL competencies for students was difficult to observe in a small amount of time. They also indicated several challenges, including feeling there was not a strong focus on SEL in the curriculum, that teachers' capacity to implement these elements varied, and that training was lacking. One teacher went as far as to say that the focus on SEL "seemed like a joke;" another teacher indicated that the activities did not appear to be appropriate for elementary school students.

Q2. Non-academic Impact: How do elementary summer programs impact non-academic outcomes for students, teachers, and families?

Finding 10: Students developed confidence, peer and teacher relationships, and comfort in a school setting based on summer programming.

2021 Program Year

District and program site respondents noted positive outcomes for students because of incorporating SEL components into summer 2021 programming (see Finding 9). They reported that summer learning provided a sense of safety for some students; program site respondents noted the atmosphere in the building, stating that students were "all smiles." Many district-level personnel recognized the importance of supporting the whole child. One district-level administrator noted, "As we've come out of the pandemic … we see the importance of SEL."

Where district-level respondents reported spending dedicated time reacclimating and reintegrating students into school and teaching social skills missed during the pandemic (e.g., expectations, routines), the individuals indicated noticeable and positive differences in student behavior from the beginning to the end of summer 2021 programming. District-level staff at District F felt that summer programming empowered students and helped them build confidence because they were able to acclimate to being in school and become more familiar with the buildings.

Respondents reported that attention to meeting non-academic needs had numerous benefits, including relationship building, adjustment to being in school all day, and working with and solving conflicts with one another. Site-level respondents reported that fewer students visited the guidance counselor during summer programming and that teachers were better able to address emotional and behavioral needs of the students. Respondent teachers reported that summer programming gave them the opportunity to build relationships with students, which was supported by smaller class sizes. Placing students with teachers they would have the following year (e.g., summer 2021 teachers who would teach the same students in the 2021-22 year) was particularly noted as encouraging relationship building and expectation setting (e.g., "When you had those relationships with those kids that are coming in the fall … it just made the school year, this year, easier.").

These SEL benefits — relationships, comfort, confidence — are noteworthy in and of themselves, but they also facilitate positive academic outcomes through academic engagement, study skills facilitation, and other mechanisms; this is noted within our study's data and more broadly (Durlak et al., 2011). This indicates the ongoing value of SEL for students in a post-COVID era, as well as more generally.

Beyond social-emotional development, respondents indicated that incorporating physical activity in the classroom and into the schedule was beneficial to overall student health. Some program site respondents noted they believed many students did not engage in physical activity during the stay-at-home orders in the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, so a dedicated opportunity for physical activity at school (recess, movement activities) provided additional health advantages.

2022 Program Year

In the 2022 program year focus, observational data (reporting in Finding 9) clearly indicated evidence of SEL integration into classrooms, and student respondents built on the SEL effects described by 2021-focused respondents above. They described a variety of non-academic benefits of summer programming, including new friendships, improved interactions with new people, more practice speaking in front of people, and reduced social anxiety. Fourth and fifth grade respondents stated that they experienced social benefits from the program, including building relationships with peers; fifth grade student respondents highlighted the value of making new friends before moving on to middle school in the fall. These student respondents also frequently commented on their positive perception of the teachers, describing them as "nice" and "fun." Teacher respondents echoed students' positive experience and enjoyment of the summer program environment, noting that most students "seemed to really enjoy the curriculum" and had fun during the summer program.

Finding 11: Summer programming facilitated more robust home-school partnerships and provided families with resource support.

2021 Program Year

Select respondent teachers reported stronger home-school partnerships and trust in schools among community members. Many teachers reported increased parent communication and

strengthened home-school partnerships due to summer 2021 programming. Respondents from program sites across multiple districts reported an increased sense of trust with the community. Respondent teachers cited multiple potential reasons for the change in relationship: Caregivers were already familiar with them (for sites where students did not change schools for summer programming), smaller classes allowed for more opportunity for teachers to reach out to families, and length of programming allowed for more face-to-face contact with families. One teacher stated her excitement about seeing a parent in the school building for the first-time during summer programming:

> *We actually had a parent who really doesn't do much, she came to school on Friday and she brought her child's hamster. They had read something about a hamster, the child asked if she could bring it in and the teacher said sure. She came in, and I had never seen that parent … to see her come into the building was a big deal for me.*

Beyond strengthening home-school relationships, summer programming provided families and their children with added supports. These included consistent meals for participating children, access to a climate-controlled environment, and accessible and free childcare for parents. Site-level respondents reported that parents were appreciative of other supports districts provided (e.g., extra weekend meals). This additional family and home contribution can facilitate family well-being and student learning.

2022 Program Year

Administrator respondents across districts in 2022 additionally reported that summer programming enabled parents to build relationships with teachers (District C) and experience positive perceptions of teacher-student interactions (District B). There is also evidence that summer programming increased parents' confidence that their children would enter school at (or close to) grade level (District D). An administrator from District B explained that parents were "very pleased with the success of the camp and how their students grew. Even if their student didn't make proficiency, they were excited to know that. Wow!"

In addition, 2022 data added evidence of support for parents directly, beyond the school-home connection. One parent respondent stated that they were not able to help their child academically at home, so the summer program also helped relieve or prevent pressure the parent

may have experienced due to their child falling behind. More specifically, this parent respondent described how summer programming prevented the "summer slide" and associated parental stress:

> *Having that bridge help to alleviate some of the pressures for myself, as the parent, especially as we look into getting it to this school year, because we did have that maintenance. Whereas if there had been any sliding back, it would have been a lot more weight on my shoulders to help to get him back where he was at the level last year. Yeah, that certainly helped me.*

This indicates the role summer programming had in reducing parental stress and schedule challenges.

Finding 12: Summer programming helped build and strengthen teachers' peer relationships, relationships with administrators, and learning opportunities.

2021 Program Year

Summer 2021 teachers felt a sense of camaraderie and learned from one another. Many staff respondents reported that summer programming supported more collaboration between staff. Respondent teachers from three districts felt they were able to "lean on" each other for support. Additionally, staff appreciated the opportunity to meet other people from their districts and were excited to learn from one another. Site-level personnel noted summer programming gave them a sense of normalcy, and they felt that their administration valued their feedback. One principal noted:

> *I think that every year we do this … we can learn what works well, what didn't work well. But if it works well, let's just keep it. We don't need to make changes just to make changes, but we take what the teachers are telling us and incorporate that every year to make the experience better.*

2022 Program Year

Data from the 2022 year evidenced additional value for teacher learning and relationships. An administrator in District D commented that teachers, particularly newer teachers, benefited from being around other and more experienced teachers; administrators in Districts C and D stated that teachers developed relationships during summer programming.

Additionally, small class sizes and small groups enabled teachers to try different tools and techniques to aid in student learning. An administrator in District D explained the benefits of smaller class sizes for teachers:

> *I heard a lot from the teacher, 'if we only had ten or twenty kids in class. We could do this all every day,' but they started building their confidence in how to be able to do small groups. … [T]he teachers loved it, because they were able to have smaller groups and class size.*

In District B, an administrator respondent said teachers kept resources they received to expand their knowledge and implement them in their own classrooms during the academic year. One teacher respondent commented that the summer programming helped them practice and hone their skills:

> *I felt like it was a good way for me to just practice. I'm a third-year teacher so I'm still getting used to things and just practicing things. Like if I wanted to, seeing how this worked, seeing how that worked. So, it gave me a little bit more flexibility.*

Through this lens, summer programming provided teachers an opportunity to gain additional experience and potentially try innovative approaches that they may use in future academic years.

DISCUSSION

When considering the implications of this work, we note select overarching points that are reflected across program years. Although aspects of the programming, administrative context, and pandemic context may have shifted, key themes and factors that facilitated successful implementation, as well as key aspects of non-academic supports and associated outcomes, were echoed across the two years. Though these drew specifically from summer programming, many have implications for educational programming more broadly. Below, the researchers structure their interpretation and discussion around key recommendations to facilitate translation of research to action.

Carefully consider implications of program length and timing, including start date, end date, duration, and length of day; at minimum, ensure a break between the school year end and the start of summer programming.

The need for careful attention to program length and implementation timing was clear across both years. In 2021, summer programming generally lasted six weeks with full-time days and started just after the school year ended. While students experienced academic gains, respondents reported student and staff burnout as a result. Summer programming in 2022 was shorter, often three or four weeks, with a week-long break in some districts, and with half rather than full days. Administrators and teachers appreciated the opportunity to experience a break but also reported seeing fewer academic gains in 2022 (compared to 2021) due to reduced instruction time. This indicates a challenge in identifying an optimal program length to allow adequate instructional time so that students can reach academic benchmarks, while preventing burnout of administrators, teachers, and students due to the lack of breaks in instruction time. Program length and duration also have implications for teacher recruitment and student attendance due to burnout and summer vacations; these are added factors that should be considered. One administrator suggested implementing a six-week, half-day program, or extending programming across the summer in two-week increments (two weeks on, two weeks off). Student respondents reported that the rigorous schedule provides limited or no opportunities for recess, which limits enjoyment overall and may have implications for attendance and ability to pay attention throughout the summer program day.

Teacher recruitment is critical, and needs added support; consider increased pay for teachers and teacher assistants, further professional development opportunities, and processes to ensure teachers are using their grade level experience.

Beyond the implications of program timing on teacher recruitment, numerous challenges related to teacher recruitment and support hindered program implementation and success. In 2021, the program was implemented quickly, providing little advance notice to sites about program logistics, nor adequate training for staff; as described above, teachers experienced fatigue and burnout after summer programming. Together, these circumstances negatively impacted teacher interest in applying for 2022 summer programming. Although respondents viewed 2022 program implementation more favorably compared to 2021, teacher respondents reported challenges with pay more frequently in 2022 — particularly for teacher assistants who, unlike teachers, did not receive pay incentives. Additionally, one administrator respondent noted that early notification of program funding supports planning for pay incentives to attract high-

quality, National Board-certified teachers. Administrator respondents also indicated a desire for building and funding professional development and lesson planning opportunities into the schedule. Respondents also reported teachers were placed in grades where they had no experience; for example, kindergarten teachers may struggle with delivering third grade content and literacy standards. This mismatch could negatively impact student outcomes and teacher desire to participate in programming. In addition, it was noted that recruitment issues in the summer are reflective of recruitment issues across the year; this speaks to the need to address teacher recruitment across districts generally to also maximize summer learning.

Continue to focus on small group work and smaller class sizes; teacher PD on small-group instruction and time/funds for lesson planning should be provided as needed, and augmented individual work could help students with EOG preparation.

Within the design of academic programming, data evidenced the importance of smaller class sizes and emphasis on small-group instruction for better teacher and student outcomes. Smaller class sizes allowed teachers to tailor instruction and address specific student needs. Teachers could rotate students in and out of small groups based on their assessment results and needs. Respondents in 2021 and 2022 commented on the impact of small groups for driving differentiation. One administrator respondent suggested funding for teacher professional development related to small-group instruction to ensure this small-group time was used most effectively and added that opportunity to incorporate lesson planning (small group, but also generally) into teachers' schedules would be valuable. In addition, while student respondents stated they liked and found value in small-group work, they suggested tailoring instruction to help them prepare for EOG tests. This included completing more independent activities and assignments because tests and assessments are completed independently.

Continue and further develop teacher support, including curricula and planning time, availability of teacher assistants, and access to and understanding of how to use data to inform instruction.

Teachers valued *provided* curricula to limit their need to develop this material, but they also valued time to plan for lessons and adapt curricula to their needs. One teacher suggested that districts provide materials to teachers in advance and let them develop their own activities.

Teacher assistants with appropriate pay were critical to focus attention on students and the small-group instruction approach. Data-informed assessment was vital for successful implementation; in addition to helping districts identify students that would benefit from summer programming and place students with teachers and in groups, it also helped teachers target instruction and measure gains to determine overall student growth.

Continue and augment SEL support, including more reinforcement for teacher training and funding for relevant positions.

Respondents across districts spoke to the importance of SEL for student academic and non-academic outcomes, noting that SEL components can provide activities that lead to increased student engagement and greater confidence, which can positively impact academic outcomes. However, in 2021 and 2022, implementation of SEL components varied across districts in the region. For example, District B incorporated an SEL-based curriculum into specific daily lessons and activities, and attributed this to positive outcomes related to behavior, self-management, and relationship building. In District C, an SEL counselor hired for the program emphasized physical activity and providing opportunities for social interaction outside of academic activities for students; this was echoed by fourth and fifth grade respondents who stated that they wanted teachers to help them feel more comfortable in the classroom and interact with them more. However, teachers found the emphasis on SEL ineffective. Some districts reported teachers incorporated SEL components during classroom activities as needed, but the capacity to do so varied. For example, administrators in District D commented that some teachers received training in some SEL components while others did not. Respondents recommended funding for positions to support SEL components. Those that fill the positions should be qualified and have experience with the student population. Additionally, respondents suggested providing teachers with professional development opportunities related to SEL to provide strategies and tools to address and prevent behavioral issues and deepen student engagement in the classroom, particularly in small groups. Administrators reported that the use of small groups was important for implementing SEL components in the classroom, which, as noted before, have broad positive implications for student engagement, development, and academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Rosanbalm, 2021).

Continue and augment incorporation of enrichment programming and movement.

Enrichment programming was valuable through focus (as relevant to enrichment) on SEL, and it provided students an opportunity to build some "fun" into their day, which fostered engagement in academic lessons and program attendance. In addition, incorporating regular movement during the day facilitated students' ability to focus during core lessons.

Prioritize and improve communication with parents, including early communication, individualized communication, and necessary translational and interpretation supports.

Communication is critical to develop parental buy-in, which is related to attendance, and to ensure parents understand summer program plans. District respondents recommended early communication (mid-academic year) with parents to explain the importance of summer programming for student achievement. Administrators reflected positively on strategies, including Hispanic translators to communicate with parents, explaining the benefit of programming to help remove the retention label to encourage student participation and continued attendance and using an individualized approach with families.

Develop specific strategies to facilitate student attendance; many strategies are referenced in other recommendations, such as program length considerations, movement and enrichment, and parental communication.

Challenges with student attendance were impacted by program length in 2021 and parent and student buy-in in 2022. Respondents from 2021 reported that parents were eager to have their child participate in the summer programming for extra learning opportunities. However, districts reported that while some parents responded favorably to the program length because it helped them with childcare, other parents complained that it was too long, and attendance waned after the July 4th holiday. In 2022, some parents "turned down the opportunity" for extra learning, not wanting their children to miss another summer. All respondents commented on the difficulties of sending students to school during summertime, when students want a break from academic instruction and to have fun.

Ensure clear and early communication from DPI on requirements and processes to facilitate effective program organization.

In 2021, districts faced several challenges based on late and at times conflicting information from DPI, likely exacerbated by challenges at the state and federal level. This challenge was lessened in 2022. As much as possible, DPI should aim to prioritize early and clear communication.

CONCLUSION

This applied research study sought to address the following questions: What strategies, instructional approaches, and conditions are critical to the feasible and successful implementation of elementary summer learning programs? How do elementary summer programs impact non-academic outcomes for students, teachers, and families? By addressing these questions, we intended to develop an understanding of critical processes not easily addressed by other available data, and we intended to inform ongoing development and implementation of educational programming.

Across program years, the successful implementation of the summer extension program was facilitated by teacher investments and supports, data-informed decision-making, and the emphasis on smaller class sizes and small-group instruction. Teacher investments and supports provided pay incentives for highly qualified teachers to participate in programming, and tools and strategies to achieve program goals. Investments and supports include curriculum training and lesson planning opportunities, the availability of instructional assistants, professional development opportunities, and pay and incentives for teachers and instructional assistants. A significant challenge to implementation across years was program length and duration. Parents and school staff valued additional instructional time that the longer schedule provided during the summer 2021 programming. They also recognized the impact on teacher and student burnout and fatigue, which had negative implications for staffing and program participation and attendance, contributing to the change in program duration for summer 2022. However, the shorter schedule resulted in fewer instructional hours and fewer student academic gains, according to respondents.

While all districts reported the value of SEL components in summer programming for academic and non-academic student outcomes, implementation of SEL varied across districts. Although this did not present a challenge to program implementation, districts recognized the need for increased SEL training and resources to fully experience the benefits for student

outcomes. Accordingly, recommendations related to program length, class instruction, teacher supports, student participation and attendance, and SEL pointed to specific actions taken by districts and suggestions from school personnel, parents, and students to address challenges, improve programming, and leverage successes and lessons learned across years.

Summer programming, beyond addressing student learning needs, also facilitated other non-academic outcomes for varied parties. For students, it encouraged the development of SEL competencies and teacher relationships. For parents, it encouraged added school-home connections, and it provided financial and social support through meal provision and childcare. For teachers, it helped to develop relationships between school and instructional staff, and in some cases provided added training opportunities. These non-academic outcomes are critical when considering schools' roles in communities and whole-child development, and each can have positive implications for ongoing student learning and success.

In this applied research and evaluation project, we have structured our focus and reporting to inform decision-making; results from this study should, most clearly, inform the implementation of summer elementary programming ongoing. In addition, results shown here can also have direct implications for instruction at periods other than the summer, including the academic year, and potentially beyond the elementary level. The authors and researchers strongly encourage educational administration, leadership, and policymakers — particularly at the state level — to use this information to improve students' ability to succeed. We also encourage individual districts and schools to use this information to inform their practice.

Within the value of our results, we also acknowledge select limitations. For instance, this study only includes selected districts and schools; it is possible that other districts and schools have distinct experiences. However, our focus on a relatively large number of districts for a qualitative study, and our focus on core trends across districts, may help to mitigate this concern. In addition, we included some instances of student and parent voices, but there would have been value in added perspective from these critical groups. We envision this focus as a valuable next step if continuing a line of research focused on summer program implementation and non-academic effect.

We appreciate the time and thought provided by all respondents who participated in this study and the districts who supported partnership. We appreciate OLR providing the opportunity to learn from districts and to advocate for ways in which the learnings reported here can inform DPI as well as individual North Carolina school districts and schools.

REFERENCES

Blair, C., & Raver, C. C. (2014). Closing the achievement gap through modification of neurocognitive and neuroendocrine function: results from a cluster randomized controlled trial of an innovative approach to the education of children in kindergarten. *PLoS ONE*, *9*(11), e112393. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0112393

CASEL. (2021). *The CASEL guide to schoolwide SEL essentials*. https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/the-casel-guide-to-schoolwide-sel-essentials/

Center on Reinventing Public Education. (2022). *The state of the American student*. Center on Reinventing Public Education, Arizona State University. https://crpe.org/the-state-of-the-american-student/

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, *82*(1), 405–432.

Fitzpatrick, J. L., Sanders, J. R., & Worthen, B. R. (2004). Evaluation's basic purpose, uses and conceptual distinctions. *Program Evaluation: Alternative Approaches and Practical Guidelines*, *3*, 3–29.

Goodrick, D. (2014). Comparative case studies: Methodological briefs - Impact Evaluation No. 9. *Papers Innpub754*, *Methodological Briefs*. https://ideas.repec.org/p/ucf/metbri/innpub754.html

Goralnik, L., & Marcus, S. (2020). Resilient learners, learning resilience: Contemplative practice in the sustainability classroom. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, *2020*(161), 83–99. https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.20375

Hilliard, P., & Mangum, N. K. (2020, May 6). *Stress, trauma, and resilience: Helping students manage the challenges of remote learning*. https://www.fi.ncsu.edu/resources/stress-trauma-and-resilience-helping-students-manage-the-challenges-of-remote-learning/

Jones, S. M., Brown, J. L., & Lawrence Aber, J. (2011). Two-year impacts of a universal school-based social-emotional and literacy intervention: An experiment in translational developmental research. *Child Development*, *82*(2), 533–554. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01560.x

McCombs, J. S., Augustine, C. H., Schwartz, H. L., Bodilly, S. J., McInnis, B., Lichter, D. S., & Cross, A. B. (2011). *Making Summer Count: How summer programs can boost children's learning*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1120.pdf

Office for Civil Rights. (2021). *Education in a pandemic: The disparate impacts of COVID-19 on America's Students*. United States Department of Education. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/20210608-impacts-of-covid19.pdf

Overcoming Obstacles. (2023). *Overcoming Obstacles*. https://www.overcomingobstacles.org/

Patrick, S. K., Woods, S. C., Bala, N., & Santelli, F. A. (2021). *Schooling during COVID-19: Fall semester trends from six Tennessee districts*. TN Education Research Alliance, Vanderbilt University. https://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/TERA/files/covid19_fall_semester_trends_FINAL.pdf

Rosanbalm, K. (2021). *Social and emotional learning during COVID-19 and beyond: Why it matters and how to support it*. The Hunt Institute. https://hunt-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/HI-Duke-Brief-SEL-Learning-During-COVID-19-Rosanbalm.pdf

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* (Third Edition). SAGE.

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2022). *Total duration of school closures*. Education: From Disruption to Recovery. https://webarchive.unesco.org/web/20220629024039/https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/

Zeng, S., Benner, G. J., & Silva, R. M. (2016). Effects of a summer learning program for students at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders. *Education and Treatment of Children*, *39*(4), 593–615. https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2016.0026

APPENDICES

Appendices are included separately at https://tinyurl.com/DukeNCSU-OLR-qual-2023. For reference, below are items included in the Appendices.

Appendix A. District Descriptive Overview

Appendix B. Data Collection Processes Detail

Appendix C. Data Collection Reflection, Adaptations, and Limitations

Appendix D. Phase II Administrator Interview Questions

Appendix E. Phase II Focus Group Protocol

Appendix F. Phase III Observation Guide

Appendix G. Phase III Administrator Interview

Appendix H. Phase III Teacher Interview Guide

Appendix I. Phase III Parent Interview Protocol

Appendix J: Phase III Student Focus Group Guide

Appendix K. Phase II Coding Schema

Appendix L. Phase III Coding Schema

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO SERVE CENTER

Study of the Implementation and Outcomes of North Carolina's Summer Career Accelerator Program

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant and ongoing impact on the way schools and districts support students and families across North Carolina. Remote and hybrid learning, as well as other social distancing measures, have had a significant impact on Career and Technical Education (CTE) given that CTE is often hands-on, collaborative, or typically requires students to be in work-based settings—characteristics that do not easily translate to an online environment (Smith & Soricone, 2021). In general, students may have missed career awareness and exploration activities as schools prioritized instruction in core content areas or meeting students' social and emotional needs during the height of the pandemic. High school students may have been unable to complete internships, clinical experiences, or credentialing opportunities often required for CTE programs. To respond to this learning loss, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) created the Summer Career Accelerator Program (CAP) to assist state public school units (PSU) develop and provide summer programs that address students' loss of CTE instructional time that also align with workforce needs in the PSUs' communities. SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (SERVE) was asked to research the CAP implementation to generate information about planning and preliminary outcomes associated with the first year of the CAP implementation to inform future efforts to support students and families through career-focused summer programming.

Program Literature and Context

Much of the formal information that students receive about careers comes from their exposure to CTE at school. CTE gives students experiences that promote career awareness and exploration and opportunities to develop practical and specific skills to prepare themselves to enter the workforce. Although CTE programs vary (see Rosen, Visher, & Beal, 2018), these programs are generally designed to provide students with the academic, technical, and employability skills necessary to become college and career ready. For high school students, CTE offers opportunities to gain hands-on, experiential learning through coursework and

programs such as internships and apprenticeships, which can lead to industry-recognized certifications and credentials. For younger students, CTE is designed to develop career awareness and provide opportunities for career exploration through activities such as job shadowing, guest speakers or field trips, or workforce-aligned assignments. Students who complete CTE programs in high school can experience several benefits including a lower probability of dropping out of high school, an increased high school graduation rate, the higher employment rate (with higher wages), and more successful transitions to postsecondary education (Brunner et al., 2021; Dougherty, 2018; Kreisman & Strange, 2020).

Given the hands-on nature of CTE, it is not surprising that these programs faced significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most CTE programs were put on hold or pivoted to virtual instruction early on and then continued to operate either virtually or in some form of hybrid instruction into the 2020–21 school year. Smith and Soricone (2021) found that during spring 2020 and into the 2020–21 school year, the pacing of the CTE curriculum was slower, in part, due to social distancing requirements. The most significant negative impacts were on hands-on activities and opportunities for work-based learning and the continuation of student CTE clubs. Opportunities requiring students to have access to specialized equipment or job sites were most heavily impacted by virtual learning and distance measures. In general, the literature on the impact of COVID-19 on CTE suggests that students whose learning took place primarily in a virtual or hybrid setting would need additional time and support to build skills that they would have acquired through in-person learning. Similarly, students who missed opportunities for work-based learning and completion of hours required for certifications were at greater risk for entering the workforce without the skills and experiences to support a successful transition to the workforce (Dougherty et al., 2022; Smith & Soricone, 2021).

Purpose of Study

Schools and districts have faced several challenges in providing career development opportunities to students since the onset of the pandemic. Emerging literature highlights examples of educators adapting and innovating their practices to minimize the learning loss that students experienced (ACTE, 2021). The CAP, identified by the NCDPI Program Report Code (PRC) 177, provides districts and schools with resources to develop workforce-aligned summer programming. Given that this was the first year of the CAP implementation, our goal was to collaborate with six diverse PSUs (five districts and one charter school) to document what

implementation looked like "on the ground," understand what stakeholders saw as the impact of the CAP funding in their schools and districts, and most importantly, provide a venue for our PSU partners to share promising practices and lessons learned from their initial implementation efforts in order to support future summer learning programs.

Our study was guided by a *descriptive phenomenological* approach that focuses on understanding and describing the essence of a phenomenon from the subjective experiences and perceptions of individuals who experience it (Creswell, 2007; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). In our research, we were interested in the experiences of PSU staff and community partners implementing CAPs as well as the experiences of students and families who participated in the camps.[1] Given this approach, we conducted in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observations with the goal of letting stakeholders themselves tell us their stories about how they experienced their district's CAP. It was important that our decisions about which camps to visit were made in collaboration with our PSU partners so that our findings elevated their perspectives and unique insights while attempting to minimizing our own interpretations and expectations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was guided by three primary evaluation/research questions:

1. How were the Summer CAP activities implemented?
2. What promising practices have been developed?
3. What were the outcomes of implementing the Summer CAPs?

METHODS

Design Overview

We used a multi-case study design for which we recruited a diverse group of PSUs implementing a variety of summer programs. We considered each PSU as a case so that we could examine all CAP offerings within the PSU and then conduct site visits to a selection of camps within each PSU to provide more detailed reporting on implementation. This approach helped us build a better understanding of how district- and camp-level implementation decisions were made and how such decisions impacted students and staff at each camp we visited. We collaborated with six PSUs across State Board of Education Districts 5 (Piedmont-Triad Region) and 6 (Southwest Region):[2] five LEAs and one charter school. (Our sampling strategy is described below.) Once PSUs agreed to participate, we conducted interviews primarily with

district and school staff, focus groups with students, and site visits. In some cases, we were able to interview community partners and parents. PSUs shared implementation documents with us (e.g., schedules, activity guides, student recruitment flyers). All information was qualitatively coded and developed into individual PSU case study reports (see Appendix K). Findings across case studies are summarized in this report. We encourage readers to review the individual case studies for more nuanced information on how each PSU implemented their CAP.

Data Collected

Selection and Recruitment of PSUs

Considerable attention was given to identifying and recruiting PSUs for collaboration given our goal of identifying PSUs using promising practices. To accomplish this, we drew on CTE best practices from the literature (see Imperatore & Hyslop, 2018), evidence-based recommendations for summer learning programs (Manuel, 2022), as well as the program goals set forth by NCDPI to develop a rubric to guide our selection process. Our understanding of what PSUs planned to implement came from their grant applications and initial contacts with PSU leaders before the summer. Our study was not designed to provide a summative evaluation of the quality or impact of any PSU's approach to implementing a CAP. Rather, our goal was to collaborate with PSUs to identify a selection of camps that highlighted some of the potentially innovative or promising ways that CAP funding was being used from the perspective of those who were involved with the program.

The rubric allowed us to document, and discuss as a research team, potentially innovative features across eight dimensions: (1) program design; (2) length of program for students; (3) goals and outcomes of the camp; (4) workforce alignment of camp activities; (5) alignment of camp activities to other district efforts (e.g., curriculum, programs/pathways, learning recovery efforts); (6) student eligibility and recruitment; (7) staffing and budget; and (8) planned post-program follow up and data use. We reviewed 39 PSUs' applications for Summer CAP funding provided to us by NCDPI. Based on our initial review, we contacted 17 PSUs to learn more about their CAP planning and gauge their interest in collaborating to support our study (see Appendix A). In general, we approached these PSUs based on unique or innovative activities in each area (e.g., offered paid internships, interesting collaborations with community partners) or because the PSU articulated a well-designed overall plan that showed promise in multiple areas consistent with best practices in the CTE literature. In addition, we wanted to maximize the

diversity of our partner PSUs based on the size and locale of the district, as well as the characteristics of the students served, to understand what CAP implementation looked like in different contexts. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the six PSUs that agreed to collaborate on this study and the camps they offered. Note that we used pseudonyms for the PSUs throughout the report.

Table 1

Characteristics of PSU's and Summer CAP Offerings

PSU Name (Region)	Description of Summer 2022 Programs	Locale[3]	PSU Enrollment[4] (Students Served by the CAP)	% Black, Hispanic, Native American[5]	% EDS[6]
Ferndale School District (6)	**22 Camps** (4-day) with topics ranging from CPR certification to finance, construction, public safety, healthcare, and culinary arts	Rural, Fringe	Over 20,000 (351)	41–60	21–40
Glenview School District (5)	**6 Camps** provided to rising 6th–8th-grade students (Agriculture and Health Science); Middle and High school students (Media production, Entrepreneurship, Design & Engineering) and High School (Agriculture) **Paid internships** for high school students with Workplace Readiness Training weekly	Town, Fringe	2,001–5,000 (113)	61–81	61–80
Highland School District (6)	**6 Camps** (4-day) provided to rising 6th–8th-grade students (STEM/Engineering, Cybersecurity/Coding, HGTV, Healthcare, Public Safety, Sewing & Design)	Rural, Distant	10,001–20,000 (133)	0–20	21–40
Lakeshore School District (6)	**7 Camps** (4-day) for rising 6th–8th-grade students including drones, robotics, auto tech **Summer Elevation Camp** (2 weeks) used a math remediation curriculum that integrated career exploration activities to promote connections to math **Career Roadtrip** (4-day) for high school students/parents to explore local business and industry opportunities, particularly in advanced manufacturing	Rural, Fringe	Over 20,000 (335)	21–40	21–40
Magnolia School (6)	**Student Store** (3 weeks) opened and operated by students combined with career exploration activities and project	City, Large	Under 200 (8)	61–80	61–80
Woodside School District (5)	**CTE Camp** (2 weeks) for rising 6th- and 7th-grade students included field trips and career exploration via field trips and MajorClarity **Paid internships** for high school students, included soft-skills development	Town, Fringe	2,001–5,000 (45)	61–80	61–80

Sources of Data

We developed several data collection instruments for our site visits and interviews. For site visits, we developed an observation protocol for observers to collect detailed notes and reflections (see Appendix B) and a student focus group protocol (see Appendix C). The student focus group protocol was designed to gather information about why students participated in camp, their experiences and satisfaction with camp, what they learned, how the camp related to their future education and career plans, and any recommendations to improve their camp experiences. For the adult interviews, we developed structured protocols to address each research

question and included items related to planning and implementation, how their CAP aligned with the PSU's CTE programming and other learning recovery efforts, and any recommendations or promising practices that staff identified. Protocols contained overlapping content, but each protocol was adapted to the role of the participant (see Appendices D–H).

We also asked PSUs to share any relevant documents to help tell the story of their CAP implementation (e.g., program flyers, schedules/calendars, curriculum materials, photos, survey results, student projects/presentations). Collecting information from multiple sources allowed us to build a more nuanced picture of the programs offered at each PSU from the perspective of individuals in distinct roles and with different responsibilities. This allowed us to uncover similarities and differences in the way that stakeholders experienced their PSU's CAP.

Data Collection Procedures

When selecting camps within PSUs for site visits, we relied on district staff to help identify camps that they felt were innovative, showed promise, or would create unique opportunities to generate information that could inform other PSUs and state leaders. Site visits were conducted between June 20 and August 4, 2022. During these site visits, we carried out structured observations of students and staff participating in the funded CAP activities, and we conducted student focus groups. We talked to staff, community partners, and parents during these visits, but we did not conduct structured interviews to minimize disruptions.

Following every site visit, we made a note of PSU-specific questions that we added to our standard interview protocol questions, which helped give us a more complete picture of the programs we observed. After each visit, we conducted virtual interviews with CAP staff, including district-level administrators, camp administrators, camp facilitators, and where possible, community partners and parents. These interviews took place at the end of the summer and in early fall so that participants could reflect on their experiences once summer activities were complete. Carrying out the interviews as the last data collection activity allowed us to verify information, we gathered during site visits and confirm details we learned from pre-summer conversations with PSU staff. Wherever possible, we built a holistic understanding of the programs offered by triangulating various data sources, using interviews and observations primarily and supplementing with program documents supplied by the PSUs, the pre-summer conversations, and the PSUs' preliminary CAP application. One challenge we encountered during data collection was that some teachers were not responsive to our invitations for

interviews, despite multiple requests through multiple avenues. Except for one camp, we interviewed at least one instructor from every camp we observed, so we were still able to get an instructor-level perspective on almost all programs. Table 2 summarizes the sites we visited and counts of interviews and focus groups we conducted.

Table 2

CAP Data Collection: Site Visits and Interview Counts

PSU	Camps Observed	Number of Students (Number of Focus Groups)	District Personnel	Camp Administrators or Facilitators	Program Instructors or Other Program Staff	Other
Ferndale	- Public Safety Camp - Academy of Architecture & Construction Camp	7 (2)	1	2	4	1 parent, 2 community partners
Glenview	- Design & Engineering Camp - High School Internship	16 (2)	1	0	1	0
Highland	- Healthcare Camp - Public Safety Camp - Sewing Camp	10 (2)	1	0	6	0
Lakeshore	- Summer Elevation (math remediation & CTE) - Career Roadtrip	10 (2)	1	1	2	2 parents, 1 community partner
Magnolia School	- School Store	3 (1)	1[a]	0	1	0
Woodside	- Middle School STEM Camp - High School Internship	9 (2)	1	1	2	0
Total	12	55 (11)	6	4	16	6

Note. Most people were interviewed individually, but a few were interviewed in a group of two or more.
[a] Interviewed the school principal.

Analysis

We used a qualitative, multi-case-study approach where an individual, in-depth case study was created for each of the six PSUs, and then we created a cross-case summary of key findings. Creating individual case studies allowed us to develop a deeper understanding of stakeholders' experiences designing, implementing, and participating in CAP activities at each PSU. The cross-case summary allowed us to synthesize key findings across PSUs by highlighting similarities and differences in program implementation across the PSUs. For both the individual case studies and the cross-case synthesis, we made use of quotes to allow

stakeholders to describe their experiences in their own words. To generate the case studies, all collected data were entered into the qualitative software program Atlas.ti v22, which facilitates the coding of documents to identify themes. To code the data, we developed a preliminary list of codes based on the research questions, the literature on best or promising practices, and our preliminary findings during the recruitment process. We also created new or modified codes based on themes that emerged as we analyzed the data (see Appendix I for code descriptions). To ensure accuracy, we coded a selection of the same documents and then met to calibrate our coding. Then, each of us coded an equal number of interviews and documents. We met regularly to review and make coding adjustments as needed.

Throughout the research process we used an iterative approach to refine our understanding of the CAP implementation to inform our data collection and analysis process. A graphical representation of this approach can be found in Appendix J. Initial reviews of the CAP applications and discussions with program leaders helped us refine our research questions and inform the development of our protocols. Similarly, what we learned through our structured interviews and site visits allowed us to refine the design of our study and our methods for analyzing and reporting the data. We met weekly throughout the study to discuss our findings, debrief, and evaluate our processes to inform our research as we gained new knowledge.

The findings presented in this report must be interpreted in light of certain limitations. First, findings should not be considered representative of Summer CAP implementation across the state as we only considered PSUs in Districts 5 and 6 who were implementing programs that appeared promising based on our review of applications and preliminary discussions with program leaders. Second, because of the brief timespan between the submission of the applications and the start of the camps, we had a short window in which to review applications, conduct screening calls with PSUs, and make final site selections. As a result, we were unable to recruit some PSUs, particularly larger PSUs who had more lengthy research application procedures in place. Relatedly, we had to shift our focus to PSUs that showed an initial interest and willingness to be a part of our study over those with whom we had greater difficulty making initial contact. In summary, we caution readers not to view our findings as representative of other CAP outcomes or as an endorsement of the implementation described in our report.

Research Question 1: How Were the Summer CAP Activities Implemented?

PSUs Offered a Variety of Camps Opportunities to Students

Our collaborations with the six PSUs revealed that CAP funding was used for a variety of CTE-related summer camps that typically lasted half a day for one or two weeks. Approximately 50 camps served nearly 1,000 middle and high school students (see Table 1). Most of the camps were focused on specific career fields (e.g., public safety, healthcare), however, we also observed other forms of programming:

- Two PSUs in our study offered paid internships to high school students that lasted several weeks. Students in these internships were required to work a set number of hours with their employers as well as complete connecting activities, including soft skills and employability activities in the classroom.
- In another program, charter school students developed and operated a student store. Students researched and operated all aspects of the store including management of finances, inventory, advertising, and sales with staff support. These students also completed career awareness projects and had guest speakers from the community.
- Another PSU in our study used CAP funding to take students and parents together on half-day bus trips over the course of four days to local businesses to learn about industry opportunities in their community.

PSUs Strengthened Existing and Developed New Community Partnerships

The Summer CAP was developed to aid PSUs in leveraging existing business and community relationships and build new partnerships to help students learn about local workforce opportunities. We saw several examples of PSUs collaborating with community partners. One theme that emerged from our observations and conversations was the importance of building those partnerships in order to expand opportunities for students. Staff reported that decisions about camp themes were based on several factors, including local employment needs, existing community partnerships, and the expertise of CTE staff. Camps were also offered based on student interest or the willingness of community partners to host field trips. For example, three

PSUs incorporated opportunities to learn about automotive technology based on regional labor needs associated with NASCAR and the automotive racing industry.

The internships and camps that we visited were supported by a mix of existing partnerships with local businesses and new partnerships that developed because of the CAP opportunities. An instructor at Glenview shared how new partnerships were opening doors for current and future students in the district. The Summer CAP internship worked well for both the high school and the community partner, and because of that, the healthcare partner began accepting new interns for the fall semester, "We've already placed some interns this [coming fall] semester at [our local healthcare system]."

Several camps and internships focused on public safety and involved several public agencies. We observed police officers, firefighters, and a K-9 handler from the State Bureau of Investigation working with students and conducting demonstrations. A public safety camp instructor from the Highland School District explained why they agreed to partner with the CAP camps, saying, "It was just the opportunity for students to get a better idea of the public safety careers that are out there and to get some hands-on experience to have a better idea of what they'll do." Another camp instructor at Ferndale explained,

> *[Students] are able to see what they might do with their lives moving forward. They got to see a little bit of everything. When you go from working a fire hose to working with a motorcycle cop and doing the sobriety test, blowing up cow lungs and doing the EMT skills and all that stuff, they see how they can actually take an adult role. And I don't think a lot of these kids ever saw themselves within adult roles before this. And I think it helped assure them what they can do in \the future.*

Leaders at Lakeshore School District reported creating new relationships with community employers to serve as field trip destinations for students. We joined a group of students and their parents on a "Career Roadtrip" as they visited an international advanced manufacturing company and the regional distribution center of a national home improvement retail provider, both in their community. The distribution center representative made a point to tell the students and the parents that this was the first time that visitors under 18 were allowed to tour the distribution facility. Both organizations took time to explain the different areas of their facilities, describe the jobs and tasks involved, and career paths available within their organizations. During an interview, a representative for the manufacturer described workforce development as a pillar of

their corporate responsibility and that they strive to "get involved with helping students realize what their interests are and what opportunities exist for them."

In addition to leveraging business connections, many of the PSUs strengthened relationships with their community college partners. For example, one PSU hired a community college administrator from the career services center to teach the classroom portion of their summer internship program. We observed a connection between the EMT instructor at a high school and their community college counterpart as they facilitated a field trip to explore the educational opportunities in healthcare and public safety at the community college. Another PSU took students on field trips to the community college to let them see the facilities where they could study specific career paths, introducing students to careers that many never knew existed.

CAP Reengaged Students with School

A common goal for the CAPs across most of the PSUs was to re-engage students with school. Staff from several districts discussed both the academic and social and emotional impact that COVID-19 had on students in general because of the loss of in-person instruction and the pause of instruction of non-core content and certain CTE programs. A Magnolia School administrator shared how they hoped that CAP activities helped re-engage students:

> *We felt that working on a project together would give [students] a sense of accomplishment and also, they could see some concrete results of what they were doing over a relatively short period of time. . . . And so this was something that touched on their reading and their math and lots of research skills and lots of other standards that they need to know, but it was also a way that they could come together and work together and quickly see some benefit of that work.*

A Lakeshore instructor that we interviewed from the math/STEM camp, which had embedded career awareness activities, shared a similar perspective on what students learned at the camps, saying,

> *[Students] researched careers. They did do the math. But sometimes with post-COVID, I feel like they kind of did need to realize that 'Hey, teachers are here to help me get better.' I think that was an important [lesson] for some of those kids who are struggling.*

CAP Helped Students Explore Local Careers and CTE Options in Their Schools

Beyond the goal of re-engaging students, CAP programs shared the goal of engaging students in career exploration through activities that were exciting and hands-on, and that would also help students make connections between school and the world of work. A district staff member from Lakeshore discussed the importance of not only promoting awareness of CTE programs within the PSU, but helping students see connections more broadly between programs, opportunities in the community, and the role of postsecondary education. They explained,

> *We're trying to be very deliberate, aligning our camps, our courses, our special projects and field trips to help students better understand how CTE from middle school to high school is tied together with our credentials, our career academy. . . .And then [they can] further their education at a community college or a college or just go right into the workforce.*

Another theme to emerge from our interviews with district-level staff was that CAP funding was used to not only promote career exploration in general, but to help students, and by extension, their families, build awareness of what specific CTE programs and pathways were available to students within the PSU. At Glenview School District, camps were directly related to the district's K–12 Career Development Continuum. Lakeshore School District intentionally tied their CAP programs to CTE programs within the district. Some PSUs used middle school camps to make younger students aware of high school CTE programs and pathways that would be available to them when they entered high school in the district. We observed at a public safety camp, hosted at the district's Public Safety Academy, staff frequently described the public safety programs and pathways available at that high school. At another camp, guest speakers from the sheriff's department talked to students about CTE opportunities at other high schools and career academies in that district. At an engineering camp, where students were designing and building guitars, we observed the instructor take the middle school students on an informal tour of the high school and introduce them to several CTE teachers.

A final note about the CAP implementation: although a goal listed in the CAP funding application was targeting students who were "disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic" or who were otherwise at risk, our interviews with staff suggested that, in general, PSUs prioritized making opportunities available to all students instead of targeting specific groups.

Research Question 2: What Promising Practices Have Been Developed?

The promising practices described here come primarily from our discussions with the CAP instructors and coordinators and school-/district-level staff; they shared their recommendations for what facilitated a smooth implementation of their programs and what provided an enjoyable experience for instructors and staff. We also used their reflections on what they would change in the future. The promising practices are also informed by our own observations. The promising practices below were observed across PSUs.

Start Planning and Recruiting Instructors and Students Early

Across all PSUs, we heard from staff involved at every level of planning about the importance of early planning. Planning for summer projects should begin months before the start so that camp details are confirmed with enough time to advertise offerings to students in the spring. Many of those responsible for planning for summer 2023 reported modifying plans based on their experiences with the summer 2022 camps.

The short period between the CAP funding announcement in winter 2021 and implementation in summer 2022 was challenging for those planning the summer programs. All PSUs had to simultaneously recruit teachers to plan or staff the camps, hire support staff, organize camp locations, purchase equipment and supplies, and finally, advertise the programs. For many PSUs, camp offerings were determined by which instructors with content-area expertise were interested in planning and leading a camp and who were also available during the summer. Camp instructors and support staff needed to be identified and recruited early in the process to make sure camps were fully staffed before employees had made other summer plans. The STEM Camp coordinator from Woodside explained the importance of beginning planning early, saying,

> *I think the earlier we're able to say, "We're doing this, when is it going to happen? Who are we going to invite?" the earlier we can get that out there . . . the more that we can let [students and families] know that this opportunity is out there, I feel like it's goingto be even more successful. So, I think early planning and really forming those partnerships as soon as possible [is a promising practice].*

Student recruitment could not begin until details such as date, location, and camp focus had been confirmed. Getting students signed up for summer programs generally required providing parents advance notice of the opportunities, and PSUs needed time to share information through multiple channels. Many PSUs that we spoke with suggested that they missed opportunities to recruit students because camp plans were not formalized until late spring, long after family plans had been arranged for the summer. PSU leaders also reported that it was harder to get high school students, particularly rising 11th- and 12th-grade students, to sign up for summer programs due to other commitments, such as jobs and sports.

Provide Sufficient Administrative and In-Classroom Support to Instructors to Support Daily Operations

During the camps, instructors and assistants often took on tasks and assignments they were not typically responsible for during the school year; for example, ensuring that students who were signed up for meals received their food or getting students on the correct bus at the end of the day. In Glenview, the district hired a facilitator who helped make sure that many aspects of daily operations, such as meals, attendance, and buses, were addressed. This took an administrative burden off instructors and district staff The CTE director at Glenview described the decision to create that facilitator position: "That was a tremendous investment, and I think really made things run more smoothly for students and instructors and also the rest of our departments across the district to have a point person." In some PSUs, camps were held in buildings that the instructors were not familiar with, so they did not know where to find things or who to go to for assistance. In Lakeshore, where this was the case, the CAP planners assigned district-level administrators to serve as roving site managers in each of the buildings used for camps. One of the site managers summed up the promising practice of having administrative support in place at each camp or building (from the perspective of teachers) by saying,

> *This is not our school where we work. We don't know our way around, we don't know the staff, the support staff. We don't know who to go and get. Having [someone] here as a site manager to fill in, . . . to do with all those things that a site manager would do, [teachers] said, "That should happen at every camp." I do think we need to build that into our camps.*

For many of the programs, the CAP planners budgeted for additional in-class instructors or assistants to support the instructor and help monitor students. The smaller student-to-adult ratio during camps and field trips provided more personalized attention to students than they got in-class during the school year, which helped support PSUs' goal to re-engage students with school and support their social-emotional learning needs. In many cases, high school teachers had both CTE content and high school teaching expertise, but camps were planned for a younger set of students, middle school students. In these instances, PSUs found that it was helpful—or reflected later that it would have been helpful—to have additional adults in the classroom who were accustomed to working with students from those grade levels, even if they were not familiar with the content. Some PSUs deliberately staffed camps with at least one assistant who was also able to drive a school bus, facilitating transportation for field trips.

Take Advantage of the Flexibility of Summer Programming to Offer Experiences Not Possible During the School Year

Summer programs are not constrained by the structures that govern the school day during the school year; planners were not bound by the arrival or dismissal bells or the change of class periods. Many PSUs took advantage of this flexibility to offer programs that were not logistically feasible during the school year and planned activities that took several hours and/or spanned consecutive days, for example having students spend a day baking a cake, decorating it, and designing a final presentation about it. One camp had a day focused on masonry and students spent the day making mortar and laying courses of bricks, something that could not take place during a typical class period. At Lakeshore, the Career Roadtrip was designed to pair students and their parents for tours of two to four local employers daily over four consecutive days. At Magnolia School's camp, staff and students worked together over the summer to establish a student-operated store that will continue to be run by students during the school year. All of these programs would have been difficult to do during the school year when students have multiple classes and potentially after-school activities each day. Even camps that were ostensibly structured more like a standard school day—with students rotating to different classrooms over multiple periods—altered the schedule to accommodate field trips and guest speakers with hands-on demonstrations that needed more time.

Leverage Teachers' Expertise and Interests to Develop and Staff Camps

The role of planning or developing camps and internships fell to different people at each of the PSUs. At some, district leaders decided on the topics for camp offerings and planned the content of each camp; in others, district leaders determined the topic and delegated the planning to staff; and finally, in some PSUs, teachers were invited to propose topics and develop curriculum for camps. Drawing on teachers' expertise and interests helped PSUs recruit staff for the camps and, in some cases, aided district staff with planning a robust set of camps. To staff camps in Lakeshore, a district leader explained, "We began looking for teachers that [we] knew of in the district that were just really high-energy folks." Although leveraging teachers' expertise and interests may have played out differently at each PSU, the net effect of this practice was that it provided CAP students with highly motivated teachers, while also taking some of the responsibility of planning and curriculum development off of district staff. In Ferndale School District, all teachers were invited to submit a proposal for a camp by completing a form created for this purpose. Others submitted ideas based on a personal interest or expertise, such as culinary arts or emergency medicine. Also in Ferndale, instructors from the same career academy co-created, (and co-taught) camps to introduce rising high school students to their academy as a possible high school pathway.

Prepare for Summer Programs by Coordinating with Departments and Teams Within the District in Advance

Preparing for successful CAP implementation required planning and coordination, within a PSU, between administration and staff who would be involved with or impacted by the program. Successful planning opened lines of communication and promoted collaboration among district staff at the different buildings. We observed several different strategies by CAP planners to facilitate coordination for summer programs with other district teams. In the Glenview School District, once the CTE team laid out the type of programming they wanted to provide, they held intra-district, cross-departmental meetings with representatives from transportation, nutrition, human resources, and finance; they also included the team planning the Summer Bridge Academy, PRC 176, to coordinate efficiencies across funding streams. The CTE director explained that these intra-district meetings were helpful for establishing commonly-agreed-upon timelines and deadlines, saying,

[We met] to talk through all the pieces, like who was going to be where, when, and who needed this, and who needed lunch, and how many people are we hiring and what those contracts look like. . . . For the most part, I think that really did help with those big logistics pieces.

Other PSUs took similar approaches to coordination. In Lakeshore, the CTE team established an implementation task force made up of district staff representing different departments, teachers, representatives from the local community college, and local business partners. As mentioned above, Ferndale teachers used a proposal worksheet to plan their camp. As part of their proposal, they needed to include information about the logistics of their camp, departments across the district that their camp would impact, the type of classroom or space required, the physical and material needs of the camp, transportation needs, and what personnel might be affected. The proposal worksheet provided a framework to communicate their needs and coordinate across the district.

Ensure Facilities are Prepared for Summer Programs

Just as collaboration is needed across district teams, coordination and collaboration is also needed between CAP leaders, camp staff, and building personnel in the host buildings. Traditionally, school buildings are used for a few programs during summer break, so facilities teams take the opportunity to do maintenance and upgrades, and utilities or services may be turned off or inaccessible. CAP planners in several PSUs realized that they needed to coordinate with facility personnel to make sure that the classrooms and common spaces that programs needed access to—particularly specialized spaces, such as a masonry lab, kitchen, or computer lab—would be accessible and safe and that electricity, wi-fi, and other building amenities were on, as needed, for camp activities.

Building- and district-wide planning allowed for the provision of information to the host school administrators and facilities and custodial staff involved, enlisting their help, where necessary, to ensure that implementing camps went smoothly. In some cases, when this communication was not integrated into planning for the camps, facilities were not fully prepared to host the programs, creating challenges for camp staff. For example, at a coding camp in Ferndale, the building's wi-fi was turned off, requiring teachers to temporarily use their personal devices as mobile hotspots. For one camp in Lakeshore, the instructors were not given access to

the school in advance; on the morning of the first day of camp, they had to scramble to set up the classrooms and locate resources because they were unfamiliar with the building. In Ferndale, after camp dates and locations were announced, camp planners learned that the front entrance of a building they planned to use was being remodeled and the adjoining parking lot was being resurfaced over the summer. In our site visits, we encountered evidence of school buildings being in "summer mode," such as restrooms that were not stocked with supplies or a school lobby being closed for maintenance, thus requiring visitors to enter through a side door. Several camp planners emphasized the importance of communication with building personnel during the camp planning process, advising others to "plan ahead for all scenarios," and "make sure to collaborate with the locations—if it is a school property, collaborate with them to make sure that everything is available."

Research Question 3: What Were the Outcomes of Implementing the Summer CAP Programs?

As part of documenting the CAP implementation across the PSUs, we recorded the impact the program had on students, staff, and the PSUs, as reported by stakeholders. Stakeholders shared their experiences with us through interviews and focus groups; we also incorporated information from our site visit observations.

Student Outcomes

Staff and students reported that students enjoyed the camps. The camps were designed to re-engage students with school and provide career-oriented learning experiences. One instructor from the Highland School District described the idea behind the planning:

> *Camp has to be fun and engaging. These are their summer days. And for them to spend their summers in school with us, it has to be fun. And so, there were lots of lessons that were made and things that were taught, but it wasn't like a normal school day. We did not expect these kids to sit down as we were instructing.*

In focus groups, students across the PSUs were particularly enthusiastic about the camp activities that did not feel like schoolwork. When Woodside STEM Camp students were asked what they enjoyed most about the camp, they reported that they liked doing things like making ice cream or dissecting frogs, activities that they did not get to do during the year. Lakeshore

students liked using technology that they had not experienced before, like virtual reality headsets to explore career opportunities. When students were asked what they would change about their camp, students from different PSUs suggested making camps longer because they were having fun and wanted to learn more. One Ferndale student said, "Make camp longer or something, or make the days longer so that we can do more in the electrical. Instead of just [simple connections], we can make it more complex to connect more things."

PSU administrators and instructors described high rates of student retention over the camps as evidence that students enjoyed them. One PSU administrator summed up the positive camp experience by saying, "[In] all the camps I was at, there was a ton of laughter and students and teachers were engaged." At Glenview, one student described their anticipation of camp, "I always look forward to doing new stuff every day. One day, it's sanding, but I mostly look forward to going in the workshop and doing stuff." Across PSUs, we spoke to students who reported that they enjoyed the camps, that they were engaged in career activities, and that they were beginning to think about classes and careers. One student said, "I've really enjoyed meeting the new people here, and I really enjoyed figuring out a class that I would love to take when I get into high school, especially with this teacher. Finally, a camp leader at Lakeshore commented on student engagement and enthusiasm:

> *The last day of that [drone] camp . . . if you could have seen this long hallway in this elementary school, students had taken boxes and hula hoops and swim noodles and made targets and they were flying these little classroom drones through this gigantic obstacle course they had built. And some of that honestly happened so organically; the teachers, we kind of talked about, but then the students just took off with it, and it was a really cool way to end camp."*

Students reported developing greater career awareness through camps and internships. A major goal of the CAP programming was to promote career awareness and exploration by exposing students to career fields and the types of jobs within those fields. Students in camps and internships shared numerous examples of how they learned about unfamiliar careers or gained additional insight into careers. In some cases, their experiences changed their thinking about their future.

- A rising 6th-grade student in the Woodside School District told us that "One [career] was really interesting to me, and it was a graphic designer because I love graphic things, . . . because I've always thought that was just a huge satisfying idea. . . . I didn't even know that was a job till now."
- One middle school camper at Woodside was able to connect a career with a field trip taken during the CAP camp, "I was looking at a water resource engineer, and I put that as one of my jobs that I was interested in. And at the lake, we tested the water and looked [at] what kind of water was it? Was it dirty water? And it was fascinating . . .; we had these little pill things to [put in] the water to see what color would turn. It was really cool. So, I was interested in the water resource engineer."
- A student from the Woodside internship program had been considering a medical career, and the internship experience gave them experience to make a more informed choice. They explained, "The experience of working inside of [a specialist's] office, taught me how I could work inside of a regular doctor's office. Since I want to be a nurse and work in the medical field, it just helped me see how to work with patients, how to work with coworkers. And yeah, I put all that I've learned there, and I could put it into my other career path."
- During one Woodside student's internship, they were inspired by a role model to explore opportunities as a firefighter. The student explained, "She really showed me a lot of points of being a female and the only Latina, . . . she was a girl boss and really powerful. She inspired me to become a firefighter because there's not really bilingual people, not really Hispanic Latinos." The intern added, "I've never really thought about it, but she made me look at stuff that has never crossed my mind."
- Students from one Highland camp described how their camp experiences influenced their course selection for the upcoming year and their personal plans, such as joining the local Explorer group (a law enforcement club for students 13 years or older) or the Junior Firefighter program.

Students gained personal and workforce knowledge through their internships.

Students in the two PSUs that developed internship programs were exposed to careers with different employers and reflected on their internship experiences:

- When asked about their reason for participating in the internships, a Woodside intern said, “This was my first job, and I felt like this would be the perfect experience for a job.”
- Another Woodside intern described why they selected to work with the employer that they did, “I wanted to step out my comfort zone and just try new things. And this is an experience in your life that you can never get, because it's [a job in] high school, so it's a lot of opportunities.”
- A Glenview intern realized that they did not want a solely desk-based job based on their internship; others said that they were now planning to go to college instead of straight into the workforce full-time.
- One student in the Glenview internship program told us that they “learned that there’s a lot of ups and downs [interning in a small company]. . . . Every week, on Wednesday, they have a meeting with all the employees, they share the numbers and all that. You get to see there’s really bad days to some weeks. Last Wednesday, it was a complete miss. All the numbers were in the red, everything. They had to shut down some hours. It’s real life that every day’s not going to be a good day.”
- Another student at Glenview described what they learned as part of their internship, “I’ve learned that experience, sometimes, is more important than the education you learn in college. For example, both things are important, but I [interned] with maintenance people that work with the schools in the city. There are people that work inside HVAC [department] with all this electrical experience, . . . they don’t have a degree, but most times they know more than the people who just freshly came out of college with a degree because of all the experience they have.”

Programs provided at no cost allowed some students to go to camp who otherwise would not have been able to attend. This fee-free summer programs enabled students, whose families may not have had the means to pay for their children to attend traditional summer camps, to participate in at least one camp. One Highland instructor described the importance of being able to provide an engaging, quality camp at no cost to families, saying, “If we wouldn't have had that money, I feel like this camp would've been pretty expensive, and a lot of kids wouldn't have been able to afford it.”

The CAP’s impact on students was limited by the fact that there were students who could not arrange transportation to the camps or to internship sites. Camp planners acknowledged that

this was a shortcoming. Looking forward to 2023, many of the PSUs we spoke to are considering how to increase student access to camps; for example, by offering transportation to camps or dispersing the camp sites around the district to be closer to more students.

Teacher Outcomes

Teachers were energized by their work on CAP. Several staff members noted that teachers were re-engaged by teaching in their PSU's CAP over the summer. One CTE administrator at Ferndale noted, "Teachers felt a lot of support from the students that were really excited about what they were doing. And it kind of rejuvenated teachers after a long school year." This perspective was shared by a Ferndale instructor who said,

> *[Camps were] energizing for us. The kids were excited to be here. It was the part of teaching that you love without all the parts of teaching that are stressful. And it was a good little shot of adrenaline at the end of the summer, to start the new year. I think my advice [to other teachers would be, "Do it. Run the camp, play with the kids, have fun!"*

In PSUs where camps were designed by the instructors, one of the factors that seemed to motivate them was having the ability to play a role in designing the camps and developing their own content; several reported enjoying having the opportunity to provide content and activities would go beyond what they were able to teach taught during the school. A Glenview administrator acknowledged that the teachers seemed uplifted by their experiences:

> *I think CAP was really positive for teachers. Last year was still really, really hard for teachers and students. I think for teachers, that they saw again how fun teaching can be and how they can make their classrooms come alive for students*.

Working with colleagues they do not usually interact with during the school year gave teachers ideas for how to improve their instruction during the school year.

Many of the camps brought teachers together to collaborate or co-teach across grades and subjects. In PSUs where this occurred, instructors reported that they benefited from the collaborative aspect of co-teaching the summer camps. For example, two camp instructors from Lakeshore's math and CTE camp shared that working together allowed both instructors the opportunity to see connections between their fields, particularly in terms of the language used in each field. One instructor shared,

When the math person was teaching, I would be like, "Oh yeah. We [CTE] say it this way." And I thought "I need to start saying it the way the math teacher says it." And then the math teacher was like, "Oh, you use that in your class. . . . " We really understood [the] need to start being together on the words that we're using and the context in which we use them.

Teachers reflected on opportunities to work together and started to think about how to continue to collaborate in their classrooms in the upcoming school year. A Ferndale instructor shared that they were planning a collaboration with a teacher they met during the summer on projects during the school year, saying, "Our curriculums are aligned," adding that, "[Teaching the camp] opened up our eyes to see how well and how easily we could work together to do some projects in the future."

PSU Outcomes

CAP funding allowed PSUs to expand CTE programming into the summer. The PRC 177 funding allowed PSUs to provide summer programs focusing on career exploration to rising 6th- through 12th-grade students. CTE staff members from several districts reported that the CAP opportunities complemented district-wide efforts to incorporate CTE and career learning into district curriculum as early as elementary school. The Highland CTE director described how Summer CAP and career exploration fit into their district's plans, saying,

Careers are becoming an ongoing conversation with students in the county. All the way from 4th grade to grade 14, there is just a greater focus on careers. The camps that we just had this past summer became a part of that. Just new focus, new drive, new conversations around careers, and what we have [in our district] is what we call a Career Continuum, it's "What are the experiences kids will have related to careers?"

At Woodside, the CTE director described the importance of PRC 177 funding in expanding their summer programming:

We wouldn't have been able to support the internship experience [at the high school]. We wouldn't have been able to afford hiring a coordinator for that and all the things and checking up on the students and so forth throughout the summer. . . . Then the middle school, we've done other camps at the middle school, but we just have not had the

funding to do all the things that we did this summer with it. So that allowed us to do some more things.

CAP funding allowed PSUs to purchase resources and pay for experiences not available to students during the year. The PRC 177 funding also provided resources to create rich experiences for students (e.g., pay for field trips, purchase technology for projects and activities). A Woodside camp coordinator explained the importance of this:

In our Title I district, we just don't get to do a lot of really nice field trips. . . . Our final trip was \the Discovery Place in Charlotte, and a large number of kids, they had never even been to Charlotte before. So, we felt like that would be some place where it would be special for the camp. Something special that they got to participate in.

The funding also allowed camp planners to purchase supplies and materials that would be out of reach with the standard school-year budget. One instructor described being able to purchase supplies for their camp, saying,

The best thing was the fact that there was funding available. I didn't have to think, "How [can I] make an activity work with the cheapest [option] or [an] alternative?" I was able to go purchase what I wanted, that I needed, and not have to figure out a cheaper way to do something.

Across the PSUs, grant funding was used to create opportunities for students to experience a variety of career-related activities, to go places they hadn't been, and to use materials that they wouldn't otherwise have had access to. Some funding expanded students' access to community partners through guest speakers or field trips, while other funding was used to create hands-on learning experiences and purchase supplies that were necessary to allow students to use authentic training equipment.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we sought to understand how Summer CAP programs were implemented in six diverse PSUs during summer 2022 and how participants described their experiences. Our findings revealed that PSUs were able to either greatly expand upon existing camps/programs or offer, for the first time, a more diverse array of programs, ranging from camps that blended general career awareness with core content, to career pathway camps, to a school-based enterprise camp at a charter school, to internships, to a multi-day local business-awareness field trip camp. Our

conversations with the staff that created these camps revealed that, although programs differed in design and goals, all saw this funding as a valuable tool for re-engaging students with school through fun and interesting activities that were hands-on, collaborative, and helped students see connections between school and future careers. Although helping students make connections to the workforce was important, staff were also concerned about the social and emotional toll that the COVID-19 pandemic took on their students and wanted to create opportunities for students to reconnect with peers and teachers and to see school as a supportive environment for learning. One finding of note was that CAP programming was generally available to all students in a PSU and not targeted to "at risk" or "disproportionately impacted" students. We do not know if this finding generalizes to other districts, and it was beyond the scope of our study to fully understand why the PSUs took this approach, but it may relate to the concerns expressed by staff that all students needed social and emotional support coming out of the pandemic. It may also be the case that because PSUs had a short window of time to plan CAP for summer 2022, opening camps to all students may have been a strategy to promote higher enrollment.

Through our site visits and focus groups with students, we saw for ourselves that students enjoyed the camps, particularly the hands-on activities, projects, field trips, and getting to use technology, specialized equipment, or other tools. When asked about what they learned, students could readily describe careers that they learned about, career information that challenged what they thought they knew, and what they would need to do to pursue careers of interest. We also learned that CAP experiences were positive for staff, with many program leaders and instructors sharing how they were re-energized or excited by the opportunity to collaborate with students, other staff, and community partners through summer programming dedicated to workforce development. On a practical level, CAP funds allowed staff to purchase what they felt they needed to provide an enriching experience to students, but on a broader level, many staff members talked about how they were able to design lessons and activities that would not be possible during the school year without the funding and the flexibility afforded in the summer. Another CAP byproduct was that many instructors who typically do not work together were brought together for the camps. Working with instructors from different schools, grades, and content areas created several opportunities for cross-pollination of ideas, which several staff members hoped to carry into the school year. In short, stakeholders at all levels who participated in summer 2022 saw real

value in the program in terms of the opportunities that it created for students, teachers, and the collaborative efforts between PSUs and community partners.

One of the goals of our study was to highlight promising practices and lessons learned during the first year of implementation. PSU staff reported several lessons learned, most related to initial planning and implementation management. First, staff discussed how important it was to plan well in advance so that timely decisions could be made, and advertising and recruitment efforts could occur as early as possible to aid students and families with summer planning. From an organizational perspective, having management structures in place with clear lines of communication to facilitate program design and delivery, particularly in larger districts offering multiple camps, was important. At the district level, we learned how some districts established cross-department implementation teams so that various department heads could collaborate to work out logistical issues to support camps (e.g., transportation, nutrition) and how this was helpful in identifying and resolving problems early. More importantly, having effective management plans and staff supports in place at each camp was something that many staff members did not fully appreciate at the start of the summer. In some cases, teachers were serving at unfamiliar schools, where administrators and staff working on site were not necessarily part of the camp. Several staff discussed how important it was to have a site-level coordinator at each camp site to support instructors and coordinate activities so that students and instructors had someone to lean on for support. Our takeaway from these findings is that PSUs were more successful in meeting the needs of instructors and students when CAP planners recognized the distinction between *planning for summer programs* and *planning for school in the summer*. Many of the organizational structures and staff expectations that drive regular school-year operations may not adequately address the unique challenges that arise during summer programs that bring together a diverse group of educators and community partners to provide career-focused enrichment activities to students.

Although these initial findings are encouraging, they do need to be interpreted in light of certain limitations that can be addressed through future investigations. First, it is important to remember that this was the first year of CAP implementation. Some of our findings may reflect the growing pains associated with a new program. For example, we believe some of the logistical challenges that we noted in our findings, such as not having facilities fully prepared for camps,

reflect the newness of the program and may not be an ongoing issue. From that perspective, we think it is important for future work to follow the progress of CAP implementation into summer 2023 and beyond to see how PSUs modified or expanded their CAP programs based on what they learned from the initial implementation. Second, although we imagine that many of our findings reflect aspects of implementation that other PSUs around the state experienced, we cannot say that our findings represent what any other PSUs experienced. As such, we recommend future investigations use our initial findings to inform work that takes a broader view of CAP implementation across the state. Finally, in terms of the outcomes associated with CAP, our qualitative findings were based on the perspectives and opinions of those involved with CAP. That is, this study was not designed to rigorously test the impact of CAP on students' learning and recovery; however, we encourage future investigators to explore the impact that CAP had on participating students both in the short- and long-term.

CONCLUSION

This study provides important contextual information on how several PSUs used CAP funding to serve students impacted by COVID-19. Our findings provide insight into some of the challenges and opportunities that staff faced in implementing CAP for the first time in summer 2022. Our goal was to highlight lessons learned and promising practices that staff reported as important factors in making their programs a success. We cannot draw conclusions about the quality or impact of the programs that we studied, because this study was not designed to be a rigorous impact study; however, our findings do add to the knowledge base of the practices PSUs themselves found most effective in implementing their programs, and we hope that this information can inform the work of educators, policymakers, and researchers as they turn their attention to future CAP programming in the state. To that end, SERVE Center is currently organizing a Community of Practice (CoP) to support CAP program implementers through SERVE's Region 6 Comprehensive Center (RC6). The RC6 is a hub for technical assistance and capacity-building services for those deeply involved in innovative, equitable public education. This CoP approach emerged out of conversations with our PSU partners; we heard from several CAP instructors and district leaders who expressed a desire to connect with other PSU CTE administrators to learn more about how others were implementing CAP funding and to share institutional knowledge and resources. Because we were working with multiple districts and had

the opportunity to see implementation from multiple vantage points, we felt that we, along with our SERVE colleagues working with the RC6, were in a unique position to facilitate these conversations. We will be organizing meetings with our current partners in the coming months and plan to expand the network to other interested stakeholders soon thereafter.

REFERENCES

ACTE (2021). High-Quality CTE During COVID-19: Challenges and Innovations. Retrieved from https://www.acteonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/HighQualityCTE_COVID_ChallengesAndInnovations_March2021_Final.pdf

Brunner, E., Dougherty, S., & Ross, S. L. (2021). The effects of career and technical education: Evidence from the Connecticut technical high school system (Working Paper 28790). National Bureau of Economic Research.

Creswell, J. W. (2007) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 2nd ed. Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA

Dougherty, S. M. (2018). The effect of career and technical education on human capital accumulation: Causal evidence from Massachusetts. *Education Finance and Policy*, *13*(2), 119–148. https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00224

Giorgi, A., & Giorgi, B. (2003). Phenomenology. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 25–50). Sage Publications, Inc.

Dougherty, S. M., Ecton, W. G., Bonilla, S., & McGuinness, S. (2022) The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Recession on Career Preparation during High School, *Peabody Journal of Education, 97(3), 326–343*, DOI: 10.1080/0161956X.2022.2079911

Imperatore, C., & Hyslop, A. (2018). 2018 ACTE Quality CTE Program of Study Framework. Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE). Retrieved from https://www.acteonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HighQualityCTEFramework2018.pdf

Kreisman, D., & Stange, K. (2020). Vocational and career tech education in American high schools: The value of depth over breadth. *Education Finance and Policy*, *15*(1), 11–44. https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00266

Manuel, E. (2022). *Compelling evidence about effective summer programming* [White paper]. NCDPI Office of Learning and Recovery. Retrieved from https://www.dpi.nc.gov/blog/2022/06/06/compelling-evidence-about-effective-summer-programming

Footnotes

[1] In this report we use the term "program" or "programming" to describe each PSU's overall CAP offerings, but for individual sites we generally use the term "camp" (or internship where appropriate) to distinguish programming at the site level from the PSU level.

[2] We focused our recruitment on these regions based on a request from NCDPI's Office of Learning and Recovery to coordinate our collection efforts with other investigations of summer programming.

[3] Locale type classification from NCDPI, EDDIE, for SY 2022–23 (https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/district-operations/financial-and-business-services/eddie).

[4] Enrollment and race/ethnicity data from NCDPI, Statistical Profile, for SY 2021–22 (https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/district-operations/financial-and-business-services/demographics-and-finances/statistical-profile). Enrollment is presented as a range to preserve PSU anonymity.

[5] The percentage of students is presented as a quintile range (i.e., 0–20%, 21–40%, etc.).

[6] Economic disadvantage data from NCDPI, Economically Disadvantaged report, for SY 2021–22 (https://www.dpi.nc.gov/data-reports/economically-disadvantaged). The percentage of students is presented as a quintile range (i.e., 0–20%, 21–40%, etc.).

APPENDICES

Appendix A

PSU Screening Call Protocol

Data/Information Need	Feedback/Contact information from District Liaison
Identifying a District Liaison for our project • Verify who would be the best person to help us with: • Site visit selection and recruitment • Identifying staff/students/parents for interviews/focus groups • Answering questions or reaching out to us to share information	
Site Visit Location Needs (Directly funded through 177) • Can you talk a little bit about the overall focus of your Summer CAP program? • Where are the CAP sites located? (e.g., schools, colleges, other) • Which location(s) does the district think we should visit? • Should we visit single or multiple locations (depth vs. breadth)? • Who would be the best person to serve as a liaison between our team and staff at schools that we visit and what would be the best approach to contacting school staff?	
District-Level Program Administrators Interviews (1–2) • We would like to interview 1–2 district-level administrators of the Summer CAP program. Who would be the best individuals to interview?	
Site-Level Administrators Interviews (1–3) • Who supervises the program at each site? • What is their role in the district, school, etc.? • Contact information? (once sites selected)	
Site Teachers, Instructors, Facilitators Interviews (2–3) • Who implements program components *directly* to students? • Were these individuals involved in program development? • What is their role in the district, school, etc.? • Contact information? (once sites selected)	
Community Partner Interviews (1–2)	

• Who collaborates with the district to support the CAP program and what types of support are provided? • Would it be possible for us to reach out to individuals/organizations who support the district (e.g., guest speakers, hosts of tours/visits, etc.)? • Contact information (once sites selected)	
Student Interviews/Focus Groups (5–6) • Which students are taking part in the program? • What are some of the things that we would be observing students doing during our visits? • We want to interview or conduct focus groups with a group of students. Would it be better to arrange that as part of the site visit or is there a better strategy?	

Data/Information Need	**Feedback/Contact information from District Liaison**
Parents/Guardians Interviews/Focus Groups (3–4) • We would like to speak to parents of students who are taking part in the program. What's the best way to identify and contact parents who might be interested in participating in a brief interview or focus group?	
Data that the district is already collecting and may be willing to share to highlight student/program success? • Examples of student work • Pictures taken at any events • Copies of reports/presentations generated by program staff • Any promotional materials developed in support of the program	

Appendix B

Summer CAP Site Visit Observation Protocol

Date:
Observer:
PSU:
Site Location:
CAP Program:
Start Time:
End Time:
Number and Role of CAP and School/District Staff Observed:

Number and Description of Students Observed:

Number and Description of Others (e.g., community members) Observed:

Brief Description of the Observation (attach schedule from the site/district if available) including theme of the camp, topic/activities observed:

General Activity Notes Recorded During/Shortly After Observation

During the visit (if possible) take some notes on the activities that you observe as they unfold. Note what staff and students are doing and try to be as detailed as possible. Note time spent in transition between activities if it takes more than approximately 2–3 minutes. After the observation please complete these notes and answer the reflection questions below.

Time	Activity	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes

Reflections After the Observation

After the observation, answer the following reflection questions about things that you observed or any information that was shared with you by students, staff, or members of the community. Be sure to highlight any promising practices or implementation challenges. Note: it is not expected that all questions can be answered based on the observation.

Preparedness of Staff – staff are organized and knowledgeable about the content/topics covered in the activity or lesson
Engaging Instruction – use of PBL, inquiry-based learning, or other engaging activities where students worked on authentic tasks and/or made connections between school and work
Level of Student Engagement – students engaged or bored; active or passive; working together or individually; changes in levels of engagement
Facilities, Equipment, Technology, and Materials – use of equipment and tools to effectively support student learning
How Activities Support Career Development – curriculum, tools, strategies, or activities that camp used to help students gain career knowledge and engage in career planning and decision making
Business and Community Partnership Involvement – both direct involvement and indirect involvement/support for camp activities
What Worked Well – any positive experiences noted
What Didn't Work Well – any challenges or concerns noted
Anything to Follow Up on in Interviews – document any questions that we may want to probe in future interviews/focus groups
Anything Else – note anything that the project may want to follow up on or learn more about

Appendix C

Summer CAP Student Focus Group Protocol

1. What grade are you going to be in this fall? What are some of the things that you think you might want to do [when you grow up/after high school]?
2. Now let's talk about the summer camp; how did you learn about the summer camp? (probe if needed – who communicated about the camp and what did the communication look like)
    a. What do you think is the best way to let students like you know about these camps?
3. What made you decide to come to the camp? (*if multiple camp opportunities available*) Your district is offering several camps. What made you decide to attend this camp?
2. Why do you think some students decided not to come to this or another career camp this summer?
4. Now let's talk about what kinds of things you do at the camp; what does a typical day look like at your camp? (*probe for structure of the camp from students' perspective*)
3. (*probe if needed*) What are some of the activities that you do at your camp?
5. What are some of the activities that you've enjoyed the most at your camp?
6. What's something that you learned at the camp that you didn't know before you came here?
4. Did you learn about any jobs or careers that you were not aware of before?
5. Did you learn anything about local businesses or industries that you didn't know before?
7. How has the camp made you think about what you might want to do [when you grow up/after high school]?
8. [*For middle school students*] Has participating in this camp influenced the things that you might do in school when you return in the fall? For example, the kinds of clubs you participate in, the types of conversations that you might have with your advisor or teachers, or anything else?
9. [*For rising high school students*] Has participating in this camp influenced what you plan to do in school in terms of pathways or activities you might participate in or courses you might take?
10. If you could change anything about the camp what would it be and why?
11. Would you recommend to your friends that they participate in this type of camp if it's offered again next summer? Why or why not?
12. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

Appendix D

District Administrator Interview Protocol

Instructions

Thank you so much for your time. The purpose of our discussion today is to better understand your district's experiences implementing the Summer Career Accelerator Program (CAP). In general the questions we will ask today are about how the program has been implemented in your district and how you think the program has impacted your district.

In terms of **implementation**, we are interested in learning more about how you implemented your Summer CAP program with a particular interest in your perspective on strategies, decisions, or approaches that you believe are critical to the success of this type of program.

In terms of **impacts**, we're interested in learning more about how your program supports students directly as well as how CAP supports other initiatives in your district.

With that in mind, we are particularly interested in any perspectives you have to offer about strategies, practices, or programmatic decisions that you think were particularly successful for you. We are looking for promising practices to share with NCDPI and/or other districts in an effort to help other districts implement similar career programs.

District/Program Context

We would like to start by asking you a few questions about yourself and your district to learn a little bit about the context for your CAP program.

13. First, can you tell us a little about your role in your district and your role in the CAP program?
14. We want to understand how the programs you offered through your CAP funding align with other learning recovery and career-focused programs or initiatives in your district. With that in mind, first can you tell us if this is the first time you've offered these types of summer programs in your district?
    a. How do you see the CAP funding supporting or aligning to other learning recovery and career-focused programs in your district? (*probe if needed: is CAP a one-off initiative, supportive of current programs, a springboard for new initiatives, etc.?*)
    b. (if needed) What career-focused summer programming would you have offered if you had not received CAP funding support?

Implementation

Next, we'd like to ask about the district's approach to planning and implementing CAP this summer in terms of decision making around staffing the camps, determining what curriculum/instructional materials to use, and what activities and opportunities would be available to students.

15. Before asking about district-level decision making, what design decisions were made at the district level and what decisions tended to be made by staff at the individual camps or schools?
16. How did the district decide what curriculum and instructional activities and materials would be used, or what field trips or guest speakers would be part of the camp, at individual sites or across the district?

17. Did the district collaborate with community partners to implement the camps and if so, how did the district make decisions about collaborating with community partners to support the CAP program?
18. How did the district make decisions around staffing sites for the summer?
19. How did the district make decisions about which students could participate in CAP and how did the district support recruiting and retaining students?
20. Which student outcomes are you focused on and how are you monitoring these outcomes?

Impacts

Now we want to ask some questions about how you think the CAP program has impacted your district. Here we're interested in not only the impact of CAP on students and their families, but also the impact of CAP on the district.

21. Overall, how successful do you feel that your CAP program was in helping students recover from lost opportunities for career exploration and exposure and why?
22. In terms of other impacts, how do you think the CAP program has impacted your district and schools in terms of the programs and services that your district currently offers or plans to offer in the future?
23. Has your relationship with community partners, such as local businesses and industries, been impacted in any way as a result of the CAP program?

Innovations/Promising Practices

The next set of questions is about any promising or innovative practices that you have identified to support the implementation and impact of your CAP program this summer. We're interested in identifying practices that districts have found particularly helpful that can be shared with other districts to support implementation efforts for next summer. With that in mind, thinking about your CAP program this summer:

24. Were there any practices that your district identified that were helpful in supporting the *planning and implementation* of CAP that you think other districts might find helpful?
25. In terms of program impacts on students, were there any practices that your district identified that you believe would be particularly effective for supporting students' career development?
26. If you were asked to highlight one aspect of your Summer CAP program that you think was particularly successful, what would you highlight and why?

Lessons Learned

27. What lessons have you learned from implementing the CAP program this summer?
28. If you are implementing CAP next summer, what changes do you plan to make to support your district's implementation efforts next summer?
29. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Thank you for your participation! [Stop recording]

Appendix E

Site Administrator Interview Protocol

Collect Name, Date, District, School, Start/End Time

Instructions

Thank you so much for your time with us today. The purpose of our discussion today is to better understand your experiences with a summer camp or other summer programming that received funding from NCDPI's Summer Career Accelerator Program (CAP) [Let site administrator know we may refer to the program as CAP during our interview but make clear we are talking about the camp that we observed them at]. In general the questions we will ask today are about how the program has been implemented in your school and how you think the program has impacted your students.

In terms of **implementation**, we are interested in learning more about how you implemented your Summer CAP program with a particular interest in your perspective on strategies, decisions, or approaches that you believe are critical to the successful implementation of the program.

In terms of **impacts**, we're interested in learning more about how your program supports students in their career exploration and development or addresses learning loss from the pandemic.

With that in mind, we are particularly interested in any perspectives you have to offer about strategies, practices, or programmatic decisions that you think are particularly interesting that you would like to share with NCDPI and/or other districts in an effort to help other districts support students' career development through future programming.

Begin recording.

School/Program Context

1. What is your role in the district?
2. What is your role in the Summer CAP program? (Probe: planning, recruiting, site management, serving lunch?)
3. How were you involved in the planning of the CAP summer camp at this site/district?
    c. Did you contribute to creating or selecting any of the instructional materials or activities (worksheets, PBL)?
    d. Were you involved in selecting guests or field trips?

Recruitment

4. Were you involved in recruiting staff for your district or school's CAP program? (*Probe: staff, teachers, site selection*)
    e. (if yes) What worked well, and what challenges did you experience recruiting staff for the CAP program here?
5. Were you involved in recruiting students for the program?
    f. How did your district identify and recruit students for the camp?
    g. What worked well, and what challenges did you face recruiting students for the program?

Program Context

6. What do you see as the overall goals of CAP at this site? (probe if necessary, the degree to which CAP is career focused)

7. How was the camp designed to achieve your goals? (Probe if needed, program activities, curriculum, materials, speakers.)
8. What kind of training or support did you receive to prepare you to work at your Summer CAP site?
9. Who else did you work with – with other staff at your school or district, or local business/industry partners – to make the Summer CAP program successful?

Impacts

10. Which student outcomes were you most focused on for the programs at your site?
11. Did you monitor student outcomes? If so, what did you do to collect data or report on the outcomes? Was reporting required?
12. Overall, how successful do you feel that your camps were in helping students recover from lost educational opportunities and why?
13. How successful do you think your camps were in giving students an opportunity for career development and exploration? Why?

Innovations/Promising Practices

14. What resources or other support was made available to you that made your camp successful? What resources or support do you wish you had?
15. What aspects of the summer program do you think your site/school has been the most successful in implementing and why? (*Probe for specific examples if needed*)
16. NCDPI is interested in identifying promising practices that educators across the state have used to support student learning. Thinking about your Summer CAP program, are there any promising practices that you have identified that have been particularly helpful in supporting learning recovery or student career exploration and why?
17. If you were asked to highlight or showcase one successful aspect of your Summer CAP program, what would you showcase and why?

Lessons Learned/Conclusion

18. What lessons have you learned from implementing the CAP program in your site/school?
19. What recommendations do you have if your school or district implements CAP or a similar career-focused camp next summer?
20. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your CAP program or your district's efforts to support students' learning and recovery?

Appendix F

CAP Business/Community Partner Interview Protocol

Directions: We're conducting a study of summer programming in several schools and districts in this region of the state with a particular focus on summer programming that helps students explore potential careers and future job opportunities. We're talking to you today because [you/your organization] was involved with [specify camp/program and district].
Today we would like to ask you a few questions about [organization] and how your organization has worked with the schools and district to support the local community. Because the focus of our study is on career-focused summer programs, we're interested in your thoughts about how [organization] and the district can work together to support student learning.
Ask for consent to record interview.

1. First, can you tell us about yourself and your company?
2. Your organization took part in some summer programming with the district. How did that collaboration come about? (*probe if needed: is this a new activity or something that the district and company have done together before*)
3. Can you describe what you did with the school/district this summer?
    h. How did you decide what activity you would do with the students?
4. Can you tell us about your company's relationship with the district? (probe if needed for level of collaboration and/or types of past and present activities between the two organizations;)
5. Are you the person who coordinates activities with the school/district? If so, do you usually coordinate with the same person at the school/district, or does it vary? *probe for if organization has relationship with the district generally, or with a particular school or a particular program/department within a school*
6. How does the collaboration with the district benefit your company? How do you see your collaboration benefiting the community?
7. How do you think your collaboration with the district/school this summer benefited the students? How did this particular collaboration benefit your company?
8. If the district/school does this type of summer programming next summer what recommendations would you give for improving the program to support students?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us?

Appendix G

Site Staff Interview Protocol

Teacher (or Similar Camp Staff) Protocol: Instructions

Thank you so much for your time with us today. The purpose of our discussion today is to better understand your experiences teaching at a summer camp or other summer programming that received funding from NCDPI's Summer Career Accelerator Program (CAP) [**Let teacher know we may refer to the program as CAP during our interview but make clear we are talking about the camp that we observed them at**]. In general the questions we will ask today are about how the program has been implemented in your school and how you think the program has impacted your students.

In terms of **implementation**, we are interested in your perspective on strategies, decisions, or approaches that you believe are critical to the successful implementation of a summer program like CAP. In terms of **impacts**, we're interested in learning more about how your program supports student learning and recovery.

With that in mind, we are particularly interested in any perspectives you have to offer about strategies, practices, or programmatic decisions that you think were particularly successful for your work this summer that we can share with other districts in an effort to help others implement similar summer programming.

Ask for consent to record interview.

Background

We would like to start by asking you a few questions about yourself and how you got involved in your district's Summer CAP program.

1. How long have you worked in the district and what subjects and grades do you teach? (*probe if needed: does the teacher regularly teach at the summer camp school?*)
2. Does your district usually offer summer camps or summer schools that include career or CTE topics?
6. What made you decide to teach for the CAP program this summer?

Implementation

Now we would like to ask you about how the CAP program was implemented at your school this summer, particularly what the program looked like from the students' perspective.

3. What did you see as the overall goal of the CAP program at your school?
4. Were you involved in the design of the CAP summer camp at your school?
7. (if yes) How were you involved in the design of the camp? (probe if needed: curriculum/instruction design, activity selection, collaboration with community partners)
8. (*if no*) Who was involved in designing the camp?
9. What training did you receive to teach at the camp? (probe if needed: district-level design, school-level design, community partners, external consultants, others?)
5. In terms of the camp that you taught at, what did a typical day look like for students? (probe if needed: what curriculum and instructional materials did you use and what types of activities did students engage in?)

Impacts

6. What do you think the students got out of attending the camp?

7. Do you think the camp gave students an opportunity to recover from lost educational opportunities?
8. Do you think the camp gave students an opportunity for career development?

Innovations/Promising Practices

We're interested in learning about any practices or strategies that you found helpful that could be shared with other educators who are implementing CAP next summer (or programs similar to CAP). With that in mind, thinking about your camp this summer,

9. What factors do you think helped or hindered student engagement in the program this summer?
10. What resources or other support was made available to you that made your camp successful? What resources or support do you wish you had?
11. If you were asked to highlight one aspect of your Summer CAP program that you think was particularly successful, what would you highlight and why?

Lessons Learned/Conclusion

12. What lessons have you learned from implementing the CAP program in your school?
13. What recommendations or advice would you give for others implementing CAP or a similar career-focused camp next summer?
14. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Thank you for your participation! [Stop recording]

Appendix H

CAP Parent/Guardian Interview Protocol

1. How did you and your child learn about [camp/program]?
2. Why did your child decide to participate in [camp/program]? Or, why did you want your child to participate in [camp/program]?
3. What do you think your child learned from participating in [camp/program]?
4. Overall, how satisfied are you with your child's experience in [camp/program]?
5. Would you recommend [camp/program] to other parents? Why or why not?
6. What recommendations do you have for the school/district if they were to offer a similar [camp/program] next summer?
7. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your child's experience in [camp/program]?

Appendix I

Qualitative Analysis Codes

Code	Definition
Access/Equity	Any reference to efforts of the CAP (e.g., recruitment) that support access and equity for various student populations, including by gender, race and ethnicity, and special population status. A goal here is to understand the degree to which CAPs use practices that promote student participation and success with a particular emphasis on practices designed to accommodate and/or address barriers among various student populations. Include things like transportation and nutrition support here. **Informed by ACTE Standard 6**
Background/Context	Any explanation of the participant's role in CAP or in their school/district, or students' grade level. Any discussion that gives background context to the school/district/organization.
Business/Community Partnerships	Any reference to PSU's business and community partnerships including past or ongoing partnerships as well as partnerships to support CAP specifically. A goal here is to capture diversity of partners (or lack thereof), structure of partnerships (e.g., formal/informal), levels of support, history of partnerships, degree to which partnerships address workforce needs. **Informed by ACTE Standard 8.**
Career Development	Any reference to helping students gain career knowledge and engage in education and career planning and decision making, including career counseling, career assessment, curriculum that helps students learn about careers, information about educational opportunities and workforce trends, and job search information and placement services. This does not include career development as part of WBL activities such as field trips or internships. **Informed by ACTE Standard 9.**
Challenges to Implementation	Any reference to conditions or situations that inhibited implementation of CAP. This can include more external forces (e.g., geography/transportation) or challenges that arose during implementation (e.g., limited advertising of CAP). Includes and problematic post recruitment communication with families.
Connections to Programs	Any reference to how the CAP aligns with or adds to PSU's past or current CTE programs, pathways, or other learning recovery efforts. Also code any reference to whether CAP programs are new this summer or funds used to support previously offered programs. A goal here is to understand how CAP operates in relation to other programs/pathways within the PSU. For example, is CAP an entirely new program, or does it expand or support other available programs? Also, note if the CAP aligns to future program/pathway opportunities for students. Example: robotics camp introduces rising 9th-

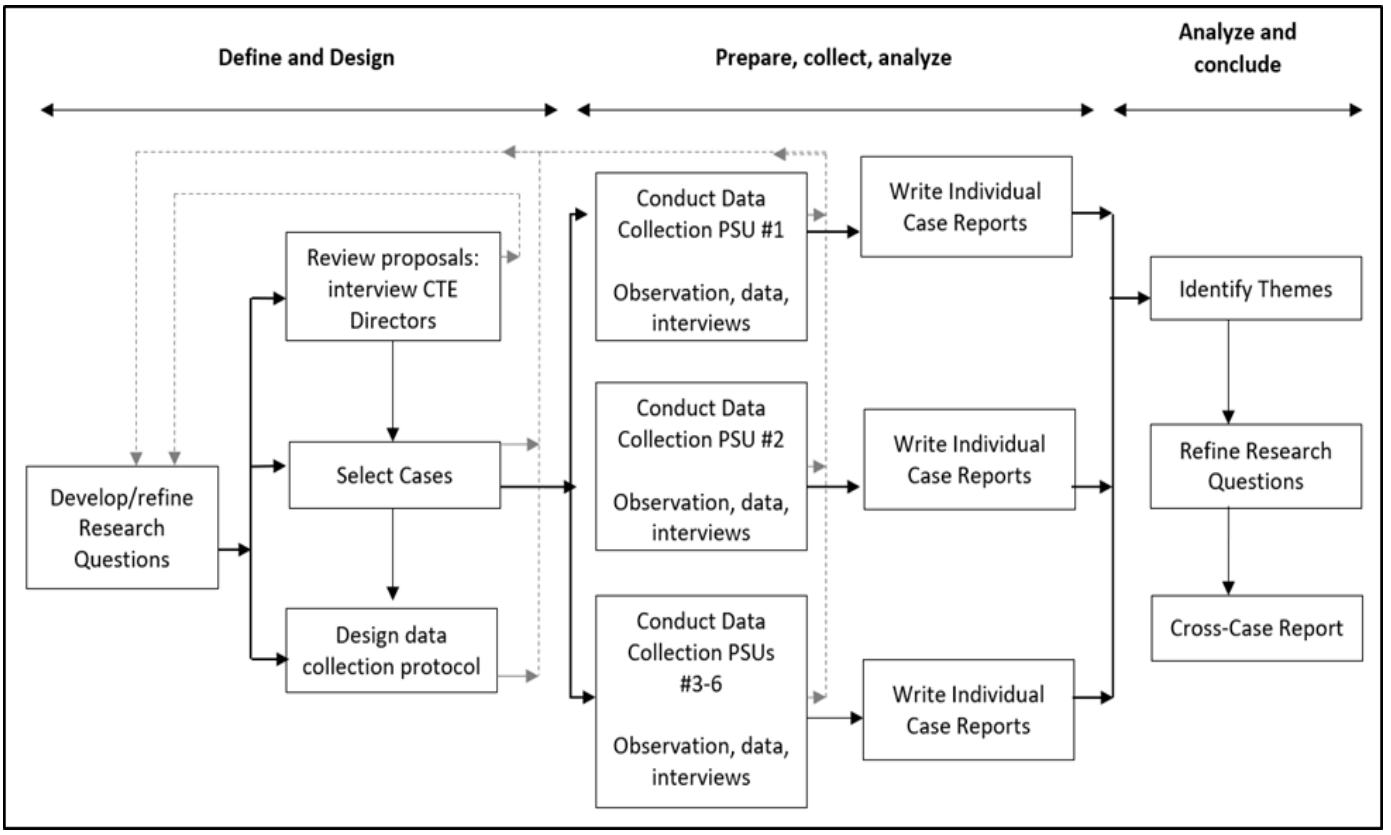
	grade students to PSU's CCP computer science pathway at the high school. **Informed by ACTE Standard 2.**
Curriculum and Instruction	Any reference to curriculum development or implementation or instructional strategies used regardless of adequacy and/or quality. **Informed by ACTE Standards 1 and 5.**
Data and Program Improvement	Any reference to the collection, reporting, and/or use of data for continuous evaluation and program improvement. Examples of this would include collection of student, staff, or parent exit surveys around program satisfaction or maybe monitoring of which camps were more popular to inform offerings for next summer. **Informed by ACTE Standard 12.**
Desired Changes	Any reference to planned or desired changes to next year's CAP or other PSU programs as a result of CAP implementation this summer.
Eligibility/Recruitment	Any reference to which students were eligible to participate and/or how students were recruited. If reference includes discussion of access/equity issues double code with that response.
Facilitators to Implementation	Any reference to conditions or situations that supported implementation of CAP. If the facilitator is an innovative practice directly related to CAP implementation use the innovative practices code. This code is designed more to capture contextual supports that may be external to CAP or CAP facilitators that are more general in nature (e.g., having dedicated teachers is a facilitator to implementation, but not really an innovation). Includes any positive post recruitment communication with families.
Facilities and Materials	Any reference to the facilities for CAP or physical environment that students were in (e.g., bathroom issue, did computer not have appropriate system), equipment, technology, and/or materials used to support the CAP. Use this code to document any observations about the school environment in which the camp was held, particularly the school's general operational status during the camp (e.g., minimal staff in the building). **Informed by ACTE Standard 7.**
Goals/Outcomes	Any reference to the goals or expected outcomes of the program for students, instructors, community partners, and/or the PSU. Examples include, earn credentials, general career development, exposure to CTE pathways.
Good Quote	Tag any quote that would be particularly useful as an exemplar of another code (or larger theme) that could be used in a report.
Impact	Any reference to the impact that CAP has had on students, instructors, community partners, and/or the PSU. Here impact is broadly defined to include any perceived impacts (e.g., student learning gains, career development, advertising/awareness building for CTE

	programs, greater family engagement, etc.). Use this code for any reference to what PSU would have done differently without CAP support.
Learning Loss/COVID	Any reference to learning loss or lost opportunities as a result of COVID. Example: PSU resumed an internship program that went away specifically because of the impact of COVID.
Lessons Learned or Recommendation	Any lessons learned or recommendations shared by respondent.
Program Design	General descriptions of the overall CAP program design or activities offered. Include here how initial design decisions were made at various phases including: proposal phase, early planning/implementation, and design responsibilities at site vs. PSU level.
Program Satisfaction	Any reference to levels of satisfaction/dissatisfaction related to the implementation, impact, or participation in CAP from respondent.
Promising Practice	Any reference to a promising practice that respondent found helpful in implementing CAP activities and/or to address any challenges. Here the focus should be on what respondents themselves report as innovative or promising, but if an activity is described as promising but not explicitly identified as such (i.e., evaluation team member felt it was a potentially promising practice) it should be tagged with this code.
Staff Preparedness or Training	Any reference to qualifications of the CAP staff or PD received to support CAP implementation. A goal here is to evaluate, where possible, the alignment between an instructor's background and CAP area served to understand whether qualified instructors are leading CAPs (e.g., foreign language teacher providing career development instruction vs. nurse teaching at health science camp). Also use this code to capture when PD or other preparation activities were not offered to staff prior to start of CAP. **Informed by ACTE Standard 4**
Staffing/Budget	Any reference to staffing, budget decisions, or funding sources. Do not use this code if reference to staff preparedness only. Also, do not use this code for references to facilities/materials unless these discussions relate to budget or funding issues.
Student Assessment	Any reference to formative or summative students assessments used to measure student learning gains in general education and/or CTE areas or as part of individual activities or lessons. This can include references to EOC/EOG assessments, assessments for CTE credentialing/knowledge, as well as performance assessments used as part of instructional activities (e.g., quizzes, learning checks, etc.). Also use this code when specific references to not using assessment data are made so that we can capture presence and absence of student assessment data use. **Informed by ACTE Standard 3**
Student Motivation	Use for any discussion of why a student chose to attend a CAP program (or their parent wanted them to attend or

	they were required to attend). Also include discussion of why a hypothetical student may or may not want to. Code with 'Recruitment' if applicable.
Work-Based Learning	Any reference to the delivery of WBL opportunities that involved interactions with industry/community partners to foster in-depth, firsthand engagement with the tasks required in a given career field. WBL may occur in the workplace, in the community, at an educational institution, or virtually and may include: workplace tours, job shadowing, school-based enterprises, internships, and apprenticeships. Given the short duration of many CAP camps, less in-depth or sustained activities (e.g., single day field trip to workplace) should be included as WBL. **Informed by ACTE Standard 11**
Workforce Alignment	Any reference to how CAP is aligned to local workforce opportunities and/or needs.

Appendix J

Approach to Analysis



Appendix K

Individual PSU Case Study Reports

- CAP Case Study #1: Glenview School District
- CAP Case Study #2: Ferndale School District
- CAP Case Study #3: Magnolia School
- CAP Case Study #4: Lakeshore School District
- CAP Case Study #5: Woodside School District
- CAP Case Study #6: Highland School District

EDUCATIONAL POLICY INITIATIVE AT CHAPEL HILL (EPIC)

An Active Implementation Evaluation of ESSER-funded Summer Programs Targeting Learning Recovery and Acceleration within High Schools in Western North Carolina

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

This qualitative study examines the "what, how, and why" of summer school extension impacts, providing depth beyond the measures of competency-based assessments, grade promotion, and credit recovery. We leveraged an existing research partnership with a charitable organization headquartered in Asheville, NC to assess how districts implemented the School Extension Learning and Enrichment Program (Summer Learning), Summer Bridge Academies, and Summer Career Accelerator summer program activities at high schools in the western part of the state. Through interviews, focus groups, and surveys, we examined how students, educators, and district administrators experienced and perceived these programs. Drawing on these data, we illustrate the components and impacts of summer programs and elements that facilitated and inhibited implementation. This research contextualizes patterns regarding summer learning programs and highlights where extension activity resources may be concentrated for sustainability and scaling.

PROGRAM LITERATURE AND CONTEXT

Conceptual Framework

We ground this research in the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) Active Implementation Framework. This framework comprises a three-component model of effective interventions, positing that effective practices, effective implementation, and effective contexts interact to yield improved outcomes. We designed our study to align with this framework and identified these components in target districts per a multi-step process.

Our team first identified the 'what' of summer programming, developing school extension program profiles and identifying those program components that comprised effective practices. Next, we developed operational definitions of program components, ranging from student engagement to instructional support, to identify varied iterations of these components across contexts. We then investigated the 'how' of school extension activities and the extent to

which participants perceived summer programming as effectively implemented. Finally, we addressed the 'why' behind implementation, examining those conditions across contexts that enabled or inhibited school extension programming.

Study Context

This study focused on students, educators, and district administrators in the western part of the state comprised of State Board of Education (SBE) regions 7 and 8. We identified these regions due to the number of factors that place students in the western part of North Carolina at particular risk for learning loss and disengagement from school associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The mountainous landscape in western North Carolina presents unique challenges including limited access to high-speed internet and increased transportation costs. In addition, most of the districts in the western regions are rural and many are economically distressed. Within this area, we focused our study on school extension programs that served high school students. The effects of the pandemic on the educational experiences of high schoolers puts students at risk of failing to attain credit for courses required to graduate from high school. Students may also be retained in grades, which increases their risk of dropping out of school. In addition, high schoolers face pandemic-related mental health impacts that can impair their progress in school. This study provides valuable information about how Summer Learning, career acceleration, and transitional supports provided through OLR-supported summer programs influenced school engagement and learning recovery for high school students in western North Carolina.

Our engagement with this region was bolstered by an existing partnership between EPIC and the Dogwood Health Trust (DHT). The Dogwood Health Trust is a foundation that partners with community organizations in the western part of the state to improve the health and well-being of people and communities, with education as one of its focal areas. The DHT currently has community partners within 18 of the 28 districts in education regions 7 and 8 and supported EPIC in its recruitment of school districts and high schools across the western region.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addresses three primary research questions, which we use to structure our findings throughout this report.

Research Question 1: How are summer programs for learning recovery and acceleration implemented in high schools within the western region of the state?

Research Question 2: To what extent are these programs achieving their desired academic and social emotional learning outcomes?

Research Question 3: What are the enabling and inhibiting conditions identified by educators for the successful implementation of high school summer learning recovery and acceleration programs in western North Carolina?

METHODS

Design Overview

We developed this project as a single case study with an embedded design (Yin, 2003). We approached school extension programming as our case, with districts and schools in regions 7 and 8 as our embedded units of analyses in years 2021 and 2022. We considered nested and vertical case study models; however, we felt that these approaches isolated focus on individual organizations in a manner that was not conducive to our study. Drawing on a single case study with an embedded design fostered continued interrogation of the activities and events that comprise summer programming within the western geographical context.

Data Collection

Our data collection took place over two waves (Table 1). The first wave took place in the spring of 2022, occurred at the district level, and was focused exclusively on the spring of 2022, at the district level summer 2021 Summer Learning Programs. The second wave of data collection occurred in the fall of 2022, was focused on the high school level, and included focus groups with teachers and students who participated in the Summer Bridge Academies and Career Accelerator Programs in the summer of 2022. Data collection for wave 1 was conducted virtually occurred in spring 2022, at the district level over Zoom, while wave 2 was conducted in person

during high school site visits. We also conducted a survey of staff and students regarding participation in summer 2022 programming.

Table 1

Data Collection Overview

Time Frame	Data Source	Method	RQs Addressed
Wave 1: Spring 2022	District Administrators	Interviews (7)	1, 2, 3
	School Staff	Focus groups (2, ~8 staff)	1, 2, 3
Wave 2: Fall 2022	School Staff	Focus groups (7 groups, ~35 staff)	1, 2, 3
		Survey (146)	2, 3
	Students	Focus groups (6 groups, ~60 students)	1, 2, 3
		Survey (1,308)	2, 3

Selection and Recruitment of PSU's

Sample

In total, we worked with ten districts in regions 7 and 8 (Table 2). For our first wave of data collection in spring 2022, we focused exclusively on the mandated School Extension Learning and Enrichment (Summer Learning) program. This included interviews with district administrators and school leadership across seven districts, along with teacher focus groups in two districts. For our second wave of data collection in fall 2022, we focused on high schools implementing Summer Bridge, Career Accelerator, and Summer Learning programs. For this, we conducted focus groups with teachers and students from high schools across six districts. We targeted high schools for recruitment based on the extent to which their populations represented the broader sociodemographic characteristics of their respective district and heterogeneity in program composition. We have omitted specific high school demographics to maintain participant confidentiality.

Table 2

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Sample Districts

School District	Rural Status	% Black	% Hispanic	% White	% Low Income	Overall Performance Composite	Overall Growth Score	High School Graduation Percent	Short Term Suspension Rate
All North Carolina	55.7%	25.1	16.8	48.9	40.7	52.3	74.5	84.0	17.5
All Region 7 & 8	63.6%	5.0	13.4	74.2	45.3	57.8	75.6	85.9	13.2
Buncombe County	No	6.1	15.7	70.9	44.6	60.7	81.7	86.9	18.9
Catawba County	Yes	5.7	16.2	65.8	40.3	60.0	83.4	88.7	15.3
Graham County	Yes	0.3	4.2	78.4	42.6	64.8	81.1	90.7	13.4
Henderson County	No	3.5	22.1	68.5	41.6	66.6	83.8	93.7	11.9
Madison County	Yes	0.1	3.5	94.2	45.4	54.1	66.8	87.6	11.3
McDowell County	Yes	2.5	12.6	80.4	47.8	58.1	93.3	81.4	16.1
Newton-Conover City	No	10.8	26.9	51.2	49.2	54.4	77.8	88.5	15.8
Polk County	Yes	4.9	11.1	78.5	39.1	58.7	61.8	90.4	6.2
Swain County	Yes	0.5	4.3	67.7	47.1	45.5	57.9	77.6	27.9
Watauga County	Yes	1.0	7.5	87.7	18.4	68.4	80.3	90.1	10.9

Note: Demographic and performance data for this table are generated using an average of statistics for all schools serving high school grade (9-12) weighted by the enrollment at the school. These data are from the 2018-19 school year - the last year prior to the beginning of our study for which there was complete demographic and performance data.

Sources of Data

Interviews

We conducted interviews with district administrators, focusing on their implementation experiences, perceived impacts of programming, and enablers and inhibitors of school extension programs implemented in summer 2021.These interviews grounded our development of district profiles and supported our definition and operationalization of essential program activities. Interviews also provided a district-level perspective regarding the practical successes and challenges that arose throughout their summer extension programming.

Focus Groups

Focus groups targeted staff and students participating in school extension activities. We designed focus group questions to assess perceptions of implementation, impact on academic and socioemotional learning, and facilitators and barriers to implementation, attendance, and engagement. Staff focus groups included principals, counselors, and classroom teachers involved in summer extension programming. Student focus groups predominantly included ninth graders, as these students were targeted by the Summer Bridge programming featured at five of our six sample high schools. However, we also spoke with tenth and eleventh grade students who participated in our focus groups.

Surveys

We worked with administrators from our target high schools to disseminate student and staff surveys to all students eligible for summer programming, regardless of participation, and all staff who worked with students during the school year, regardless of their involvement in the summer programs. Student survey questions aimed to identify students' motivations for attending summer programming, the extent they participated in various aspects of summer programs, and their perceived impacts. Staff survey questions pertained to perceived benefits of summer programming for students who attended and the goals of summer extension programming for students. We encountered some challenges with survey administration, which limited the extent to which we could examine these responses as discussed further in the next section.

ANALYSIS

Interviews and Focus Groups

All interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed, and uploaded into Dedoose for coding and analysis. We first piloted the coding frameworks by double-coding a subset of transcripts across three researchers. Through this process, we finalized coding protocols and examined discrepancies to optimize interrater reliability. Individual coders drafted abbreviated analytic memos to serve as an additional point of reference during data synthesis and reporting.

We applied a deductive codebook to these data, with a priori codes drawn from the NIRN Active Implementation Framework. These codes included practices, implementation, contexts,

and outcomes. Upon coding the data, we engaged in pattern matching (Yin, 2018, p. 175) to identify those features that comprised and facilitated summer programming across all sites. We then conducted cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2018, p. 194) to examine the factors across districts that informed the substance and implementation of summer extension programming.

Surveys

We conducted a descriptive analysis of survey data from close-ended questions, with a particular focus on the relative distribution of perceived enabling and inhibiting conditions across subgroups. We deductively analyzed open-ended survey items in Dedoose to ascertain patterns, followed by open coding to identify new themes. Though our surveys were distributed broadly across our six participating high schools, we received limited responses from students and staff members that participated in the programming. Consequently, while the information gleaned from these surveys bolsters our primary qualitative findings, we did not receive a robust enough response to draw substantive conclusions from the survey alone.

Validity and Limitations

To assess the validity of our findings we triangulated data across and within participant sub-groups. We engaged in cross-group triangulation by analyzing the experiences and perceptions of participants across administrative, staff, and student groups, and assessing consistency among these data. Within-group triangulation included interrogation of data from the same sub-group in different locales (e.g. student focus groups in different high schools), as well as cross checks against existing survey data. We also drew upon artifacts, namely school summer program summaries, to contextualize and verify qualitative data.

We recognize there are limitations to the generalizability of these findings, as this study explicitly focuses on high schools in western North Carolina. In addition, our sample should not be considered homogenous given the fact that the schools we studied were implementing different combinations of programs (Summer Bridge vs Career Accelerator vs Summer Learning vs some combination thereof). Though we gathered rich data from participants across programs, we prioritized the breadth of program representation over the depth of examination of a single program.

Our survey participation was limited, as we did not have oversight over the distribution and could not send reminders to students or staff. Though school staff were immensely helpful in coordinating survey logistics, we recognize that survey distribution was an additional logistical burden. We also do not have consistent data regarding which students or staff completed surveys, outside of grade level and involvement of summer programming, which limits our capacity to ensure a representative sample of responses.

Future researchers engaging in this work may wish to sample multiple high schools in each district to account for school-level variations, examine one type of summer extension program across multiple districts, and/or work with districts in which there is increased flexibility for researcher involvement in survey distribution.

FINDINGS

The findings in this report are drawn from a synthesis of the data sources outlined above: interviews and focus groups with district administrators, school leadership, school staff/teachers, and students. In this section, we organize qualitative findings by our three research questions and represent a mix of common themes shared across multiple roles and organizations, along with unique or exemplary promising practices. We include constructs that cross-cut Summer Learning, Summer Bridge, and Career Accelerator programs and highlight program-specific findings. Select survey findings are included in Appendix C.

RQ1: How are summer learning programs implemented in high schools within the western region of the state?

Implementation Characteristics:

Wave 1: 2021 Summer Learning programs

In April 2021, schools in North Carolina were alerted that they would be required to develop and implement an in-person learning recovery and enrichment program after the conclusion of the 2020-2021 school year. Each LEA was charged with submitting a plan no later than 30 days before the end of the school year, leaving a very small planning window. The program parameters were fairly prescribed, dictating that every eligible student should have access to instructional support for at least 150 hours or 30 days over the course of the program. At the high-school level, this included in-person instruction in End-of-Course subjects and

access to teacher -supported modules for credit recovery courses necessary to meet graduation requirements. Outside of these requirements, LEAs had autonomy in the process by which they identified eligible students, informed parents of eligibility, and provided outreach to families and students. Given this short planning window and implementation requirements, there was not substantial variability in program components across districts.

Wave 2: 2022 Summer Bridge and Career Accelerator programs.

Our site visit sample captured the heterogeneity of Summer Learning programs across high schools in western North Carolina. School size ranged from a total of 415 to 1286 students, with the number of students participating in their respective summer programs ranging from 12 to over 150 students. The length of the summer programs ranged from one to three weeks, and programs were variably held at the beginning, middle, or end of summer (see Table 3).

We saw noteworthy differences in school approaches for identifying and recruiting students. These approaches included: the empirical use of i-Ready scores to target students in need of academic support; a subjective assessment of "bubble" students, nominated by teachers who perceive that they have the potential to excel academically if provided with additional supports; and an open invitation with no criteria for participation. Additionally, programs differed in whether recruitment was initiated at the middle school, high school, or both. Table 3 provides a snapshot of implementation characteristics across site visit schools.

Table 3

Implementation Characteristics of Wave 2 Sample High Schools

	School 1	**School 2**	**School 3**	**School 4**	**School 5**	**School 6**
School Size (2021-2022 school year)	886	1029	415	1286	682	1198
Program Type	Summer Bridge	Career Accelerator	Career Accelerator	Summer Bridge	Summer Bridge & Career Accelerator	Summer Bridge
Number of Students Participating	~150	25-30	32	~60	Summer Bridge* * Career Accelerator:	12

					6	
Program Length (# of days)	3 days	8 days	12 days	8 days	Summer Bridge: 12 days Career Accelerator: 8 days	9 days
Timeframe	End of summer	Mid-summer	Start of summer	End of summer	Start of summer	Start of summer
Recruitment & Enrollment Criteria	All incoming freshman invited; junior peer mentors recommended by teachers	MS teachers nominated students they thought would benefit from a bridge to high school	6-10th graders, interest- based	HS invited all incoming freshman; multiple seniors also invited	Summer Bridge: MS teachers recruited students based on i-ready scores Career Accelerator: CTE staff circulated flyer about CTE program with open invitation to summer program	HS asked 8th grade teachers to nominate students who were 'on the bubble' academically could use a boost in understanding HS content, and had leadership potential.

*Summer Bridge attendance count not provided

Note. The following sections represent reflections from district administrators and school staff around the implementation of ESSER-funded summer programs. We begin with implementation findings within each of the three program models, followed by implementation considerations that cross-cut program models.

Implementation Findings:

Summer Learning Programs

Finding 1a: Districts varied in the extent they emphasized learning recovery versus learning acceleration when describing Summer Learning Program goals.

Programs emphasizing learning recovery described three types of supports: 1) recovering course credits that allow students to graduate upon completion of the summer program; 2) recovering course credits that allow students to return in the fall on track with their peers; and 3)

strengthening content knowledge that was lost during remote learning, to improve their success in the upcoming school year.

> *We definitely were trying to help kids who were behind on their credits and honestly, that was our major goal. To help those kids to be able to get closer to graduation who may have not otherwise done so without coming…if they get that one-on-one help and they could concentrate on certain classes and some might end up getting two or three other credits regained, which was going to put them on track to graduate with their cohort when otherwise they weren't on track to do that.* [Teacher, Wave 1]

Superintendent (Wave 1) added,

> *It wasn't just a kid picking up a credit, it was to truly address the foundational skills in ELA or in math that helped them be successful later on. I think it was beyond just a simple credit attainment. It was truly trying to get kids where they were.*

Finding 1b: Some districts leveraged Summer Learning programs to accelerate course progression so that students could take advantage of dual enrollment opportunities with local community colleges in the fall.

As one principal explained, Summer Learning programs not only supported students who have struggled academically, but also provided opportunities to help students get ahead of their course requirements, which then provided the opportunity to gain college credits in the fall:

> *It was to give students the opportunity to enter into a credit recovery program for students that had failed classes and also give some students the opportunity to enroll in academic classes in order to possibly get ahead as far as the required state curriculum, and give them more opportunities to take classes through the College and Career Promise dual enrollment at our local community college. It was also the opportunity to retake classes, not necessarily credit recovery, but retake the entire curriculum for the 6-week period we held summer school.* [Principal, Wave 1]

Finding 1c: ESSER funds provided an opportunity to supplement required credit recovery curriculum with enrichment courses, which enhanced student engagement and buy-in.

Administrators appreciated the ability to provide enrichment courses that students would be interested in to accompany the more rigorous core courses, which can serve to bolster attendance as well

> *Last summer did afford us an opportunity to offer some different classes that we weren't able to offer in the past away from core. We were able to put in some enrichment classes they could take and we had not been able to do that until last summer…it's not just about coming and doing math for 3.5 hours. You may be able to actually take something else that interests you and we all know those other classes are what keep kids coming to school anyway, the ones who struggle.* [Principal, Wave 1]

Finding 1d: Districts varied in the extent they relied on learning management systems (LMS) versus live instruction for their Summer Learning programs.

When districts described the core elements of their Summer Learning programs, one notable point of distinction was their philosophy about, and use of, primary instruction. For some schools, the use of an LMS was a logistical necessity as they lacked the staff capacity to meet students' needs, and for others, it was a programmatic decision to decrease teacher burden and increase receptivity to teach over the summer.

> *…we decided to go with (LMS) so that we didn't have to develop anything different…so that they didn't have as much planning that they had to do and also, in order to get enough secondary folks to cover the needed areas.* [District Administrator, Wave 1]

Schools who relied on an LMS expressed that they wished they had time to provide professional development to Summer Learning program staff who didn't use an LMS for instruction throughout the school year. Other districts were explicit about the need for individualized live instruction and employed certified instructors whenever possible.

> *The thing that I think has helped us be very successful is something that we learned a long time ago…if a student is doing math credit recovery, all the math kids are one lab, in one classroom with a certified math teacher and what we tell the teachers, the way we train them is, 'You need to be actively working with all the students. If you have a small group of students that are hung up on a concept, you pull them aside, you might do a mini lesson.'…so it's not just a facilitator or someone standing up there making sure*

everybody's working. It's a certified teacher working with those students. [Teacher, Wave 1]

Summer Bridge Programs

Finding 1e: Districts varied considerably in the extent they conceptualized their Summer Bridge program as an academic versus social emotional support.

When principals spoke about how their Summer Bridge program targeted and supported students transitioning into high school, there was a broad spectrum along the academic - social emotional learning continuum. Some programs, as illustrated in the first quote, focused fully on providing social support to students, particularly those that were visibly struggling. These summer bridge supports were designed to foster connections, build student confidence, and establish a sense of security and belonging with their new school.

I think it is really those kids that we think need that extra support, maybe like a drop-out prevention, like we're concerned about this young person. They seem to be floundering. They don't have a connection. They don't like school. They don't seem to have any friends. [Principal, Wave 2]

Other programs focused primarily on ensuring kids were prepared to succeed academically. These supports included providing refresher courses in core subjects, and/or supplementary instructor to allow students to place in a more advanced class.

I think our kids, the kind of sweet spot in a program like this isn't necessarily the kids who are in the mindset of burn it all down, but it's kids who have the potential and might get sucked into that darkness, but also have a ton of potential to be really successful ….That's the kind of kids I felt like we had. [Principal, Wave 2]

Finding 1f: High schools expressed a lack of clarity and desire for guidance in the early implementation process around a) identifying the target population for summer bridge programs; b) who should be leading recruitment efforts; and c) how best to do so.

For the (summer)bridge, the middle school did that and we really did not have a good understanding of how they selected what kids they did. We were expecting more remedial

kids and we did get a nice chunk of those, but we also got a chunk of kids that were slated for Honors classes… there were metrics set by the principal at the MS, and we were not made aware of what the metric was for those students. [Teacher, Wave 2]

The Summer Bridge program implementation model was fairly uniform across districts with one exception. One district's summer bridge model had a unique model in that it paired upperclassmen with small groups of incoming freshmen for team-building exercises, academic guidance, and social and emotional learning support. In addition to the benefits of peer support, this also served to reduce staff burden as the upperclassmen led many implementation activities. This support extended from the summer and continued throughout the school year. Staff described the program accordingly:

(Summer Bridge) is all about engagement all the time, so it was really more focused on building relationships, learning the environment, learning the people around, it was all geared towards getting already collaborated with your programs… now (in the fall), they do meet once per month to go over actual content. So, it hasn't ended yet is what we're saying. It's an ongoing thing. So, the engagement piece prior is the foundation to getting into the meat. [Summer Bridge program lead, Wave 2]

This approach provided an opportunity for upperclassmen to mentor incoming freshmen with an emphasis on connection rather than content over the summer. This also provided a foundation for sustained academic support throughout the school year.

Career Accelerator Program

Broadly, CTE staff spoke about two overarching goals for Career Accelerator Programs: 1) exposing students to opportunities and experiences they would likely not encounter on their own; and 2) helping students understand the importance of their decisions in high school as it relates to post-secondary options.

Finding 1g: Rural districts emphasized the value of the career accelerator programs to combat brain drain and highlight lucrative opportunities within their communities.

CTE staff expressed that students either aren't aware of different opportunities to build a career in their local community, or don't realize how lucrative certain careers can be.

> *We have a huge shortage when it comes to plumbers, electricians, etc. There are so many areas in CTE where kids could be really successful and own their own business and have a great life if they were willing to go into those programs*. [Career Accelerator Lead / CTE instructor, Wave 1]

> *I really feel like we're pushing too many of our kids to the university system...especially kids that will come back to our county and have a career. Honestly, if you want to come back to (LEA) with a 4-year degree, you better go into education because that's the one place you're pretty much guaranteed to get a job. There aren't that many jobs for those kids, so for many years, our biggest export in (LEA) is our young people and that is a shame.* [Principal, Wave 1]

Cross-program Implementation Findings

Finding 1h: All programs emphasized the importance of attending to social and emotional needs of high school students, particularly in relation to persistently elevated anxiety levels.

Some districts expressed that their first priority was the physical and mental health of their students who faced amplified challenges related to isolation and disengagement during remote learning, especially those residing in geographically dispersed and economically distressed communities. School administrators acknowledged that some of these students had no internet connectivity throughout remote learning. Some Summer Bridge programs identified students based on the anticipated benefit of simply being in a school environment. As one district administrator explained regarding Summer Learning recruitment:

> *[W]e did tell principals if they felt like because of anxiety or social emotional issues that maybe a child who didn't need the credits but they just need to be around people [or] it would be a safer environment, then we encourage them to include those students also.* [District Administrator, Wave 1]

Finally, Career Accelerator program staff also prioritized students' social development, specifically referring to recalibration from the effects of the pandemic. A CTE program teacher reflected on addressing this goal:

> *We definitely see that some kids have forgotten how to make friends and be a friend, and some of that anxiety pulls into it. And I think our team did a fantastic job and [students] even referenced to how [staff] would switch it up for different activities so that they had to meet each other, get to know one another. That has helped their transition to the HS tremendously, probably more so than a lot of kids who didn't participate.* [CTE lead teacher, Wave 2]

Across programs, staff members cited that summer programming supported student needs beyond outlined content goals. Practitioners repeatedly spoke to summer programming as a means to support students they identified as needing connection or support, whether due to individual circumstances or the broader impacts of the pandemic.

Finding 1i: Summer Bridge and Career Accelerator programs prioritized experiential learning whenever possible.

All Summer Bridge programs in our sample incorporated non-academic activities and experiential learning. Students universally deemed activities such as scavenger hunts to learn their way around high school as the most engaging and useful activity for feeling more confident as they transitioned into high school.

The scope of summer bridge activities varied considerably across schools, with some participating in large adventure ropes courses, others kayaking in local lakes, and still others remaining on school property. The common thread across these was building connections between students and their peers and between students and staff.

Career Accelerator programs included various approaches to experiential learning. One Career Accelerator program took daily field trips to well-known local industries, and then connected those careers back to the educational paths that students would need to follow. Another program focused on developing career-relevant skills and linking those skills to educational opportunities.

[Teacher 1] taught the Adobe and Graphic Design piece of it and then [Teacher 2] taught the Robotics piece. I came in and did a piece each day where we talked about our career planning with them and also, coordinated them to go on a field trip where we went to [local] community college and toured their graphic design department and they did activities up there as well. [Career Accelerator Teacher, Wave 2]

Though experiential learning was a component of both Summer Bridge and Career Accelerator programs, these experiences took on a different tenor based on the district that was implementing them.

Finding 1j: Implementing a flexible staffing model - allowing teachers to split their time within a day, and/or across the number of total program games - was paramount for staffing summer programs and minimizing further teacher burnout.

One district noted a potential added benefit of this approach, in that it provides students with exposure to different teachers and different teaching styles.

I have one department that they've got 3 different teachers that are going to do one week each because no one wants to commit to the 3 weeks and I'm fine with that. And it's a good thing for our students because it gives them the opportunity to see different types of teaching methods and it may show a kid, hey, I might not learn real well under this teacher, but this other teacher, I get along great with and I understand everything they say, so that's a positive. [Principal, Wave 1]

RQ 2: To what extent are summer learning programs achieving their desired academic and social emotional outcomes?

Data from staff and students consistently indicated that districts largely met their goals and achieved their desired academic and social-emotional outcomes. Academic outcomes include drop-out prevention, increased academic engagement, expanded course availability, and teacher pedagogical development. Social-emotional outcomes include exposure to new experiences, connections with teachers and peers, and increased confidence, though some participating students still seem to be struggling with anxiety within the regular school year.

Academic Outcomes

Educators characterized the academic outcomes driving their summer programs across four focal areas: drop-out prevention, increased academic engagement and self-efficacy, expanded course access, and pedagogical development.

Finding 2a. Districts emphasized that access to summer credit recovery programs provides important opportunities for dropout prevention.

Districts emphasized that access to Summer Learning programs provided important opportunities for dropout prevention. Teachers noted that the difference between graduating versus dropping out of high school can be as little as one or two classes. These students can often fall through the cracks as they perceive the social stigma of repeating a course or grade to be greater than the consequences of dropping out of high school. As an administrator described:

> *We had 770 HS credits earned last summer with students across our district. That's huge. We graduated 55 students at the end of summer academy and these students would have been students that would have been dropouts. Even though there's light at the end of the tunnel and you have one or two credits, sometimes, they'll just walk away rather than face that embarrassment. Sometimes, they're first-generation HS graduates, so they don't have that push behind them that others may have and so, to graduate 55, that's huge for our district.* [LEA Director of Secondary Education, Wave 1]

The ability to make-up ground before the next school year was an exceptionally valuable impact of the ESSER-funded Summer Learning programs.

Finding 2b. High schools leveraged Summer Learning programs to enable students to attend dual enrollment community college classes in the fall.

Schools that utilized the ESSER-funded summer programs for credit acceleration reported that students responded positively to being able accrue college credits in the fall due to courses they completed over the summer.

…for some of them, it opens up the opportunity to take the community college class. We didn't have that before because they were going to have to be making up that credit in the fall. So, if they come to summer school, that leaves them an open spot and we can get them into a community college class too, so it seemed they were really glad when they came back. We didn't have anybody come back and say, oh, I wish I hadn't done that. We probably need to do some testimonies. It might help kids come to summer school and be willing. [Superintendent, Wave 1]

Finding 2c. Students who successfully completed credit recovery courses were more engaged in the fall and had more confidence in their ability to succeed academically.

Teachers and school staff observed that students who progressed through the Summer Learning program returned in the fall with more confidence and self-efficacy around their ability to continue progressing academically. School staff reported that students who participated in the Summer Learning program were much more engaged in the fall and had disproportionately lower rates of disciplinary actions.

When they come in and they are behind and you're saying, you do this summer program, you can come in and you're right with your class, that is a whole new student that next go around because they're not singled out…it's like, we can fix that so you're not in that class with Sophomores again and that does give them a…I've seen that happen time and time again. It's positive for them and they come back with a different attitude, and sometimes, another life event slaps them, but usually, they do much better. [Teacher,, Wave 1]

Finding 2d. Students who participated in the Career Accelerator program sought out courses aligned with their professional interest.

Career Accelerator programming also contributed to student academic engagement by providing a tangible link between school and careers. Several students described how the program helped them determine which classes specifically supported their career interest. As a staff member explained:

I think it also helped when they would talk to employers or our teachers at (community college), or even our faculty here, they were able to make a connection between this is why I need to make sure I'm at grade level in that Math class because if I want to do this as a career, I've got to be able to function in Math. The question, how am I ever going to use this? You might not use specifically what we're talking about today, but in general, you're going to use it throughout your whole career and I think they saw that quite a bit. [CTE Director, Wave 2]

Finding 2e. Students and teachers described the Summer Bridge program as an environment conducive to learning and teaching, given there aren't any exams or grades attached.

Some students expressed that they appreciated the opportunity to learn something without worrying about being tested on it. Relatedly, teachers referenced SB as a 'low-stakes' opportunity to try new instructional techniques before integrating them into the normal school year curriculum. Several staff members also spoke positively of the opportunity to engage more creatively with the content that they teach during the school year.

[S]hooting water rockets is something that I do at the end of quadratics unit, but instead, we did it at the beginning and it's changed…I'm going to change my sequence of teaching quadratics this semester because I was able to take this risk and saw, "Oh, that worked and it was a lot more fun and a lot more applicable to the standards." I think it gave us a low stakes opportunity to try new teaching methods and to see if it worked. [Teacher, Wave 2]

Social Emotional Outcomes

Finding 2g. Teachers and students perceived the social and emotional benefits of summer programs to include establishing connections with teachers and peers, increasing students' self-confidence, and exposure to new experiences.

Establishing connections with teachers and peers: Teachers and staff across programs and districts highlighted that the smaller and more tailored experience of the summer programs

provided some students an opportunity to build a connection with the teacher(s) they will have in the fall. Moreover, we heard that relationship-building through summer programming carried over to support student success during the regular school year.

> *Because we're small, we have a couple teachers that teach math 1, but it gives them an opportunity to see both of those teachers and it gives them an opportunity to see their math 2 teacher that they're going to have next year and get to know them on a personal basis because that's the one thing I will say about summer school, it's a lot more personal than the regular school year because you have much smaller classes, fewer kids and our teachers are really great at building relationships and that's a good thing and learn a little bit more about the kids because there's more one-on-one time and instruction with them.* [Principal, Wave 1]

Another participant spoke about how Summer Bridge programming scaffolded the development of trust among teachers and students.

> *...given them an adult on campus that they had not known prior that they could trust, that they could have a relationship with and that would make them more apt to engage in learning. Hey, I've got an advocate. I've got someone who's willing to go to bat for me in school or if I get frustrated, I can go talk to them. Maybe they hadn't had an opportunity prior to that to really develop that kind of deep bond with an educator.* [Superintendent, Wave 1]

Summer programming provided a space for students to develop friendships that bolstered their experiences during the regular school year. One student reflected on how Summer Bridge helped them develop skills they felt they had lost due to the pandemic:

> *For me, once COVID happened, I felt very disconnected from everybody and I would only be friends with two people and then it had been hard for me to reconnect with people. And then I went to this camp and now, I have all these friends and even though I don't talk to some of you guys, it's good to be able to smile at someone in the hall and know that they know me.* [Student, Wave 2]

Student confidence: Staff and students relayed that summer program experiences-built student confidence in navigating the new school building and interacting with others. This was a notable

difference at the start of the school year compared with students who had not participated in summer programs.

> *They had the relationships that they created amongst themselves, the relationships they created with the adults. They came in [to the start of school] knowing more than most of the other kids, so there was that confidence of being able to say, 'Oh, I know where that is' and they got to have that leadership role, that confidence piece where, 'Okay, yeah, I know what I'm doing.* [Counselor, Wave 2]

Staff and students also described an increased sense of belonging from participation in the Summer Bridge program.

> *They come in with a sense of confidence and self-assurance of school is a safe place for me. It's a place where people care about me, where other students are going to be accepting and where I have the ability to be successful. People here want me to be successful. I want to be successful here. That's what I wanted them to feel like walking away.* [Teacher, Wave 2]

Exposure to new experiences: The aforementioned growth in relationships and confidence was in part facilitated through activities outside of the school setting. Summer programs helped students access opportunities and spaces they otherwise would not experience and provided a backdrop for social growth.

Students conveyed that they appreciated the diversity of experiences in the summer programs, including visiting worksites, colleges, and social outings. Some teachers noted that they saw student anxiety go down as they began experiencing, and enjoying, these novel and diverse opportunities. Career Accelerator staff spoke to this outcome:

> *I think one of the big things for me was just seeing some of these kids engage in something that they never had the opportunity to do before. I think we, as teachers, because we're that middle class folk in our county, we don't think about the kind of resources it might take to take a Saturday and go canoeing on the river. Some of these kids have never done that before and it's right here in our backyard. That was really powerful to me to see some of them have that opportunity to grow and to have that new experience and to see them go from that anxiety space to the end of that, this was fun, let's do this again.* [Teacher, Wave 2]

RQ 3. What are the enabling and inhibiting conditions identified by educators for the successful implementation of high school summer learning recovery and acceleration programs in western North Carolina?

We examined our interview and focus group data to identify practices and/or structures that district administrators, principals, and teachers described as inhibiting or facilitating the successful implementation of summer learning programs.

Cross-cutting Enabling Factors

Factors that enabled successful implementation were described at three levels: planning, staffing, and attendance.

Finding 3a. Factors that enabled *successful planning* of summer programs included the ability to start planning in the first semester, and a planning team that incorporates staff from different school roles.

Adequate planning time: Schools and districts spoke to the importance of knowing funding levels and program parameters for summer programs as early as possible in the school year, with most beginning planning in earnest prior to the second semester.

Cohesive planning teams: There were common sentiments from high school staff around the importance of a team-based model for effective implementation of summer programs. This included representation across different school roles such as teachers, counselors, and school administrators.

Finding 3b. Factors that enabled *successful staffing* of summer programs included flexible staffing models, and staff that prioritizes relationship-building as well as instruction.

Sharing instructional time across teachers, within a day and/or across multiple days: Providing teachers with options for how much of a summer session they would want to staff was integral for many teachers to agree to participate and helped to buffer against added burnout.

Instructors invested in relationship-building as well as instruction: Students cited the importance of feeling like the summer program teachers cared about them as a person, and not just as a test score. Principals and teachers reflected that those relationships were key to student buy-in, and gatekeepers for successful implementation.

Finding 3c. Factors that facilitate *student attendance* include directly communicating with parents for recruitment and providing transportation for students.

Direct communication with parents: Teachers and principals reported that the most effective strategy for recruitment and enrollment, particularly for at-risk students, is via phone or face-to-face individualized conversations with parents. For some schools, this included continued communication with the family throughout the summer to support regular attendance.

Transportation for students to and from summer programs: Transportation was the most commonly cited enabling condition across all programs and all districts. Importantly, the use of ESSER funds for transportation provided students in economically distressed and rural communities with more equitable access to learning recovery and acceleration supports than would have otherwise not been possible.

Cross-cutting Inhibiting Factor

Barriers to successful implementation were described across three domains: planning, staffing, and attendance.

Finding 3d. Lack of clarity around district expectations, particularly around how students should be identified and the number of students to be served, presented *challenges when planning* for Summer Bridge and Career Accelerator programs.

School staff acknowledged that they appreciate the autonomy to design programs that best meet the needs of their students, but they would have liked more clarity about the parameters they were to work in. This was particularly evident as it related to the numbers of students the schools should serve, and relatedly, the best processes for recruitment and enrollment.

> *I think they were unprepared for the number of students that we were going to have as an influx at the last minute and so we didn't have a really great mechanism in place to identify who those students were when they arrived. I had no idea who those kids were. Maybe they came back and maybe they didn't. It was a little too freeform.* [Teacher, Wave 2]

> *We have no exposure to (the students) at all. So, I think what would have been ideal was for teachers to be told in earlier May, hey, identify and asking every (8th grade) teacher to send a list of who are 5-10 kids that you think would really benefit from this and then, that person, whoever is collecting that list to be able to see that and to use that as their primary list for cold calling.* [Teacher, Wave 2]

Finding 3e. Teachers, principals, and district administrators all spoke about the challenge of teacher burnout as the primary *barrier to adequately staffing* summer programs.

As discussed under RQ1, this could be partially addressed by programs open to using an LMS in their instructional model but seemed best alleviated when there was a sufficient amount of available staff to allow teachers to split the hours they worked in a day, and/or split the total number of days they worked across the program. One district that was on a year-round schedule emphasized the importance of having flexibility around the timing of summer programs to help prevent teacher burnout.

> *I was really concerned around October-November, not just for myself, but the other teachers that had done summer school. So, just talking to some of the other staff, I felt like it was probably a little bit more burnout and then in the new school year, I think we got tired a lot quicker. I just felt like the previous school year just did not end.* [Teacher, Wave 1]

Finding 3f. The need for high school students to work over the summer, particularly in economically distressed areas, was cited as a particularly challenging *barrier to summer program attendance*.

Principals and teachers acknowledged that summer programs face scheduling challenges as they compete with family travel and student jobs. However, this challenge is amplified in some of these communities where a student's summer income is not considered supplemental, but essential for their family. On top of this, we heard from teachers that some local businesses dropped the high school requirement and hiked their pay rate to attract a ready-made labor pool of high schoolers. The other critical attendance barrier is transportation, again exacerbated by the rural mountainous regions where public transportation may not be an option.

> *..these seniors, some of them are working in place of their parents or helping their grandparents because of their home life. So, they see the need more to have that cash flow instead of the value of their education.* [Teacher, Wave 2]

> *Right now, with construction, I think of so many of our boys. We have hard working boys. They're willing to go out there and get dirty and put in that effort and work and they're getting paid a killing. I taught a kid here that was like, this was the greatest thing ever for me to be able to be remote because now, I'm making…he was bringing home $1500 a week by working construction under somebody else. He was like, I just bought my own house at 17 and I'm like, no wonder.* [Teacher, Wave 2]

DISCUSSION

In keeping with the intention of this study to inform policy and practice, we pooled our data across the three program types to highlight promising practices for the design and implementation of summer learning recovery and acceleration efforts for high school students in western North Carolina.

1. Optimize Recruitment Strategies - Utilize social media for high yield recruitment and engage students from previous summer programs for 'testimonials' and more targeted recruitment efforts.

2. Facilitate relationship-building and trust - Develop program components that intentionally foster connection and build trust between students and educators can serve as a powerful catalyst for improving academic outcomes.

3. Integrate mental health supports - Ongoing supports for the heightened anxiety and pervasive mental health challenges of students is critical at the high school level and should be incorporated into the design of all academic program planning.

4. Prioritize experiential learning - Prioritize activities where students can "do" rather than observe, e.g. hands-on experience at job sites.

5. Leverage student leadership - Engage upper-class students in mentorship roles for high school Summer Bridge programs to reduce burden on staff and heighten student self-efficacy and peer support structures across grade levels.

6. Extend supports across the school year: Extend summer programs throughout the school year to provide additional time for relationship-building and serve as a foundation for student buy-in to academic support provided across the year.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated by the findings in this report, district administrators and high school staff in western North Carolina unanimously agreed that ESSER-funded Summer Learning, Summer Bridge, and Career Accelerator programs provided important supports for high school students who are still feeling the effects of lost instructional time due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many of our interviewees directly expressed their appreciation for being provided ESSER-funding and the opportunity to use it for summer programming. Moreover, the districts and schools in our sample expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have their voices heard by policy makers through this study and noted that has not always been the perception of districts in western Carolina.

Finally, we closed each interview with a question asking what else the district and school staff would want policymakers in Raleigh to know. Across the board, district administrators, principals, and teachers expressed concern about the funding cliff looming ahead as ESSER

funds expire, with particular emphasis on the number of students who would be impacted if transportation was no longer funded.

Districts and schools indicated that they would work to retain some aspects of summer programming, but it would be at a reduced scope, on a much smaller scale, and thus limiting the capacity to serve students most in need and sustain and build upon the positive impact their programs have had to date.

The following quote captures sentiments expressed to us numerous times from across multiple districts:

> *I think we all know and recognize that the impact of COVID has not ended. It continues. We feel it, we see it every day. I wish I could say just from a school level perspective that I saw an end in sight to the negative impact that it has brought on the lives of students, but I don't see that yet and that's just very concerning. So, they need all the supports that we could offer to keep them afloat until this is a distant memory.* [Counselor, Wave 1]

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Staff Focus Group Protocol

Qualitative Study of ESSER-funded Summer Programs

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us today. The purpose of this focus group is to better understand the experience of teachers and staff who participate in summer learning programs, and will be structured to hear about your thoughts and experiences in three sections: 1) program preparation and enrollment; 2) program implementation; and 3) program impacts.

The findings from this study will be used to provide information to NCDPI and the Office of Learning Recovery around what's working, what's not, and ways summer programs could be improved going forward.

We want to emphasize a few things before we begin:

5. *All data we report will be confidential. Your names and school will never be connected to any identifiable information.*
6. *This is not in any way evaluating you or your students, the only purpose is to provide information to the state around how best to support summer learning programs and facilitate learning recovery and acceleration*
7. *You may choose not to answer any questions in the focus group and may stop participating in the focus group at any time.*

Do you have any questions?

<< Ask permission to record>>

#.Please state your name, school, the courses you currently teach, and the role you played in summer programming this past summer.

First, we'd like to hear about outreach and enrollment for the summer program.

#. What were the ways you informed students and parents about this summer program?

- *Probe specifically around outreach to high-need kids*

#. How effective do you feel the outreach strategies were for ensuring all students were aware of this opportunity?

- *Probe for strategies they found effective / ineffective*

- *Probe for any potential barriers or challenges with the enrollment process itself*

#. To what extent, if any, do you feel aspects of the enrollment process may have made it challenging or served as a barrier for some families to enroll.

#. What did you perceive, or hear from students, to be barriers for students who were invited into the program but did not enroll?

#. What do you feel were the motivations for children that did end up enrolling?
Probe for parent, teacher, and peer influence.

Next we'd like to hear about your experiences implementing in the summer program…

#. First, we'd like to hear about your experiences staffing the summer program…
- What was your motivation to participate?
- Did you have any hesitation or concerns about signing up?
- From a staffing perspective, what do you feel worked well, what didn't work well, and why?

#. Overall, how would you describe your goals around how you wanted the summer program to benefit students?
- *Probe for benefits unique to summer bridge & career accelerator as needed*

#. Tell us a bit about the activities you implemented to meet those goals
- *If SEL activities aren't explicitly mentioned, ask* a*bout the degree to which SEL aspects were folded into the program*

#.What aspects of implementation for the summer program would you say went really well, what did not go as well as you would have liked?
- For things that didn't go as well - what challenges or barriers did you face, and what strategies did you employ to try and address them?
- For things that went well - what do you feel were some supporting or enabling factors that contributed to their success?

#. Overall, what activities do you feel students seemed the most and least engaged with, and why?

- *Probe as needed:* Were there certain activities you found to be more engaging for different student subgroups?

Lastly, we'd like to hear about your reflections after completing the program…

#. To what extent do you feel your summer program met the goals you described earlier?
- On the whole, what benefit do you feel will be most useful for the students who participated?

#. If you were in charge of implementing this program next summer, what would you change, what would you keep the same, and why?

#. Lastly, thinking about the different ways you feel this program was useful to students…To what extent would you say it helped to address challenges brought about specifically by the COVID-19 pandemic?

- *If helped specific to Covid:* In what specific way(s)?

- *If it didn't help specific to Covi*d: Are there any other types of supports, either academically or socially, that you think could help to address the impact from Covid?

#. Is there anything else you'd like to share overall about your experiences with the summer program?

Appendix B

Student Focus Group Protocol

Qualitative Study of ESSER-funded Summer Programs

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us today. The purpose of this focus group is to better understand the experience of high school students who participate in summer learning programs, and will be structured to hear about your thoughts and experiences in three sections: 1) prior to participating in the program; 2) while you were participating in the program; and 3) your reflections and experience after completing the program and returning to school.

The findings from this study will be used to provide information around what's working, what's not, and ways summer programs could be improved going forward.

We want to emphasize a few things before we begin:

8. *All data we report will be confidential. Your names and school will never be connected to any identifiable information.*
9. *This is not at all evaluating you or your teachers. The purpose is only to help the state department of public instruction better support you and your school.*
10. *You may choose not to answer any questions in the focus group, and may stop participating in the focus group.*

Do you have any questions?

<< Ask permission to record>>

First, we'd like to hear about your decisions to participate in the program, and your thoughts and experiences prior to the program start…

#. How did you learn about the summer program?

#. Do you feel like all of your classmates were aware of this opportunity?
-*If no:* What classmates do you think weren't aware, and why?

#. When you were thinking about whether to participate, what hesitations or concerns did you have?

- *As needed, probe for potential barriers such as transportation, needing to work, etc*

#. Why did you end up deciding to participate?

- *As needed, probe for parent, teacher, and peer influence*

#. What are the ways you were hoping this program might help or benefit you?
Next we'd like to hear about your experiences while you were participating in the summer program…

#. Were you able to attend all of the program? *If no, why not?*

#. Can you tell us about the different activities that you participated in?

#. Next we'd like to hear which activities you liked the most; which, if any, you didn't like; and why?

- *Make sure to capture:* What was it about these activities that you did / did not enjoy?

Similarly we'd like to hear which parts of the program you felt were most and least useful for you; and in what ways?

- *{Summer Bridge} If not explicit, probe on ways the program was useful specific to transitioning to high school*

- *{Career Accelerator} If not explicit, probe on ways the program was useful specific to thinking about career options and opportunitie*s

- *{Both-SEL} If not explicit, probe on ways the program was / was not useful for social emotional learning issues such as stress management and/or mental health*

#. If you were in charge of implementing this program next summer, what would you change, what would you keep the same, and why?

Lastly, we'd like to hear about your reflections after completing the program…

#. Overall, do you feel that your participation in this program helped you and provided you the benefits you named earlier? *For yes or no (if not previously addressed)* - In what ways?

#. Lastly, thinking about the different ways you found this summer program useful…To what extent do you feel it helped to address challenges brought about specifically by the COVID-19 pandemic?

- *If helped specific to Covid:* In what specific way(s)?
- *If it didn't*
- *help specific to Covi*d: Are there any other types of supports, either academically or socially, that you think could help to address the impact from Covid?

#. Is there anything else you'd like to share overall about your experiences with the summer program?

Appendix C

Teacher and Staff Survey

Qualitative Study of ESSER-funded Summer Programs

Introductory questions

Tell us your primary role *(will check with principals to ensure all roles are included)*:

- District-level administrator
- School leader (e.g. principal or assistant principal)
- Classroom instructor (e.g. teacher, special education teacher, or teacher assistant)
- Student support personnel (e.g. counselor, social worker, school psychologist
- Instructional facilitator (e.g. curriculum specialist, literacy coach, math coach, instructional technology facilitator)
- Other: *{Write in}*

Did you work in the summer bridge or career accelerator programs this summer? *(will add specific program names for each school)* {y/n}

→ if yes, select one or both

Branch for teachers only

What grade level of students do you teach? [Select all that apply]
-9th grade, 10th grade, 11th grade, 12th grade, 13th grade, Other [write in]:

What subject-areas do you teach? [Select all that apply].
-Self-Contained (all core academic subject areas), Mathematics, English Language Arts/Reading, Science, Social sciences (e.g. social Studies, history, civics/government, etc.), Art/music, Health, World languages, Computer Science, Career and technical education, Special education, English as a second Language, Physical education, Special Education, Other, N/A

Branch Summer Bridge teachers & staff

Which of the following did you consider to be goals of your summer bridge program, and to what extent do you feel that goal was met? [Select all that apply] *{Qualtrics Matrix - Y/N Goal, if yes - Y/N met}*

- Students will become familiar with STEM aligned learning.
- Students will finish the program feeling excited and less apprehensive about their new school year.
- Students will have a better understanding of their new schools and the opportunities that will be available to them.
- Students will know that adults in the school system care about them and their personal success.

- Students will broaden their peer base and make connections with students from other feeder schools or with new-to-the school students.
- Please add any other goals not listed above and the extent you felt they were met or not met: [write in]

Please indicate how useful you feel your students found each of the following activities*:* {Very useful, somewhat useful, a little useful, not useful, don't know} **Choices will be populated based on summer bridge program activities at each school*

Branch Career Accelerator teachers and staff

Which of the following did you consider to be goals of your Career Accelerator program, and to what extent do you feel that goal was met? [Select all that apply] *{Qualtrics Matrix - Y/N Goal, if yes - Y/N met}*

- Students learn soft-skills such as resume writing and interview skills
- Students learn about careers to match their own strengths and skills
- Students experience being at a local or regional college
- Students observe daily activities of job workers
- Students learn about the courses and level of education needed to pursue different careers
- Students become more aware of career options in their local community
- Please add any other goals not listed above and the extent you felt they were met or not met [write in]

Please indicate how useful you feel your students found each of the following activities*:* {Very useful, somewhat useful, a little useful, not useful, don't know} **Choices will be populated based on career accelerator program activities at each school*

For each of the following industries *(will tailor options based on industry focus),* please indicate your perception of students' level of interest (Very interested, somewhat interested, not interested, don't know)

- Health Sciences
- Manufacturing
- Public Safety
- Information Technology
- Hospitality

Overall, how much do you think the following factors impact students' level of interest across industries {Influence a lot, influence a little, no influence}?

- Having family in the industry
- Having options to work in local community
- Starting pay
- Long-term earning potential
- Education requirements
- Other [write in]

{Summer bridge & Career Accelerator}

What, if any, of the following do you feel served to hinder optimal implementation of your summer program? (select all that apply)

- Getting students to enroll in the program
- Inconsistent student attendance
- Having enough staff
- Inconsistent staff attendance
- Not enough preparation time
- Needed more financial resources
- Needed materials/resources
- Needed better/different curriculum
- Challenges coordinating with schools/community partners
- The total length (number of days) of the program
- The daily hours of the program
- Other (write in)
- I did not experience any challenges or barriers with implementation

What factors do you feel helped to support successful implementation of summer programs? [write in] _____

All teachers and staff

Are you currently teaching or counseling a student who participated in a summer learning program?

{Yes/No/Not Sure}

If yes: Have you noticed any difference in those students compared to their peers as it relates to levels of the following? {Higher level, lower level, no difference)}

- Engagement with teachers
- Engagement with peers
    - Academic self-confidence
    - Academic performance
    - Discipline issues

Please indicate the extent you agree or disagree with the following statements {Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree, or Don't Know}

- Incoming freshmen seem comfortable navigating the high school
- Incoming freshmen seem excited to start the new school year
- Incoming freshmen seem engaged in their coursework
    - Incoming freshmen seem engaged with their teachers
    - Incoming freshmen seem engaged with their peers
    - Incoming freshmen seem academically prepared
    - *Optional – Anything else to add around perceptions of freshman preparedness?*

Please indicate the extent you agree or disagree with the following statements: {Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree, or Don't Know}

- Students express interest and seek information about careers options

- Students have opportunities during the school year to explore different career options
- Students have opportunities to get to know and interact with community organizations within the school year
- Students would know where to go or what to do to learn about the requirements for their career path of interest
- *Optional – Anything else to add around perceptions of students awareness and understanding of career options?*

Please share any thoughts you have about ways resources for summer programs could best be used to combat lost-instructional time due to the Covid-19 pandemic:{Write in} _____

[End Survey] Thank you again for your participation!

Appendix D

Select Survey Findings

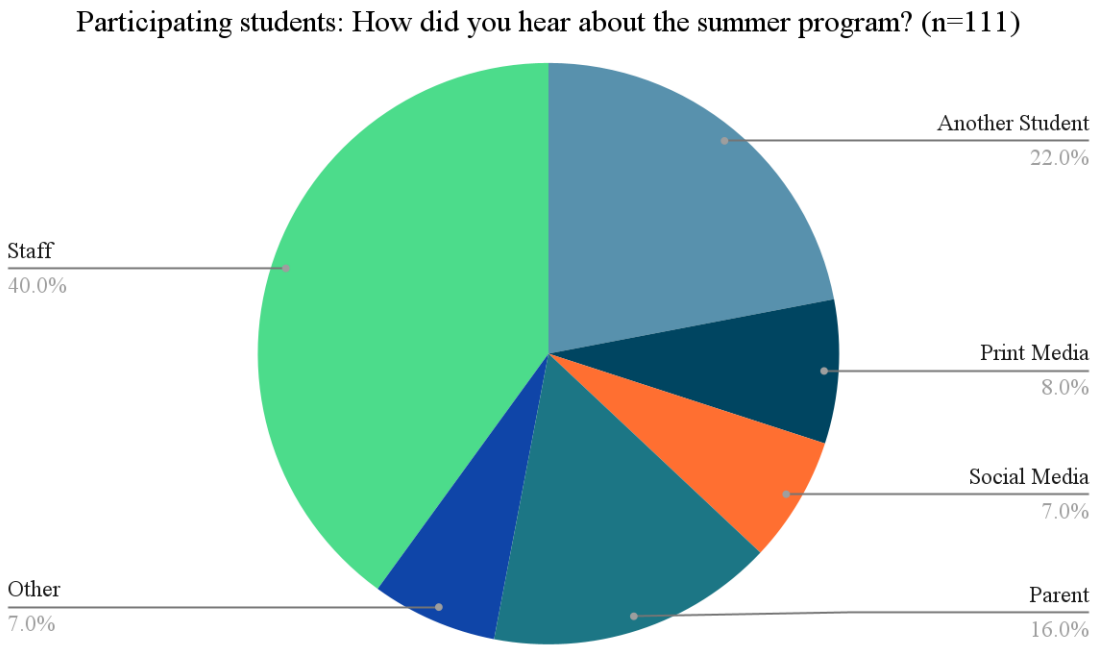
Due to administration challenges described in the Methods section, we are unable to draw robust conclusions from our survey data. However, there are two preliminary findings worth noting from the staff surveys, which also emerged in our qualitative data.

Program recruitment

When asked how students became aware of the summer programs, the most prevalent response (40%) was word-of-mouth from their peers. This was followed by being informed by school staff (22%) and parents (16%). It is important to note that the least cited information source was social media, which students and staff identified as a potentially high yield recruitment approach. This finding may reflect the limited extent to which social media was deployed as a recruitment tool across schools. Importantly, social media campaigns may also reach parents moreso than students, thus contributing to recruitment. In interviews across districts, we heard a common sentiment that the most successful approach to enrollment for Summer Bridge was directly reaching out to parents, either at school meetings or over the phone.

Figure 1

Student Recruitment Sources



Triangulation with qualitative data

Keeping in mind the survey sample's limitations, our survey data provides preliminary support for our qualitative findings, particularly in social-emotional learning (see Table 4). Teachers generally reported that students who participated in summer programming displayed stronger social skills than their peers that did not participate in summer programming. Over two-thirds of teachers noted that participating students demonstrated greater engagement with teachers and self-confidence (68.75% and 67.86%, respectively) than their non-participating peers, and over half of respondents (53.12%) reported that participating students demonstrated more engagement with their peers.

Survey findings were also compelling in support of the academic outcomes discussed in our focus groups and interviews. Nearly two-thirds of teachers reported higher levels of academic engagement and performance for participating students. Finally, over half of teachers (52.94%) reported that participating students demonstrated fewer disciplinary issues than their non-participating peers. Interestingly, several teachers reported higher disciplinary issues for students who participated in summer programming, which may reflect school-based differences regarding student recruitment and programmatic differences.

Table 4

Staff perceptions of differences in participating students relative to non-participating students

	Higher Level	**No Difference**	**Lower Level**
Engagement with teachers (32)	68.75	31.25	0
Engagement with peers (32)	53.12	46.88	0
Self-confidence (28)	67.86	32.14	0
Academic Engagement (32)	62.5	34.38	3.13
Academic Performance (32)	62.5	34.38	3.13
Disciplinary Issues (34)	17.65	29.42	52.94

Appendix E

Student Perception Survey

We surveyed students on their perceptions of school before the school year began and once it was underway. Though participants reported feeling worried about navigating high school with less frequency than non-participants, we generally saw similar rates of agreement and disagreement with statements of preparedness for and comfort in school between participants and non-participants. On one hand, this result could be read as a lack of impactfulness of summer programming on select domains. When considering students recruited, however, this result may suggest that students who were at-risk or otherwise less likely to be successful and comfortable at schools reported perspectives closer to that of non-identified students at the culmination of the program.

Table 5

Student perceptions of school before and during the school year, %

Before school began, I felt worried about where to go and what to do				
	Strongly Agree	*Somewhat Agree*	*Somewhat Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
Participants	22.58	35.48	25.81	16.13
Non-Participants	34.72	35.64	17.67	11.98
Once school began, I felt confident about knowing where to go				
	Strongly Agree	*Somewhat Agree*	*Somewhat Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
Participants	46.77	33.87	14.52	4.84
Non-Participants	42.48	40.03	10.89	6.6
Before school began, I felt nervous about my interactions with classmates				
	Strongly Agree	*Somewhat Agree*	*Somewhat Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
Participants	16.13	27.42	22.58	33.87
Non-Participants	15.8	28.22	30.21	25.77
Before school began, I felt like I was going to a school where people would care about me				
	Strongly Agree	*Somewhat Agree*	*Somewhat Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
Participants	14.52	43.55	27.42	14.52
Non-Participants	13.85	49.69	25.23	11.23
Once school began, I felt like teachers cared about me				
	Strongly Agree	*Somewhat Agree*	*Somewhat Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
Participants	37.1	35.48	19.35	6.45
Non-Participants	27.65	54.38	12.44	5.53
Before school began, I felt nervous about teachers being nice				
	Strongly Agree	*Somewhat Agree*	*Somewhat Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*

Participants	12.9	30.65	24.19	32.26
Non-Participants	15.49	31.13	32.67	20.71
Once school began, I knew where to go if I needed help				
	Strongly Agree	*Somewhat Agree*	*Somewhat Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
Participants	48.38	29.03	14.52	8.06
Non-Participants	35.89	44.48	13.04	6.6
Before school began, I believed I would be successful academically in high school				
	Strongly Agree	*Somewhat Agree*	*Somewhat Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
Participants	35	36.67	20	8.3
Non-Participants	39.85	44.92	10.31	4.92
Once school began, I had confidence I would be successful academically				
	Strongly Agree	*Somewhat Agree*	*Somewhat Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
Participants	35.48	41.94	12.9	9.68
Non-Participants	40.03	44.63	10.43	4.91

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY RURAL EDUCATION INSTITUTE

Elevating Rural Voices

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH[12]

In a broader research endeavor that encompasses the entire state, the rural context of eastern North Carolina warrants highlighting as a distinct educational environment enriched by its history and culture and distinguished by the determination and resilience of its inhabitants. In this study report, the interdisciplinary research team from ECU's Rural Education Institute (REI) foreground the voices of the educators, parents, and students as they informed us of the educational affordances that summer programming made available in 2021 and 2022 even as they earmarked issues that they intended to surmount in the future.

ECU's REI serves as a collaborator with rural stakeholders to research, innovate, and widely disseminate knowledge to benefit rural schools and communities. Ultimately, we seek to improve educational outcomes for rural students, schools, and communities. The REI interdisciplinary research team consists of faculty with expertise in Birth-Kindergarten, Special Education, Foundations, Elementary Education, Art Education, Foreign Language, Counselor Education and Education Leadership. The faculty team is connected with rural researchers and scholars across the country while embedded in the rural counties in eastern NC. The team is committed to elevating eastern NC rural voices and perspectives around summer learning programming.

Given this orientation, researchers in REI aimed to (a) collaboratively design research to refine the effectiveness of extended learning recently instituted by eastern NC rural school districts, (b) amplify the voices of students, teachers, administrators, and families of our rural schools and communities as DPI explores best practices in learning recovery and acceleration, and (c) provide actionable data for future school extension and learning recovery programming in our rural region. REI collaborated with 3 rural school districts in the design and execution of the multi-case study. These three NC rural school districts represent rural fringe, rural distant, and rural

[12] The ECU REI team was supported through funding from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's, Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration (OLR). We acknowledge this critical support and partnership with OLR. Our project is focused on our school district partners' voices and our shared commitment to elevating rural voices in NC. Any questions about this research may be directed to Kristen Cuthrell, cuthrellma@ecu.edu

remote locales and are in Eastern NC (SBE Districts 1-2). We intentionally aimed to partner with rural school districts in high poverty counties to assess and discern how to provide equitable educational services to students, families, and school personnel in these historically under resourced rural areas.

Our collaborations are modeled on the research-practitioner partnership (RPP) framework (Coburn & Penuel, 2016), a holistic model that is inclusive and participatory in the identification of issues, tracking of data, development of solutions towards transformative practice, and improved outcomes using a participatory action research design. We embrace the position of Nugent et al. (2017) that "partnerships are critical to conducting, implementing and sustaining meaningful and impactful rural education research" (p. 56). We set out to collaborate with district leaders to develop a targeted research plan to examine student, family, educator, and administrator experiences in extended learning across 2021-22. We began with conversations with superintendents, then at their direction, expanded to district leadership teams, and building administrators. We provided a menu of multi-dimensional qualitative data collection opportunities. These included:

- Qualitative Interviewing: Individual and Focus Groups
- Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs): CLEs are assemblies held within the local community in which students, families, school personnel, and stakeholders meet to exchange ideas and strategies that sustain positive school environments and school safety, and to foster progressive community change. Researchers compiled field notes from the CLEs to enlighten our inductive analyses in relation to specific interpretations of data.
- Surveys/Questionnaires: REI researchers administered demographic surveys.
- Photovoice: Photo-voice is a visual research methodology used to bring awareness to a social phenomenon by providing individuals the opportunity to use personal photos to explore lived experiences. Photo images are used as a medium to connect to an experience.

Program Literature and Context

Rural counties are defined as having an average population density of 250 people per square mile or less (NC Rural Center, 2021). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) assigns locale codes to school districts and individual schools within the district. The codes are based on the physical location represented by an address that is matched against a

geographic database maintained by the Census Bureau. NCES collapses them into categories (Geverdt, 2019). In our case, our partners are considered either Rural, Fringe (41): Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster or Rural, Distant (42): Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5. By contrast, the best way to understand rurality is a set of small, isolated, close-knit communities, connected intergenerationally to the land as a place of work (through farming and agribusiness, mining, drilling, and the like). Rural people tend to have a strong sense of community pride, a shared history, and cultural tradition (Stephens, 2019).

North Carolina has the 2nd highest number of rural students in the country- 568,161; roughly 40% of the public school students are spread geographically across 78 of the 100 counties (NC Rural Center, 2021). Additionally, NC has a student population that is more apt to live in poverty and more racially diverse than most other rural states (Showalter et al., 2019). In the 2020 Roadmap of Need report, eastern North Carolina is referred to as "the other North Carolina" populated by youth living in communities experiencing "economic decline that have struggling schools, few out-of-school opportunities, and limited options for healthy activities" (pp.3). While social and economic forces pose challenges for educational spaces everywhere (Mclaughlin et al., 2014), rural schools face additional challenges in teacher recruitment, mental health access, and social-emotional support that ensure equitable practices and support for all children (Biddle & Azan, 2016; Greenberg & Ash, 2012; NCDPI, 2022). It is well-documented that factors such as poverty, rurality, isolation, and lack of academic and mental healthcare resources have a major impact on school safety as well as on the overall well-being of students, their families, and the community (Crumb et al., 2019).

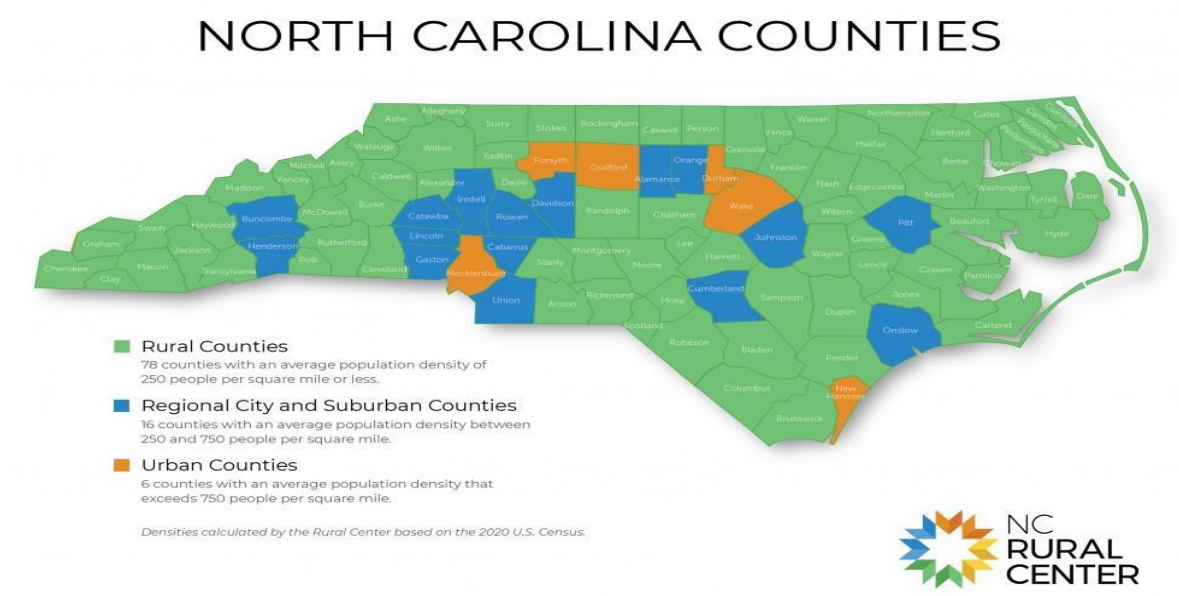
Culturally responsive rural education approaches provide educators with the opportunity to engage students respectfully and appreciatively within their natural settings of home, school, and community (Gay, 2006; Young & Chambers, 2020). Relevant principles in culturally responsive rural education include recognition of one's ethnocentric and urban normative biases, knowledge of student cultural backgrounds, understanding of community political, economic, and social contexts, an ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate communication strategies,

and a commitment to caring (Anthony-Stevens, 2018; Weinstein et al., 2004; Wenger & Dinsmore, 2005).

To situate the research, we utilized the concept of rural cultural wealth, a place-based conceptual framework, grounded in the lived experiences of rural residents (Crumb et al., 2022). This framework acknowledges the multiple strengths and assets of rural people. The framework comprises four constructs: rural resourcefulness, rural ingenuity, rural familism, and rural community unity. Rural resourcefulness refers to the capacity of rural residents to overcome socio-contextual adversities that threaten their livelihood and wellbeing through taking actions to mitigate limitations. Rural ingenuity refers to the inventiveness and adaptive ability of rural residents. Rural familism is characterized by a feeling of belonging among family members and the integration of individual activities and achievements towards attaining a collective goal. Finally, rural community unity is the outcome of rural residents' understanding of, appreciation for, and social networking around their resources, resulting in unifying and organizing behaviors. By first recognizing and appreciating these constructs, we had a mutual understanding of the value of rural people and places and an openness to learning ways to improve educational outcomes.

Figure 1

NC Map of Rural Counties



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to elevate rural voices around lived experiences of summer learning opportunities in 2021 and 2022. We examine perspectives from multiple stakeholders across multiple rural counties in the east to better understand summer student learning and school engagement. Our research question is:

To what extent does school extension programming in a rural context impact student learning, and school engagement?

A) From the students' perspective?

B) From the families' perspective?

C) From the educators' perspective?

D) From the administrators' perspective?

METHODS

Design Overview

We used a cross case analysis approach (Yin, 2018) to explore perspectives on the implementation and impact of school extension programs on student re-engagement and learning recovery across selected school districts. Case studies are well-suited for investigating individuals, events, activities, or processes of a bounded system (Yin, 2018).

Collectively, we debated with which of the school districts in eastern North Carolina we would seek to collaborate. Our intention was to ensure that we highlighted the diversity of the parent and student body across our region and the high quality of the educational programming made available over the summer without downplaying the difficulties that committed administrators and teachers overcame. We recruited districts from SBE Districts 1-2.

Our participating 3 counties are: Lenoir, Tyrrell, and Bertie. Our final 3 school district partners vary in size and in focus for the case study. The larger school district requested that we focus on their elementary summer programming, while the two smaller school districts asked that we focus on their k-12 offerings. Additionally, the school district leaders were eager to have their perspectives as rural and/or small schools shared on a larger level at NCDPI. All district administrators noted changes in how they offered summer learning programs in 2021 compared to 2022. Our smaller districts shared that their numbers of students served would be significantly less than other districts- for one district, they had few high schoolers attend because most were working jobs as potato graters during the summer. Table 1 provides an overview of districts engaged.

Table 1

Demographic Indicators By Case

	Cases		
Indicator	Bertie	Lenoir	Tyrell
% Poverty[1]	24.1%	23.5%	43.0%
SB Region	1	2	1
# of schools[2]	7	17	3
# of students[2]	1,797	8,149	528
NCES Locale Code[3]	Rural: Distant (42)	Rural: Fringe (41)	Rural: Remote (43)
Low Performing[2]	3/7	5/16	2/3
# (%) of ELL Students[4]	216 (4.6%)	455 (5.5%)	40 (7.7%)
% of students of color[5]	90%	67%	64%
Scope	K – 12 Summer	Elementary Summer	K – 12 Summer

Note: [1]SAIPE, 2020 [2]NCDPI, 2022b [3]NCES, 2022 [4]NCDPI, 2022a [5]NCDPI, 2022c

Based on these demographic indicators, Tyrrell County has the highest diversity index at .706, the highest percentage of population who experience poverty (43%), and the fewest schools in the district (3). This district also spends the least in terms of instructional expenditure per pupil and has the lowest adjusted salary expenditure per instructional FTE. These adjusted salary expenditures are determined based on the total dollar amount spent on instructional salaries multiplied by their wage index and divided by how many instructional staff members (e.g., teachers, teacher assistants). Lenoir county has the next highest diversity index at .527, the lowest of the three counties in terms of the percentage of population who experience poverty (23.5%), and the most schools out of all 3 districts (17). This district spends the most in terms of instructional expenditure per pupil and is second in terms of adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE. The third county, Bertie, has the lowest diversity index at .296 (note-90% of students of color), the second highest percentage of population who experience poverty (24.1%), and the second most schools in their district (7). Bertie is second in terms of instructional expenditure per pupil and ranks highest in terms of adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE.

All three districts included in this study fall within North Carolina's Tier 1, which means they rank in the lowest 40 counties in economic development. Note- Rural diversity index is a measure of racial heterogeneity at the school level. Specifically, if you were to randomly choose a school in a rural district, and then choose two students at random from within that school, the

rural diversity index is the percentage chance that these two students would be of a different race. Rural instructional expenditures per pupil represent the total current expenditures for instruction in rural public-school districts divided by the total number of students enrolled in those same districts. The ratio of instructional expenditures to transportation expenditures is a measure of how many dollars are spent on teaching and learning for every dollar spent on transporting pupils. The lower the ratio, the more money is channeled toward transportation and away from teaching and learning.

Data Collection

We embarked to collaborate with district leaders to develop a targeted research plan to examine student, family, educator, and administrator experiences in extended learning across 2021-22. In conversation with district leaders, several selected interviews, community learning exchanges (parent nights), and surveys. The district leaders wanted to keep things simple and go with what families and employees are more familiar with. One district chose to participate in a modified approach to PhotoVoice- Photo Elicitation. This modified approach was recommended by REI researchers who completed formal training for PhotoVoice due to the time restraints for district and participant involvement. We conducted photo elicitation as an additional element of data collection.

REI developed semi-structured qualitative interview protocols, demographic surveys, and photo-elicitation prompts with school district partners during the research design phase with input from district leaders. Having received the informed consent of the administrators and teachers, the REI faculty researchers conducted interviews and focus group discussions that canvassed the perspectives of administrators, teachers, students, and parents on the same set of key questions (suitably but minimally amended to fit the different participants, see Appendix A and B for data collection protocols; all research processes were approved by the ECU IRB (UMCIRB 22-000727).

Selection and Recruitment of PSU's

We worked with district leaders on group data-gathering activities. Some districts requested that data-gathering coincide with already-scheduled events (e.g., teacher orientation days, and parent/teacher meetings). Collection strategies incorporating existing routines that

families and students were accustomed to in the district worked well. For instance, families in Lenoir had familiarity with attending family nights in which one pizza was given per family while families participated in activities in small groups. Separate breakfast and lunch meetings worked well for gathering data for educators. The students enjoyed being interviewed with a large microphone to speak into. Conducting the student interviews during the day before the family night proved to be successful, as many of those students who interviewed during the day encouraged their families to come back that night for pizza and interviewing. The students were very proud to have taken part in the same type of interview as the adults. A Compressed data collection schedule was the preference of all 3 districts- i.e., completing all interviews in a few days. Due to the size of the REI research team, we have accommodated those requests. Interviews were scheduled and conducted virtually using Microsoft Teams at mutually agreed times for those unable to attend the already-scheduled events. Consent and documents were translated into Spanish and a school district interpreter joined us at the parent night (Community Learning Exchange). Participant incentives included gift card drawings, meals, and school supplies.

Data Collection Procedures

The REI team met regularly (as team leads and in whole group) to develop research propositions and coordinate the facilitation of the district data collection. An REI researcher was designated as a district/team lead and worked with the REI director to facilitate IRB, participant incentives, consents, and data collection. The REI district lead and REI Director facilitated meetings with the Superintendents first, then led 1.5 hour research design meeting with the district leaders appointed by the superintendent. Then the REI team leads coordinated data collection schedules with their district and brought in the rest of the REI research team to collect data. REI research team was trained on the materials and steps for data collection. Each site had 2 REI faculty leading data collection days while supported by 3-4 additional REI researchers to conduct focus group interviews, parent nights, etc. With a leadership team of two per district, it minimized the points of contact while providing backup, enabling us to nurture trust and build a relationship; this was especially important as we entered district buildings/communities to collect data. It was also important as the research team dealt with Covid exposures and navigating positive cases. All interviews and focus groups were either audio or video recorded and stored centrally on a shared server approved by ECU for storing such data.

Participants were keen to share their perceptions with us in fine detail regardless of whether the context was a focus group or an interview or the age group involved. For example, in response to a question about "what did you do on a usual day?" one earnest Grade 2 focus group participant began with "well, first I waited in our garage until I saw the bus coming" and then went on to provide a fine-grained portrait of a day in their life. Teachers in focus groups showed an awareness of how others at their site had implemented exemplary educational endeavors and prompted each other to share. Administrators discussed the intricacies of the factors they considered in inviting teachers to teach in the summer programs. Parents who were accompanied by their children in interviews sought clarification from those children—who were keen that their parent "got it right." Overall, participants showed a level of commitment and attention that led us to believe that our data were trustworthy. Table 3 provides an overview of data sources included in this study. Table 4 provides an overview of participants.

Table 3
Data Collection Methods By Case

	Cases (Counties)		
Types of Data Collection	Bertie	Lenoir	Tyrrell
Community learning exchanges	X	X	X
Demographic surveys	X	X	X
Focus groups	X	X	X
Photo-elicitation prompts	X		
Semi-structured qualitative interview	X	X	X

Table 4
Participation By Group

	Cases (Counties)		
Participant Type	Bertie	Lenoir	Tyrrell
Students		31	1
Parents/Families		11	7
Teachers	30	33	15
Administrators	3	7	4
Total	33	82	27
		142 Total Participants	

107 adult participants submitted a 30- item demographic survey when they were interviewed. It is important to note that while 107 participants submitted surveys, family members completed surveys for their minors who participated in summer learning programs. All

reported percentages are based on the number of participants that responded to the individual item on the survey. Ninety-five adult participants identified in what capacity they worked for the district, including four school administrators, 61 teachers, nine student caregivers, 15 teacher assistants, and six individuals who described their roles as "other" in the school. Twenty-five adults who were mostly parents (76%) also completed demographic surveys. Most adult participants were female (92.3%). Out of the 102 who indicated their marital status, 48 respondents were married, 18 were separated/divorced, 3 were widowed, 30 never married, and three were in cohabitation living arrangements. Most participants were born within the United States (88.6%) and six adult participants identified as Hispanic/Latino. Past high school, the average number of years of post-secondary education was approximately 8 years. Most adult participants were employed in jobs. The average number of adults in participants' households was 1.87, the average age of a child/student who participated in a summer learning program was 9.3, and the average number of additional children (under the age of 18) in the home was 0.74. Appendix C includes additional information on the demographic data collected.

Analysis

Of the five analytic techniques advocated by Yin (2018), our approach most closely conformed to the logic model in that we devised our questions in the expectation that if our research participants provided compelling evidence through their narrative responses that the many and complex components of an exemplary educational intervention were in place, then the summer program participants would demonstrate high levels of engagement (e.g., attendance, high levels of regard for the educational activities and positive feedback) as measured by enhanced educational and personal attainment and enthusiasm for future summer programs,

Using Nvivo 12 Pro software, three faculty affiliated with REI who had been involved in gathering the data used a shared a master project file curated by one of the three to deductively code one of the more comprehensive focus group recordings. Deductive coding was appropriate given that participants were responding to the same set of questions (appropriately tailored to the role and age-level of the participants). The three separate sets of codes and their descriptions were integrated after discussing and resolving any discrepancies. A fourth coder was provided with a copy of the resulting codebook and was given the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the definitions and seek clarification. Using the consensus codebook so developed, all four faculty

coded the individual data files assigned to them on a shared Excel spreadsheet. Using Nvivo 12 Pro software, the curator of the master program file produced a radial hierarchy graphic of the deductively coded files which they labelled to focus attention on the codes that the coders had assigned most frequently. The coders were then invited to volunteer to review the codes across the files to which they had assigned the codes and refine the code description in the light of particularly relevant phrases of sentences. By collectively reviewing the refined codes and the illustrative phrases and sentences, we developed cross-case themes.

Figure 2

Coding Frequency Hierarchy for Adult Participants

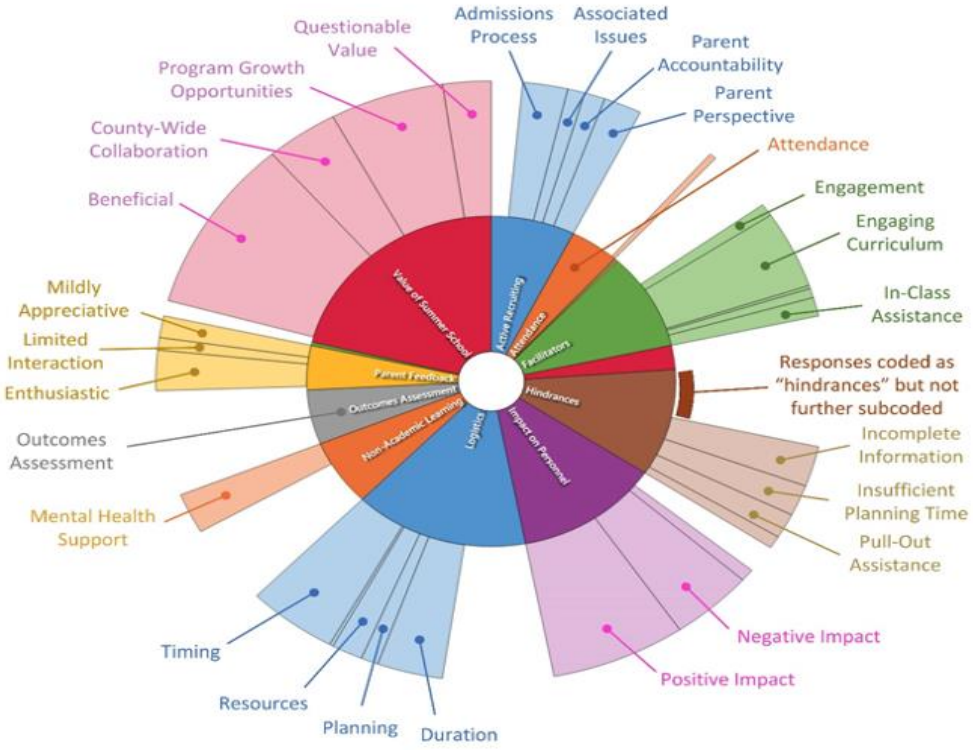
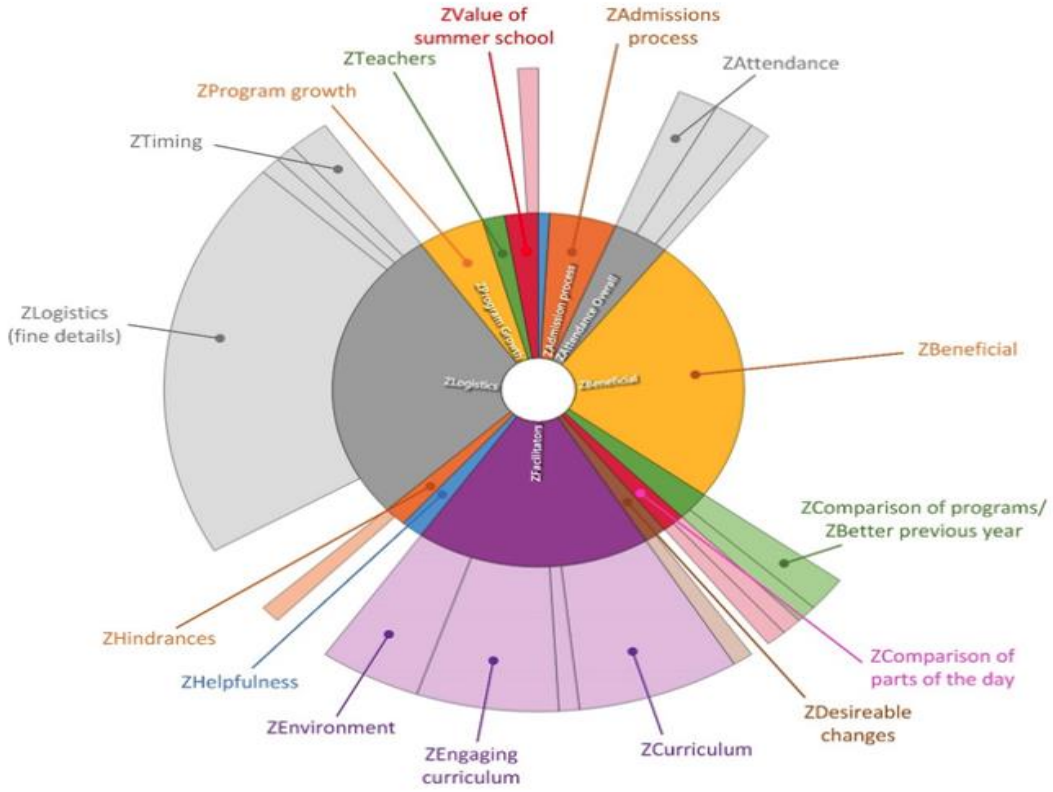


Figure 3

Coding Frequency Hierarchy for Student Participants



All coders periodically shared copies of their work-in-progress project file with the curator who imported their contributions into the project master file and subsequently shared updated copies with the other coders. After data gathering was completed, the curator shared copies of the complete master file with the other three coders and assumed the responsibility of distilling the data corpus and suggesting tentative findings for discussion by the research group. See Appendix D for adult coding schema and Appendix E for student coding schema. Aligned with Yin's 2018 tactics, we used multiple sources of evidence during data collection and provided a draft of the findings to specific district leaders to ensure construct validity (surveys, interviews, photos); we discussed rival explanations of findings and pinpointed patterns in data to ensure internal validity; we ensured external validity by selecting a conceptual framework to

situate the findings; and accounted for reliability by developing set protocols and maintaining a chain of evidence during the research process.

FINDINGS

Based on our exhaustive coding of the data, in this section, we present the results of our "themeing the data" (Saldaña, 2016, pp. 198). Saldaña (2016) contended that a theme is best conceived as an outcome of coding. Corbin and Strauss (2015) conceived of themes as the result of researchers' grouping concepts together of ideas that are conceptually similar in nature—the process that we initiated in refining our top-level codes and their related subcodes. Saldaña maintained that themes "elaborate on the researcher's interpretation of participants' meanings in . . . nuanced and/or complex ways" (p. 204). Hence, what follows represents our further distillation of the values that we discerned and the codes that we assigned to what we heard when we listened to our participants' voices. We identified five themes using a cross-case analysis approach that responded to the research question: To what extent does school extension programming in a rural context impact student learning and school engagement? We describe the findings and further explicate the meanings using direct quotes and photos from rural administrators, educators, families, and students in districts A, B, and C.

Theme One: Collaborative Planning

The importance of timely and collaborative planning and structuring of summer extension programs was a common finding across each rural district. For instance, respondents shared that recruiting staff to work in the summer programs along with proper compensation and supportive resources motivated them to engage in summer extension programs from year to year. Educators appreciated administrators who were transparent when discussing how much compensation would be available as well as the pay schedule. Respondents expressed that these open conversations are vital when some staff already face financial constraints and excessive workloads and must consider covering associated expenses such as transportation costs to commute to schools across respective rural and remote locations.

Exhibit 1

Administrator in District C

This summer programming we started maybe end of February, early March and for a while we were meeting bi-weekly and then coming back to the table and discussing what ideas we had. That is,

central office folk. So we had HR, we had finance involved, each of the school principals, school services director, and the transportation director. And, really, the transportation came in later just because we didn't know what students we would have.

It was very involved and a long process. One we got into late May/early June, we were meeting weekly just to finalize our plans and then we touched base a couple of times throughout the summer. But the planning for us was very involved.

I think this year, we did the best work we have in planning and that was just like better communication. So, I mentioned a moment ago how we had regular bi-weekly meetings and that really helped that process . . . otherwise, each school used to work in a silo and just worry about themselves—not look big-picture—so, that deliberate intention—bringing all the parties together—to talk it through as one group—really made it much more efficient and effective.

[Communication] is fundamental. You can't stress that enough. Just open dialogue, discussion . . . because, you know, everyone has their own perspective. . .School people are dreamers and finance people are number people, you know. It's very "by the book."

Accordingly, rural school personnel, families, and students valued the attention given to the structure of the summer extension programs such as having time for a 2-3 week breaks between the full year and the start of the programs, the duration of the summer extension programs, and how many days of the week, and the length of the instructional/school day. Educators and parents valued when school leaders considered their feedback in planning programs and resources. As an example, Grade 5 students in a focus group in District A valued the fact that the summer program allowed them Friday as a free day so they had 2 nights when they could stay up late and shared "*on Sunday, you have to go to sleep early because you have school on Monday.*" Similarly, a student lent support for concluding the summer program day at 1:00 p.m. stating if it went longer, "*my head hurts.*"

Educators across all districts also shared that there is value in being trained in the summer curriculum, having needed resources prepared before starting summer learning, and assessing students' learning needs beforehand, as planning time is condensed in the summer months.

Exhibit 2

Teacher in District A

When we come in, those first few days, we're always missing a lot of information that we need. We need to be able to start on Day 1 knowing what levels these kids are at—you know, what groups they're going to be in—and it always takes pretty much that whole first week to assess and figure out if the level we were given is a good level for that child and then form groups from there.

Theme Two: Intentional Engagement and Flexibility

Educator, family, and student respondents noted value in the "engagement" and "flexibility" of summer extension programs. Educators shared that the smaller class sizes allowed them to identify students' needs that may be overlooked in the full year, such as when a child is not learning on grade level. The sense was that the depth of student engagement during the school year was impacted by the necessity of teaching on grade level and lock-step curriculums; contrastingly, the summer period provided more flexibility.

Exhibit 3

Teachers in District A, C

This is an opportunity we don't have [during the school year] to teach them wherever they are. I was an instructional coach. And it was more about me pulling smaller groups of students to work with, especially third grade. And we looked at the fourth graders who had the reading retained label. So if they, yeah, if they had not gotten rid of that label and they were in fourth grade we were, we looked at pulling them as well. We tried to do some second grade. It was a little more difficult with second grade. But trying to pull some second to give them a head start for the next year- District A I like the flexibility that we had compared to last year. Last year, we had to use this resource, and then this year, it was a little bit more, more in terms of... I'm looking for the word, searching for the word. It was more, the resource that it was sort of intentional. It was more helpful than what we had last year, it catered to different level than the one last year that we had was just this week, and we were able to... We were given the autonomy to use other resources that we saw fit- District C.

Educators shared that they were motivated to teach in the summer program because they could incorporate more creative components into the curriculum, which motivated students and increased their attendance. For example, District C staff created themes [Summer Jam & Camp Lit] for their summer programs, incorporating. District C staff also created themes [Summer Jam & Camp Lit] for their summer programs which incorporated music and movement into the core subjects for grades K-5. An educator explained how this benefited engagement and a photo from the classroom.

Exhibit 4

Teachers in District C

We planned a theme for the summer learning program that help kids and parents become and stay engaged. Kids in upper elementary made the projects during the summer learning program. Kindergarten camp teachers and kids judged the contest to determine who had the best music decoration for the summer camp. Kindle Music is what the kids did on our level. It was part of the

theme “Summer Jam.” This was something kids and staff thought of for engagement and motivation to attend summer learning program in 2022.



I liked the fact that we... I mean, you had the leeway as a teacher to kind of go out loud as much as you wanted to as far as decorating your room and that kind of thing, and making it... The point was to make it fun for summer. So we were at camp. So putting things up like tents and just decorating the hallway like a camp scene, kind of thing. Those kinds of things I think made a big difference.

District C educator participants also shared examples of intentionally integrating components of socio-emotional learning, relationship building, and communication skills into daily activities to engage with students. For example, a teacher noted:

Exhibit 5

Teacher in District C

It [Camp Lit] wasn't just about the academic part. . . We had morning meetings as you circled up as part of the routine of the camp . . . you had some discussion about things. And I think that too helps you build that relationship with the kids as well . . . That was some SEL pieces as well, not just academics.

Overall, the themes collaborative planning and intentional engagement and flexibility captured findings that demonstrated the importance of collective preparation and ways to creatively engage staff and students in the design and delivery of summer extension programs in rural districts.

Theme Three: Educator, Parent, and Student Enthusiasm for Learning

All three districts each had one central site (within each district) for summer extension programs. That meant for two of the districts, students, and staff commuted to a central school

location to engage in the programs. This called for families and school administrators to work through transportation logistics, as a school staff member noted:

Exhibit 6

Administrator in District C

Transportation is always an issue as of late. Bus drivers are always an issue, of course. [In terms of transport] we consolidated some routes and some drivers drove double routes.

Despite the transportation hurdles, respondents reported numerous benefits from county-wide collaborations in the delivery of summer extension programs. Educator respondents expressed enthusiasm and advancement in their own learning by working along with other school personnel in different grade levels, subject areas, and from other district schools. In focus groups, the participants refined each other's responses to the prompts and exhibited detailed knowledge of each other's creativity, teaching styles, and practices.

Exhibit 7

Teachers in District C

[Their] room was phenomenal. [They] transformed it. Oh my God! . . . It pumped me up and got me thinking. [It was] helpful having a shared curriculum across the county and experience implementing it. I think that because everybody centers around one thing, I really think that it brings everybody together. Whereas you normally, like the middle school teachers wouldn't ordinarily see the elementary teachers and that kind of thing. It united everybody under that common thing. So everybody was lit for learning during that summer. And then last summer everybody was jamming. So you had heard the music and *everybody* was dancing and that kind of stuff. I think that that was a positive thing. It helps by bringing it all together one place. You get to see people that you, even in your own building as a middle school teacher, I didn't always see everybody every day. So it put me with people that I didn't normally work with. And I did get to learn some other people. And I think that's what happens even on the elementary level. All the teachers aren't from the same school. They have a chance to work with each other and talk about things, do things together. As an instructional coach, I know that there is some people that I can call on right now to help different teachers here with certain things and it'll be received well, it wouldn't... "So there's a fifth grade teacher in particular that really does well with science. So I'm getting ready to call her school and say, "Look, can we set up something?

Additionally, respondents shared that summer learning and extension programs seemed more relaxed and less rigid, prompting less anxiety for all educators, students, and families. This was shared across districts.

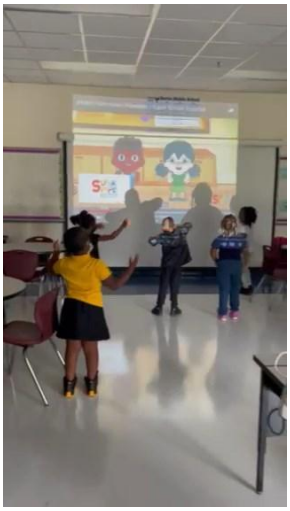
Exhibit 8
Teacher in District C

We really waited for summer. They like to come to the summer camp. They don't feel it is heavy. They are enjoying it. I'm so happy. Others say enjoy your summer. This is my way of enjoying. . . . I love the kids and I enjoy them singing and dancing with them. Spanish is my native language and I love teaching Spanish to these kids. It's like working but not working. . . . Some waiting for summer to be out but I'm always waiting for summer to be with the kids.

This respondent provided a photo of engaged in learning in classroom accompanied by the following statement in Exhibit 8:

Exhibit 9
Teacher in District C

After teaching the kinder kids the greetings in Spanish I played this video "Hola" to reinforce their learning based on their main different learning styles: kinesthetic, visual and auditory. After this I will use this song everyday to start my class every morning.



Student respondents enthusiastically declared that they enjoyed the summer program:

Exhibit 10
Students in Districts A and B

"loved the teacher," but regretted that "I can't even remember, like, EVERYTHING!" District B

its just a great place. period. Its learning what will help you. District A

Theme Four: Academic and Non-Academic Student Outcomes

Respondents reported many academic and non-academic student outcomes regarding the summer extension programs in rural contexts. There were reports that attested to increases in students' reading levels and overall academic confidence due to their participation. Additionally, school personnel and parent respondents reported varied non-academic outcomes related to students' participation. The quotes below provide descriptions to capture the reported outcomes.

Exhibit 11

Teacher in District C

They were excited about voting for, like, this is the best book and this is why. And being able to do that on . . . each book had a different characteristic that they were talking about whether it's hope or friendship. And so that allowed us to do some SEL [social emotional learning] too and some character building.

And so, all these different components were brought in that we don't always have the time to do daily during the regular school year. Not that we don't do them, but daily.

And I was going to speak on the data piece. You know you were talking about how do you know that there was a value added for learning and all that.

Our iReady data across the board showed that there was a lot of growth. I mean you had students across the board that were growing a year's growth or more. . . .

We had students that passed RtA.

We had that data to backup as well as the experience. So, them experiencing all the different things and [being] allowed to be students at times and learn different things but then also learn academically as well. I think all of that supported them to be able to show growth.

Parents expressed awareness of the impact of the summer program on their children. Some of them were forthright in their praise of the teachers' efforts. Some exuberantly expressed their appreciation regardless of the context, as illustrated in Exhibit 11.

Exhibit 12

Teacher in District A

I had a student I knew prior to [the summer program] and [they] passed RtA this summer.

And, [their] mom saw me in the store and she said "Do you know my baby passed that test?" And she was so excited. She was so excited: "DO YOU KNOW MY BABY PASSED THAT TEST?

An elementary student in District A provided the following statement: ***"****I'm already smart but summer helped me pay attention and listen."* Parents also ascribed academic and nonacademic value to summer extension programs.

Exhibit 13

Families in District B

I too felt like it that it may benefit [them] to help keep [them] . . . instead of regressing over the summer . . . and not reading and not doing things in a structured manner. . . . And obviously it did.

Opportunity for them to stay in the books" and ventured "it's always good to have a refresher.

The extra help from the summer learning program also helped with that type of situation because you want the best for your child.

Respondents also reported the value of having mental health support incorporated into the summer program which led to fewer classroom disruptions during already constrained time. Respondents noted that summer programming is an opportune time to provide intensive mental and behavioral health services or socioemotional support that may aid student success during the full school year.

Theme Five: Areas for Improvement

Respondents noted several ways that summer extension programs could improve to better serve students living in rural locales. Key areas reported were logistical challenges related to orchestrating programs (e.g., insufficient planning time); staff shortages; less resources for learning material; fluctuating student attendance; and less engaging curricula for middle and high school level students. Some school personnel reported that the shortened days led to not having enough time for lesson planning. Furthermore, some educators attributed frustration to administrators not properly assessing students' learning needs and not accounting for staff shortages before the start of summer programs.

Exhibit 14

Administrator in District C

That was the reason that second through fifth grade didn't receive any of their training materials or resource or anything like that on the first day.

Some educators felt the summer curriculum was less engaging for middle and high school level students, which negatively impacted their interest and motivation to attend. There was mixed feedback regarding pull-out assistance for specialist services (such as speech and occupational therapy). In contrast, some educators and parents reported that this was helpful as it allowed the students to receive necessary services on an individual basis.

Exhibit 15
Administrator in District A

Students were pulled for EC or whatever and [they] wanted to have all of their students benefit [from the small group work]. [student] would miss so much of what [student's] actual teacher was teaching and [student's] going to be tested on.

DISCUSSION

In rural areas that experience persistent poverty, it is ideal to work collaboratively with school staff, families, and communities to design and deliver efficient summer extension programs. Participants from each district reported ways that summer extension programs could continuously improve to fit rural contexts and attend to students' learning needs. Our findings indicated that collaborative planning and intentional engagement can either motivate or demotivate staff and students to participate in these programs within rural contexts. It is essential that school leaders gather feedback from previous summers, plan strategies to recruit staff and students, and explore creative and engaged curricula that will capture the needs of diverse students across each level (Pk-12). We offer these key considerations for summer programming in rural districts.

Keep learning fun and engaging. Teachers who were directly involved in the planning process for summer learning program curricula believed that engagement was a major factor in the program's effectiveness. It was recommended to incorporate the following: project-based learning, small groups, socio-emotional learning, recess, field trips, art, and music. Offering open enrollment was suggested. Additionally, including exceptional children's populations was highly

recommended by EC teachers and families. This becomes significant in terms of exceptional students educated in rural classrooms to address the well-documented and long-researched barriers to providing high-quality education services like lack of programming and limited resources to implement the best practices established within the special education field (i.e., inclusive practices; Berry et al., 2011; Howley et al., 2011; Mason-Williams et al., 2020).

Center community engagement/connectedness. Summer extension programs serve multiple purposes in rural, high poverty areas that have fewer supplemental educational resources. Rural communities often have fewer options for summer camps or other enrichment or recreational opportunities (see example at https://rural.vt.edu/see-vt/). Parents and families perceived the summer learning programs as a resource to engage students in enrichment experiences over the summer months. Rural schools are often deemed as places of trust in which youth can receive oversight when parents are at work. This was an expressed need in this study, and there were community and civic organizations that readily partnered with schools to offer learning and engagement opportunities for students via field trips or school visits such as dental education awareness days. The rural school is a hub for community-engaged support of students and families (Mann, 2021). Rural education leaders should identify, leverage, and allocate supports and resources, including those within their immediate communities, to meet the needs of their staff and students (Henry, 2019).

Increase financial supports for positions, salaries, resource development. Many participants noted that county financial and human resources were stretched which impacted their ability to provide the optimal summer learning experience for their students. Staff shortages in rural areas is an ongoing concern and even more poignant during summer periods. This also shows the vitality of addressing factors that lead to staff burnout to improve rural educators' retention (Davis et al., 2023). Discussing details such as pay, host school location, transportation, and access to academic and non-academic resources is vital. Regarding pullout assistance, rural administrators could explore alternative approaches that would keep specific kids in the classroom to avoid losing time covering core subjects and reduce class disruptions.

Coordinate cross-county collaboration for small counties. County-wide collaborations can benefit the professional development of teachers in several ways via exposure to varied teaching methods which could include culturally responsive practices, securing additional classroom/learning material and resources, as well as adding to the human capital in historically under-resourced districts with the unified goal to improve rural students' educational outcomes.

Provide opportunity for educator input in curriculum development and instructional decisions. Teachers who were given flexibility to alter summer learning program curricula believed that autonomy improved their summer learning program effectiveness. Additionally, administrators and teachers involved in the planning process spoke to the positive impact.

Protect planning time and shortened day. While students overwhelmingly preferred the shorter days in the summer learning program (i.e., this past summer versus the year prior), many students reported that not going on field trips (due to the shortened day) as the aspect of the summer learning program missing from this past summer.

Offer continual opportunities for input sessions from students and families. Reports of enthusiasm from students, families, and teachers regarding the impact of the summer extension program were documented and provided insight on ways these programs impact rural districts. A recommendation is to hold community learning exchanges which provides students, families, and school personnel the opportunity to share input on the design and delivery of summer programs based on a place-based education approach which connects classrooms and communities and centers the rural learner (Guajardo et al., 2015).

Delimitations

We (the research team) aspired to synthesize key findings regarding the impact of summer extension programs in three rural districts. However, it is important to acknowledge that although these districts may have geographic or demographic similarities, they have idiosyncratic experiences that also influence the impact of summer extension programs. This information was captured in the findings and the implications and discussion of future practice.

CONCLUSION

So, it was kinda like putting vegetables in pasta—it was beneficial.
—Parent description of the benefit of summer programming for their child.

This qualitative study sought to center and elevate voices of rural teachers, administrators, students, and families in relation to the impact of summer extension programs instituted in academic years 2021 and 2022. The findings from this study indicated that summer extension programs in rural districts have significant academic and nonacademic outcomes. During the time of implementation for the years assessed, they provided opportunities for students to recover credits and make up "learning loss" due to being out of formal learning environments. Furthermore, these programs contributed to the professional development of rural school personnel in remote and isolated rural locations by allowing them to build relationships and observe innovative teaching styles and practices from their peers across county schools. These findings can inform policy and the allocation of fiscal resources to rural districts to continuously improve summer extension programs. The findings signify that attention should be given to the overall summer program structure within rural contexts, including student and staff recruitment, engaged curricula across Pk-12 levels, and involvement of community stakeholders and organizations for supplemental learning experiences (e.g., field trips).

As we strive for continuous improvement of education outcomes in rural districts, collaborative and intentional planning is necessary to prevent burnout of rural school staff who are already stretched for time and resources during the full academic year. The constructs of rural resourcefulness, ingenuity, and community unity (Crumb et al., 2022) were apparent in the participants' reports of the varied strategies they used as a collaborative approach to design and deliver summer learning programs in rural, economically disadvantaged communities. Rural school personnel and families aimed to meet students' learning needs even when faced with human and material resource constraints. It is our hope that this report will demonstrate the adaptive strategies of rural students, families, and school personnel and educate those who consider themselves partners with rural communities to further strategize ways to create educational equity to ensure the academic and personal development of rural students.

We end with appreciation and recognition of our three school district partners: Bertie, Lenoir, and Tyrrell. Amid navigating learning post-Covid, weather-related stoppages (i.e. hurricanes, floods, and power outages), and national school shootings, our partners planned,

rescheduled, and planned again ways in which we could maximize data collection. We are appreciative of their tenacity, grace, and invitation to hear perspectives in each of their districts.

REFERENCES

Anthony-Stevens, V. (2018). Intersectional marginalities in rural teacher preparation: Teaching beyond "what I am able to see visibly". In A. E. Kersten (Ed.). *Teaching Economic Inequality and Capitalism in Contemporary America* (pp. 199-211). Springer.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th Edition). SAGE.

Berry, A. B., Petrin, R. A., Gravelle, M. L., & Farmer, T. W. (2011). Issues in special education teacher recruitment, retention, and professional development: Considerations in supporting rural teachers. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 30*(4), 3–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/875687051103000402

Biddle, C. & Azano, A.P. (2016), "Constructing and reconstructing the 'rural school problem': a century of rurality and rural education research", *Review of Research in Education*, (*40*)1, 298-325.

Crumb, L., Chambers, C., Azano, A., Hands, A., Cuthrell, K. & Avent, M. (2022) Rural cultural wealth: Dismantling deficit ideologies of rurality, *Journal of Multicultural Education*, https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-06-2022-0076

Crumb, L., Haskins, N.H., & Brown, S. (2019). Integrating social justice advocacy into mental health counseling in rural, impoverished American communities. *The Professional Counselor, (9)*1, 20-34. https://doi:10.15241/lc.9.1.20

Coburn, C. E., & Penuel, W. R. (2016). Research-practice partnerships in education: Outcomes, dynamics, and open questions. *Educational Researcher*, *45*(1), 48-54. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X16631750

Davis, L., Aylward, A., Scott, B. G., & Jacobs, J. (2023). "Following the breath": A trauma-informed intervention for educator wellness in rural Montana. *Education Sciences*, *13*(1), 23. doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13010023

Gay, G. (2006). Connections between classroom management and culturally responsive teaching. In C. Evertson & C. Weinstein (Eds.). *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice and contemporary issues* (pp. 343-370). Lawrence Earlbaum.

Geverdt, D. (2019). *Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates Program (EDGE): Locale Boundaries File Documentation*, 2017 (NCES 2018-115). U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch

Greenberg, S. & Ash, J. (2012). *Children with challenging behaviors: 2012 Follow-up survey of Boulder County early care and education providers*. Mental Health Partners.

Guajardo, M. A., Guajardo, F., Janson, C., & Militello, M. (2015). *Reframing community partnerships in education: Uniting the power of place and wisdom of people*. Routledge.

Henry, W. (2019). Identifying and Allocating Resources for Learning Improvement: A Study of Sustainably Improving Rural Schools. *Theory & Practice in Rural Education, 9*(1), 61–73. https://doi.org/10.3776/tpre.2019.v9n1p61-73

Howley, A., Wood, L., & Hough, B. (2011). Rural elementary school teachers' technology integration. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 26*(9). 1-13.

Mann, O. Y., Novey, D., & East Carolina University. Department of Educational Leadership (2021). *How we did it: Academic, financial, and community aspects of rural school district consolidation*. East Carolina University.

Mason-Williams, L., Bettini, E., Peyton, D., Harvey, A., Rosenberg, M., & Sindelar, P. T. (2020). Rethinking shortages in special education: Making good on the promise of an equal opportunity for students with disabilities. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, *43*(1), 45-62. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0888406419880352

McLaughlin, D., Shoff, C., & Demi, M. (2014). *Influence of perceptions of current and future community on residential aspirations of rural youth. Rural Sociology*, *79*(4), 453-477. NC Rural Center (2021). A message from Patrick about the 2020 Census. https://www.ncruralcenter.org/2021/11/a-message-from-patrick-about-the-2020-census/

National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *Common Core Data*. https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/

National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). *Common Core Data*. https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2022a). Headcount of English Learners. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eEyAtxCbIgiTDOTK9Q5M05s45xIqkO-e/view

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2022b). *NC School Report Cards*. https://ncreports.ondemand.sas.com/src/

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2022c). *Statistical Profiles*. http://apps.schools.nc.gov/ords/f?p=145:21:::NO:::

Public School Forum of North Carolina. (2020). *2020 Roadmap of need*. https://www.ncforum.org/report-highlights-where-young-people-face-the-greatestobstacles-to- success-in-north-carolina/

SAIPE (2020). SAIPE School District Estimates for 2020. https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2020/demo/saipe/2020-school-districts.html

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (Third Edition). SAGE.

Sipe, L. R., & Ghiso, M. P. (2004). Developing conceptual categories in classroom descriptive research: Some problems and possibilities. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 35*(4), 472-485.

Showalter, D., Hartman, S. L., Johnson, J., & Klein, R. (2019). *Why rural matters 2018-2019: The time is now*. A Report of the Rural School and Community Trust. https://www.ruraledu.org/WhyRuralMatters.pdf

Stephens, J. T. (2019). Teaching critically where rural and nonrural cultures intersect. *American Educational Research Journal, 56*(6), 2043–2076. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831219839311

Weinstein, C. S., Tomlinson-Clarke, S., & Curran, M. (2004). Toward a conception of culturally responsive classroom management. *Journal of Teacher Education, 55*(1), 25-38.

Wenger, K. J., & Dinsmore, J. (2005). Preparing rural preservice teachers for diversity. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 20*(10), 1-15.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (Sixth Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research and applications*: *Design and methods* (Fifth Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Young, T. & Chambers, C. (2020). The culturally relevant classroom management (CRCM) competence of novice teachers. In C. Chambers & L. Crumb (Eds.). *African American Rural Education: Postsecondary pathways and experiences*. Emerald Press.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Elevating Rural Voices: Learning Through a Pandemic
Study Overview Protocol

Research Aims and Questions

Researchers affiliated with the Rural Education Institute (REI) at ECU will collaborate with North Carolina Region 1 and 2 school districts to identify the impact, if any, of a Summer Learning Program (during the COVID-19 pandemic) on members' (teachers, school, parents, students and/or community) perceptions, engagement, and lived experiences. The conceptual model for our study is developed from two frameworks: (1) critical race theory and (2) rural cultural wealth. Our study is grounded in the acknowledgement of the ways that race and racism have impacted educational access, funding, and curriculum for children of color, and therefore, focused on elevating the voices of those in the districts, including children and families, is important to understanding the impact of state and federal summer funding (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Furthermore, we would like to explore the extent to which an asset-focused summer learning model was used through rural cultural wealth areas of inquiry (Planning, Site Climate, Student Recruitment, Academics and Enrichment, and Staffing). Our framework will guide the grounding of this study including protocol and proposition development, research questions, study protocol, data collection, and analysis.

This collaborative arrangement is based on the research practitioner partnership model (Coburn & Penuel, 2016) and, in practical terms, REI researchers will engage in participatory action research (PAR, Kemmis et. al., 2017; MacDonald, 2012) with the appropriate educational leaders. The overarching research question is:

1) To what extent does school extension programming in a rural context impact student learning, and school engagement?

A) From the students' perspective?

B) From the families' perspective?

C) From the educators' perspective?

D) From the administrators' perspective?

Research Design

Case study methodology utilizing semi-structured qualitative interviewing and photo-elicitation will be used in this study. Semi- structured interviews (60-90 minutes) will be used for data collection and conducted virtually, in person, or via phone. Following the qualitative interviews, the researcher will ask participants to take 1-3 photos that they feel best capture their experiences in summer learning programs. Photo-elicitation will allow researchers to dive deeper into participants' experiences by connecting visual images to their qualitative interviews. Participants will be given the option to choose to use their personal camera, cell phone/tablet camera or any camera of their choosing) or a camera can be provided for them upon request.

Photos will need to be brought to the interview or they may email the photos to the researchers and they will print them. Photographs should not include images of other people. The qualitative interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Research Participants

We seek to identify 250 participants (school administrators, teachers, families, and students) to participate in the study. These participants will be in the partnering school districts and will share their experiences related to summer learning programs during 2021 and 2022.

Study Duration and Analysis

The study will begin in June 2022. All data analysis will be completed by February 2023.

Potential benefits

There may be no personal benefit from participation but at little risk to themselves, the information gained by doing this research may help school districts in future summer learning program development. Researchers, in agreement with district partners, may elect to provide participant incentives in the form of a gift card, meal, and/or school supplies. These would be secured and distributed by the REI research team.

Potential harm

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. Data will be collected by trained researchers.

Seeking Consent

The consent process will take place in collaboration with school leaders and the researchers. These professionals will reach out to recommended participants in order to complete the consent form. This will be done with the district partners. A demographic questionnaire will be provided after the informed consent to gather participant demographics. The researchers involved in the focus groups/interviews will use the focus group protocol provided. Each will also remind participants of the consent process and indicate that participants may stop participating at any time they wish to do so. Recognizable data will be coded and stored in a separate electronic file. Electronic files will be stored on a removable drive that will be locked in a cabinet in the researcher's office. Paper copies of data will be also be stored in the locked cabinet.

Appendix B

Focus group interview questions for Families
Semi-structured interview questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I will ask you a series of questions regarding your experiences related to your school's summer learning program. Please do not state any person's name in your responses. I may use probing questions such as "can you give me an example, tell me more, what was that like for you" for clarification purposes.

All information discussed in the interview is kept confidential. I anticipate that the interview will last approximately 60 minutes. I will audio record our interview and write notes in my field notebook. At any time, you may decline to answer a question, choose to end the interview, or withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

11. What were the arrangements for summer learning programs in the district this year? How were you involved?
- Probe- Structure, resources, attendance, expectations

2. Why did you choose to send your child to the summer learning program this year?
3. How do you feel this summer learning opportunity will help your child(ren)?
- Probe-post-pandemic; COVID

4. Have you noticed any changes related to your child(ren)'s academics or behavior from their involvement in the summer learning programs this year?
- Probe- why or why not?

5. Is there any additional feedback you would like to provide our team about your experience with summer learning programs in the district this year?

Appendix C

Focus group interview questions for Students
Semi-structured interview questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I will ask you a series of questions regarding your experiences related to your school's summer learning program. Please do not state any person's name in your responses. I may use probing questions such as "can you give me an example, tell me more, what was that like for you" for clarification purposes.

All information discussed in the interview is kept confidential. I anticipate that the interview will last approximately 60 minutes. I will audio record our interview and write notes in my field notebook. At any time, you may decline to answer a question, choose to end the interview, or withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

12. First, tell us a little about what a typical day looked like for you in the summer learning program this year?
- Probe- Structure, resources, attendance, expectations

2. Why did you attend the summer learning program this year?
3. What parts of this year's summer learning program did you enjoy?
4. What parts of this year's summer learning program would you change?
5. How do you feel this year's summer learning program will help you?
- Probe-post-pandemic; COVID

6. Have you noticed any changes related to your academics or behavior from your involvement in the summer learning programs this year?
- Probe- why or why not?

7. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience with summer learning programs in the district this year?

Appendix C

Focus group interview questions for Teachers
Semi-structured interview questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I will ask you a series of questions regarding your experiences related to your school's summer learning program. Please do not state any person's name in your responses. I may use probing questions such as "can you give me an example, tell me more, what was that like for you" for clarification purposes.

All information discussed in the interview is kept confidential. I anticipate that the interview will last approximately 60 minutes. I will audio record our interview and write notes in my field notebook. At any time, you may decline to answer a question, choose to end the interview, or withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

13. What were the arrangements for summer learning programs in the district this year? How were you involved?
- Probe- Structure, resources, attendance, expectations

2. Why did you choose to teach in the summer learning program this year?
3. Next, please think back on any factors either helped or hindered the planning or implementation of your summer program this year.
- What were the biggest challenges you faced this year?
- How did you address them?
- What resources, supports, or policies are critical for successful implementation of summer learning programs?

4. Overall, how successful do you feel this year's summer learning program was in helping students recover academically and why?
- What factors contributed to students' academic success?
- How can summer learning programs better support elementary students in math and reading?
- How was the impact on student learning of this year's summer learning programs measured?

5. Beyond supporting students academically, did your summer learning programs intentionally address any non-academic goals for students?
- [IF RESPONSE IS YES]
- Please describe.
- How successful do you think your program was in meeting those goals?
- What factors helped or hindered those non-academic goals?
    - [IF RESPONSE IS NO]
- Even though you did not specifically include any non-academic goals for students, how do you think programs may have supported students?
    - [PROMPTS IF NEEDED]
    - Interpersonal skills?
    - Self-management skills?
    - Home-school partnerships?

6. How did this year's summer learning programs impact school personnel, either in a positive or negative way?

[PROMPTS IF NEEDED…]

- Staff relationships?
- Job satisfaction ?

7. How did the summer learning programs impact parents or primary caregivers, either in a positive or negative way?

8. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience in summer learning programs in the district this year?

Appendix D

Interview questions for Administrators
Semi-structured interview questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I will ask you a series of questions regarding your experiences related to your school's summer learning program. Please do not state any person's name in your responses. I may use probing questions such as "can you give me an example, tell me more, what was that like for you" for clarification purposes.

All information discussed in the interview is kept confidential. I anticipate that the interview will last approximately 60 minutes. I will audio record our interview and write notes in my field notebook. At any time, you may decline to answer a question, choose to end the interview, or withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

14. What were the arrangements for summer learning in the district this year? How were you involved?
- Probe- Structure, resources, attendance, expectations

15. Please think back on any factors helping or hindering the planning or implementation of your summer learning program this year.
- What were the biggest challenges you faced?
    - How did you address them?
- What resources, supports, or policies are critical for successful implementation of summer learning programs?

16. How were decisions about the components that would be included in programs made?
- How much flexibility or autonomy did sites have?
- What district-level guidance was provided to sites?

17. Overall, how successful do you feel your summer learning program was in helping students recover academically and why? [post-pandemic; COVID]?
- What factors contributed to students' academic success?
- How can these summer learning programs better support elementary students in math and reading?
- How was the impact of summer learning programs on student learning measured?

18. Beyond supporting students academically, did your summer learning programs intentionally address any non-academic goals for students?
- [IF RESPONSE IS YES]
- Please describe.
- How successful do you think your summer learning programs werein meeting those goals?
- What factors helped or hindered these non-academic goals?
    - [IF RESPONSE IS NO]
- Even though you did not explicitly include any non-academic goals for students, how do you think programs may have supported students?
    - [PROMPTS IF NEEDED]
    - Interpersonal skills?

- Self-management skills?
- Home-school partnerships?

6. How did this year's summer learning programs impact school personnel, either in positive or negative ways?

[PROMPTS IF NEEDED…]

- Staff relationships?
- Job satisfaction?

7. How did the summer learning programs impact parents or primary caregivers, either in positive or negative ways?

8. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience in summer learning programs in the district this year?

Appendix E

Photo-elicitation Directions

Thank you for participating in our research project. To complete this portion of your participation, you will take 1-3 photographs that reflect your experiences in your districts summer learning program using your own phone camera or digital camera or you may choose to have one provided to you. If you need a digital camera, we will meet at an arranged time for you to receive and return the camera to me. Please use the instructions provided below to assist you with this part of the research study.

You can take pictures of anything you feel is appropriate to meet the below instructions. However, because of confidentiality, you CANNOT take pictures of other people. In addition, for publication purposes please do not use stock photos pulled from the internet these should be photographs that you have personally taken.

If you have a problem with the digital camera provided, please let us know as soon as possible. We will provide you with a new one.

Photograph Instructions

- Take 1-3 photographs that reflect your experiences in the summer learning program.
- Title the photograph(s)
- Provide me with hard or digital copies prior to the interview.

Once you have taken all these photographs, e-mail the photographs to me directly. You also have the options of meeting me in person or emailing them directly to me.
Please let me know if you would like to send your photos through any other medium than e-mail. If you use the digital camera provided from me, please keep it in a safe location and ensure a timely return.

Appendix F

Demographic Information

Table 1

Demographic Information for Adult Participants

Demographics	n	%
Gender		
Male	8	7.7
Female	97	92.3
Familial Role (Non-educators)		
Parent	19	76
Guardian	2	8
Grandparent	4	16
Other Relative	0	
Country of Origin		
USA	93	88.6
Other	12	11.4
Race		
African American/Black	50	49.5
American Indian/Alaska Native	1	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	2
White/Caucasian	43	42.6
Other	5	4.9
Employment		
Full-time	93	89.4
Part-time	2	2
Temporarily laid off	2	2
Retired	5	4.8
Student	1	.9
Disabled Veteran	1	.9
Income		
$4,999 or less	1	4.8
$5,000-14,999	2	9.5
$15,000-24,999	1	4.8
$25,000-39,999	4	19
$40,000 or more	11	52.4
I don’t know	2	9.5

Appendix G

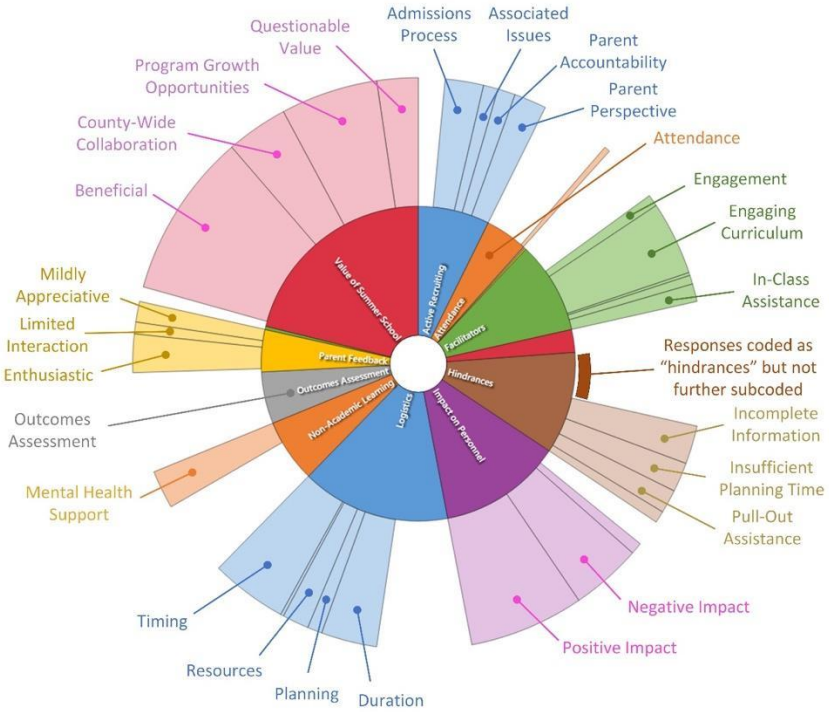
Adult Coding Schema

The frequency with which we discerned and coded the values described in the code book indicates the participants' main collective perspective. Figure 1 is a graphic presentation of the code frequency hierarchy for the adult respondents in which the size of the sectors represents the frequency with which we assigned a particular code.

In reading Figure 1, please note that the inner circle is subdivided by radii into sectors that correspond to the top-level codes in the two code books (see Appendix D and E) which, in turn, largely correspond to the prompts to which we invited participants to respond. The angle measure of each sector corresponds to the relative frequency with which we assigned codes to data points. The angle measure of the partial radial subdivisions of the surrounding annulus represent the frequency with which we assigned the various subcodes within each top-level code to data points. The labels identify the codes/subcodes that we identified sufficiently frequently (in general, the aggregation of coding from more than one file or the coding of multiple data points in one file) to warrant our provision of a brief synthesis of what we heard from the voices of our participants as they told us what they valued—proceeding clockwise from the 1-o'clock position (Active Recruiting).

Figure 1

Coding Frequency Hierarchy for Adult Participants



Active Recruiting. Each of the participating school districts initiated some form of active recruiting. We heard of teachers who recommended to individual parents of students in their classes that their child should attend and administrators who initiated school-wide outreach to parents based on guidelines related to academic criteria. For example, the teachers in District A

explained that they were told that "you get as many as you can" and that, even after the initial contact:

We continued and called on our first workday for summer school—we called the parents that we had placed on a list and that list led us to call them a second time and then make sure that they were coming and tell them the details.

Admissions Process. Each of the participating districts implemented an admission process that was tailored to their context. In essence, the enrollment process cast a wide net and prioritized the attendance of those students arguably likely to benefit most from their attendance. As an administrator in District C explained, iReady, EVASS, and EOG data were often utilized. Students whose parents were keen for them to attend—based on their child's wish to attend—were considered for admission if there was sufficient capacity.

Associated Issues. The result of casting a wide net was that organizers were faced with issues related to transport capacity and staffing. However, these were portrayed as issues that the organizers were quite ready to deal with because they valued the broadening of the opportunity to learn.

I had 27 (Grade 1) students on the roster and 24 or 25 of them showed up every single day, 5 days a week. . . . [Administrator] made sure I had a full-time teacher assistant. [I] had to do the assessment piece but they worked with a small group and I worked with a small group and some kids were working independently. (District A teacher)

Parent Accountability. Parents were made aware that they were accountability for making it feasible for their child to attend the summer program each day. This was expectation was made clear "up front" to set the ground rules. We did not sense that the parents were lackadaisical in their adherence to this expectation, as the District A teachers observed:

They were worried about accountability, I think. They were worried about if I don't send 'em, and this was their opportunity to catch up, it's going to . . . they were worried about how it would affect them as a parent.

Parent Perspective. Parents readily ascribed value to the summer program. For example, one District B parent, agreeing with a previous speaker, asserted that, "I too felt like it that it may benefit [them] to help keep [them] . . . instead of regressing over the summer . . . and not reading and not doing things in a structured manner. . . . And obviously it did."

Declaring their agreement, a third parent highlighted the value of the "opportunity for them to stay in the books" and ventured "it's always good to have a refresher." Another parent reflected on how the prolonged inability of their child to attend in-person schooling impacted their learning and was appreciative of the fact that "the extra help from the summer learning program also helped with that type of situation because you want the best for your child."

A teacher in District C offered a different perspective regarding their child who was "a high-flier." They went on:

I was like what can I do to get my baby in because it was enrichment for [them] and I didn't want [them] to just sit. So, I had to get permission. And I'm like 'Why only 4 days?' . . . A lot of times those kids who are high-fliers, they're kind of overlooked.

Attendance. As shown in Figure 1, this top-level code contained no subcodes. Since one of our prompts invited our participants to address student attendance, we quite frequently coded responses that valued it. Participants indicated that student attendance was exemplary overall, but some students at the high school level in District B took advantage of there being no formal declaration of mandatory attendance and intermittently found "more interesting things to do" (superintendent of District B). As the superintendent went on, "when we do this again, we will make participation mandatory and make it clear to the students that they have to come every day."

Facilitators. Participants quite frequently discussed aspects of the summer program that they valued as contributing to enriching the quality of the education opportunities made available in the summer program. Sometime a facilitative element involved technology such as Apple Classroom, but, as a teacher in District A went on to explain, sometime a facilitator took the form of advanced planning:

So, at the end of the year, we were asked to gather our guided reading books that we usually store in between classrooms and stuff. We were asked to bring these together, so they are actually here in our library and the folders over there are for our guided reading groups. So, all of that was gathered and put in a central location.

An administrator in District C highlighted the readiness of businesses to partner with the school district, the willingness of teachers to help, and access to appropriate curriculum resources—a point that was also acknowledged by a District B administrator who credited state funding for assisting.

Engagement. Participants reported that they witnessed and valued student engagement. The sense was that the level of student engagement during the school year was impacted by the necessity of teaching on grade level, but during the summer program "this is an opportunity we don't have [during the school year] to teach them wherever they are" (teacher, District A).

Engaging Curriculum. Teachers enthusiastically described how teaching in the summer program enabled them to exercise their creativity. A District C administrator spoke with pride about how "the arts enrichment that we added in this year—that was a bit of a challenge because we wanted to make sure that [the students] were getting what they needed." The teacher assistants in District A pointed out how the fast pace of half-day summer school was an advantage as opposed to "when you have 'em here all day."

In-Class Assistance. Given their freedom from constraints mentioned above, teachers had the time to render greater assistance to students during class-time "to change [students'] perspectives and change outlooks" (District B administrator) through building relationships and providing greater levels of in-class assistance. The teachers in District A asserted that the in-class assistance "helped tremendously," and the teacher assistants in that county valued their ability to help in greater detail as one outcome of the teachers' providing detailed instructions to them.

Hindrances. There were some aspects of summer school organization that obstructed the learning processes that the participants wanted to implement. The summer programs conducted in our partner districts ran from 4 to 7 weeks. As noted above, the fast pace can be an advantage, but the other side of the coin is the constraints placed on beneficial outcomes. As one District A administrator reflected, "we've got 'em here, we just wanna make them better readers, you know. And I think that crunch for time is definitely a hindrance." A District B administrator diplomatically described how "it was difficult to get an answer" to key questions due to a leadership transition process. This issue was dealt with effectively once they established a channel of communication to the NC DPI CARES team.

Incomplete Information. Teachers in District A agreed that "when we come in, those first few days, we're always missing a lot of information that we need. We need to be able to start on Day 1 knowing what levels these kids are at—you know, what groups they're going to be in—and it always takes pretty much that whole first week to assess and figure out if the level we were given is a good level for that child and then form groups from there." They made it clear that they were not seeking uniformity in ability levels in their classes ("you need some variability in there"), but just more complete information on the children. An administrator in District A admitted it was very hard to plan because

teachers invited children who they thought weren't proficient and then the parents on the other end were putting in their interest forms in the Google forms at the district level, so it was hard to plan with not knowing a number until the first day of school.

An administrator in District C described challenges in checking that teachers were

qualified to the extent that I had to go out and ask them personally because it was just after the pandemic and everything so went personally and said 'have you applied, have you applied, have you applied'. . . I still had to pull in some people.

Insufficient Planning Time. A District C administrator discussed the "challenge of time" the program—they "wanted to fill out the hours I was required to fulfil, but I also didn't want to burn-out teachers nor students . . . we were trying to make it all fit." A District C teacher declared that "apart from not having enough planning time for ourselves to be prepared for the next day's lessons, I mean, I think the [summer] program is better [than the regular school year]. Apart from lesson planning time being constrained, some teachers also confronted issues with short-sighted planning at the administrative level. For example, District A teachers considered "that was the reason that second through fifth grade didn't receive any of their training materials or resource or anything like that on the first day."

Pull-Out Assistance. The more free-flowing nature of summer programming opened a window for the provision of specialist help to individual students on a more sustained basis—but, in the eyes of several participants, this was not necessarily the best use of a student's time. For example, a District A administrator recounted how pull-out assistance was problematic in the eyes of a first-grade teacher who was "making comments about how a lot of [their] students were pulled for EC or whatever and [they] wanted to have all of their students benefit [from the small group work]." Validating the administrator's assertion, District A teachers themselves explained that "like [colleague] was saying, [student] would miss so much of what [student's] actual teacher was teaching and [student's] going to be tested on."

Impact on Personnel. In response to our prompting, participants were open in discussing how they and others were affected by being involved in summer school. An administrator in District A stressed how resource-intensive the planning process was and how many individuals were involved. They mentioned the middle school and high school directors of curriculum, the associate superintendent, the digital learning director, coordinator, and "several others. And when I say we met in the fall, it was a BIG group of us that met, and we met several times so the Payroll [would] know exactly [what to expect]—or they could guide us."

Negative Impact. There was a sense among many teachers that involvement in summer school carried with it the potential for them to be heading into the school year somewhat tired and even "burned-out." An administrator in District A described that, after 2021, "many of them said they weren't going to teach summer school anymore . . . but some of them came back [in 2022]. We had to maximize the time for our students as well as take care of our teachers." One District B

parent who also is a Board of Education member for the county described the difficulty program coordinators experienced with staffing due to teacher burnout. She said, "We couldn't get teachers to work. They [Program Coordinators] threw a lot of money on the table, and they [teachers] still declined. They were exhausted!"

Additionally, some teachers encountered expectations that they found alienating. An extreme example was offered by one teacher from District C who recounted:

> *I came from a different type of school, and [in the summer school building] it was, like, so serious. It was, like, we couldn't leave but 30 seconds early. It was very, very serious. You didn't eat anything. It was, like, if you showed up 30 seconds late, you were locked out. You had to, like, get let in and be questioned about why you were 30 seconds late. It was the worst experience ever.*

Positive Impact. A District C teacher stated that their decision to become involved with the summer learning program was based largely on how big of an impact the previous summer learning program had made on their own students. They said, "It [the summer learning program] helped build their confidence, their love for learning, and their academics. So, I was able to see the value of it." Another teacher in District C enjoyed teaching in the summer program because "the atmosphere is more relaxed and there's not a lot of pressure."

Logistics. There were aspects of summer school that participants considered before opting to be involved. These aspects ranged from pay, site location, familiarity with student population, and curriculum. Teachers spoke about the planning processes that program coordinators undertook and their positive impact on logistical concerns ranging from bussing, student groupings, device distribution, and training. Administrators described the steps taken to carefully select staff, often basing these decisions on staff performance data. Staff described the significance of varied experiences that helped inform their decision about participating in summer learning programs. One District C teacher stated that her decision to participate in the 2022 summer learning program was directly based on her appreciation of how well-organized the 2021 summer learning program was, since she visited one of the sites. She said, "Oh, this is nice!"

Duration. Nearly every adult participant, except one Pre-Kindergarten teacher and one Exceptional Children teacher assistant, shared their perspectives about how much better the duration of the 2022 summer learning programs were as opposed to the 2021 summer learning programs. Teachers, teacher assistants, administrators, and parents valued the shorter duration of the 2022 summer learning program in terms of the lessened number of weeks, days, and hours of contact time. One District A teacher stated that her decision to participate again in the 2022 summer learning program was contingent on the shortened duration, saying "I can handle this another year." A District A administrator stated that "weighing the advantages and disadvantages of a shorter program, it provided a good balance." The overwhelming sentiment was that the shorter duration provided participants with a sense that they still got to enjoy a summer break since programming wasn't as long each day, only four days a week, and only four weeks. The two individuals who wanted longer summer programming related their comments to the student population with which they worked. The District C Pre-kindergarten teacher stated that she needed more time with her students to help prepare them more effectively for kindergarten. The District A Exceptional Children teacher stated that she desired more time because she was unable to achieve her educational goals for her students since they were continually being pulled out for

various interventions throughout the summer learning program. She said, “There’s no time to do it all.”

Planning. Administrators described the process of planning the summer learning programs as purposeful, thoughtful, targeted, and deliberate. One District B administrator said, “It was a lot of meetings, but it was essential work.” Another District B administrator described their approach to planning as a team-based approach, where they started with an idea about how summer learning programs might look, pitched it to co-planners, and invited feedback. Several District A teachers indicated that diminished planning time was an unfortunate side effect of the shortened hours of summer learning programs in 2022.

Resources. The topic of summer learning programs' resources gave participants an opportunity to speak about their widely varied perspectives. One District B administrator acknowledged the tremendous help that grant funds provided for the summer learning programs, saying “We had multiple funding sources that came together, but PRC 176 and 177 certainly drive what we did.” As an example of the opposite viewpoint, one District C teacher shared her perspective of resource disparity for rural counties, saying “the majority of our children are black, African American children. The grandmas are raising them, or they got young parents who are just not are not with it... we need it [summer learning programs] to advance even more than it’s doing right now.” She further explained, “in the black areas like this...rural areas, we don’t have a lot of resources...we need to help our black children, because you can go to a white school. They have everything they need. We don’t.” She summarized by saying, “the better your resources, the better your program.” A District B teacher placed the success of the summer learning programs squarely on how well it was resourced, saying “If you want to offer it to more [students], it’s going to need more funding, so you can hire more [teachers], so you can serve more.”

Timing. Participants commented on the summer learning programming timing as a significant factor of the program's success. The participants’ preference has the largest impact on their perceptions of success. Some teachers and parents like the programs to be held near the beginning of the summer, while others like the programs to commence after a little bit of a break. Even those who prefer a break express a sense of dread of the upcoming program, however. Administrators commented on the benefit of having extra planning and set-up time for summer programs when starting them later. A wise District C administrator explained that to assist in planning for next summer, the county is conducting surveys of those involved in the summer learning programs to glean their preferences.

Non-Academic Learning. Participants shared what was provided to prompt students’ learning related to non-academic domains (e.g., social emotional learning). si

Additionally, a participant from District C shared how they provided students with additional learning opportunities via field trips and exposure to other knowledge such as dental education, stating: “They had the forestry department coming . . . they have dental education.” Another District C participant provided a perspective on the benefits of field trips and non-academic learning, further elaborating:

> *One child, when we went on that field trip, he was able to have conversations with the presenter that I don't think that maybe in the regular class setting, he would've had that kind of conversation, with the class teacher as with the presenter.*

Mental Health Supports. Participants highlighted the potential for providing counseling for students in the context of summer school programing which allows for less obtrusive interactions. For example, participants shared the value of having mental health support

incorporated into the summer program. They conjectured that having a counselor available helped to address students' needs, which led to fewer classroom disruptions. For example, a District A participant stated: "I would rather have that person available on an individual basis like when I had a student that was a behavior issue in the classroom that I felt could benefit from being pulled out." Other participants noted that summer programming is an opportune time to provide intensive mental and behavioral health services to equip students with necessary support and resources to aid their success during the full school year.

Outcomes Assessment. Participants shared how the results of their efforts during summer school were measured. In general, the emphasis appeared to be on using assessment tools that are customarily used during the school year. For example, one District A administrator volunteered that "for Third Grade, they take the RtA test—the Read to Achieve test—so, hopefully, at that point, those who have not already passed will be able to so. . . . So, hopefully, at least at Third Grade, we will be able to see some of that growth." Another administrator in District A highlighted that summer assessment is less stressful: "Normally, even in the office, all you hear of is benchmarks and EOGs and things like that . . . With the summer testing there's not as much hype. This also is different because this doesn't determine their academic success in terms of the next year. Like being promoted."

In relation to the younger students, a third District A administrator pointed out that the teachers also maintain their own data folders to track the progress of their students. Multiple teachers in District C stressed that the outcomes of the program went beyond academic achievement results even as they talked proudly about the academic gains they witnessed among students. This perspective was echoed in the words of one of the administrators in District B who declared that "it's not just about the academics . . . it's about relationships. This is something I really push with the teachers: It's about relationships—taking time to get to know the students that need that extra layer of support. You can come here, and we're open to you, and I can help you."

Parent Feedback. Although participants admitted to having no comprehensive sense of parents' perspective on summer programming, they shared what they were aware of from their experience as members of the local community. One District A teacher assistant summarized the parental perspective on summer learning programs in this manner: "Some parents are working, so they do need somewhere for their children to go without the cost [of childcare] coming out of their pocket. Parents are going to send their child even if the child doesn't need to go." One District A teacher supported how widespread this parental perspective was by saying that "some kids didn't need to be here . . . but parents sent them because they needed a babysitter." Confirming both these perspectives, a District B administrator provided their perception regarding the practical nature of parental support for summer learning programs that "gave the students an outlet in the summer where they had some structured activities versus free time."

Enthusiastic. The small class size was one feature of the summer learning programs that many parents pointed to as of great benefit to their children. A District C teacher recounted how

> *One parent was really so sweet. She was like 'you helped my child so much.' I mean she sent me all these little gifts at the end. She was really, like, excited about—she could see a difference. . . . [In the teacher's opinion] it was not a drastic improvement, but it was an improvement. So she was excited to see ANY improvement as far as their reading and math was concerned.*

A District A teacher reported that "several parents said they wished it was longer." Another District A teacher said that parents were very positive and upbeat about the experience, with one

parent stating that she was "excited to see any improvement, as far as [Child's] reading and math were concerned. I'm so excited to see what [Child] does next year!" Some of the most insightful parental feedback was gleaned from teachers who also had their own children participate in the summer learning programs. One such District A teacher was enthusiastic about their [Child's] experience, saying, "I'm glad that my [Child has] been exposed; [Child] needs that connection to other students." A District A administrator said that the parents "have appreciated the fact that [the summer learning program] has helped giving those students one more chance to bridge that gap and help them in strengthening their skills."

Limited Interaction. Participants surmised the parental feedback from somewhat limited interaction with the parents. It appeared that teachers, teacher assistants, and administrators only heard from many parents about logistical issues that arose during the summer learning program. No concrete mechanism appeared to be in place for soliciting feedback from parents about their perspectives on the summer learning programs except for the aforementioned survey being conducted by District C administrators.

Mildly Appreciative. Participants shared their perceptions about the tepid response of parents to summer learning programs. Many of them pointed to the attendance of students as a primary indication of the value parents placed on their children's involvement in the summer learning programs. One District A Teacher Assistant said "they're coming for the convenience of their parents, not because they need to be here. It gives [parents] a break." One District B administrator characterized the parental feedback as "very neutral" overall.

Value of Summer School. In response to what was arguably the most important question that we asked of our participants, they provided their understanding of the value of summer school. Across all counties, educators commented on how the 2022 summer structure was better than 2021 in terms of timing, duration, curriculum focus, and opportunity to engage students.

Beneficial. Participants highlighted aspects of summer school that inspired students to learn. Small group sizes, individualized attention, and the opportunity to incorporate the arts into summer programming was highlighted across all counties and groups. Additionally, educators in Districts A and C felt supported with access to engaging materials and curriculum and the opportunity to provide input into the design of the summer program. Efforts to incorporate the community into programming was also viewed favorably. One administrator in the District C, shared that "We [site supervisor and district administrator] met about what we could change for next day. We had weekly adventures and discussed what we could enhance for next week."

For some teachers, summer school was the place to be and seemed to be more relaxed prompting less anxiety for all. One Spanish teacher shared that:

> *We really waited for summer. They like to come to the summer camp. They don't feel it is heavy. They are enjoying it. I'm so happy. Others say enjoy your summer. This is my way of enjoying. . . . I love the kids and I enjoy them singing and dancing with them. Spanish is my native language and I love teaching Spanish to these kids. It's like working but not working. . . . Some waiting for summer to be out but I'm always waiting for summer to be with the kids.*

One teacher in District B, shared "Some of them don't open-up during the regular school year, but they were able to open-up and share because the setting was smaller… . . . They worked well together, like I said smaller setting. Better for them [with a] shorter program."

County-Wide Collaboration. Participants highlighted the longer-term benefits of meeting with and learning from colleagues who were teaching in other schools in the county: "[it was]

helpful having a shared curriculum across the county and experience implementing it." The relatively small size of the counties was identified as an opportunity to foster teamwork: "we are a small county but [we] worked with what we had." Educators across all counties discussed the importance of meeting other colleagues in the county and families.

Program Growth Opportunities. Participants envisioned potential learning that might ensue from the implementation of more enlightened curriculum and programming. There was a sense of possibility across groups and counties. In District C, one administrator of 30 years, spoke of leadership and the encouragement to take risks and plan for the whole child.

> *When we opened up and I can honestly say our superintendent and deputy director believed in me so I could support the school and site coordinator and reach out to people to bring in partnerships. I think that was a huge turn and shift . . . we made summer camp about the whole child . . . wanting the child to have a great camp experience and learn at the same time. That touched my heart right there.*

District B educators expressed interest in starting up their own enrichment programming instead of sending students to other entities to experience it.

A novice District A summer program administrator described a process of refinement. They described the first day of the program they were leading for the first time as "horrible . . . completely chaotic." They described the chaos as arising from transportation issues brought about by parental indecision and their own tendency to take on too many tasks themselves. However, they continued, "the second day was half that, the third day was a quarter of that, and after that everything was smooth sailing. I could not have asked for it to be a better experience from my perspective."

Questionable Value. Participants offered their perceptions of why summer school was of limited value for some students. For District B, educators felt the students may not be as engaged in the learning process due to limited programs such as "credit recovery on computer . . . didn't really work for kids . . . unmotivating" and opportunities for staffing: "[I] only hired 1-2 people to do summer school."

Appendix H

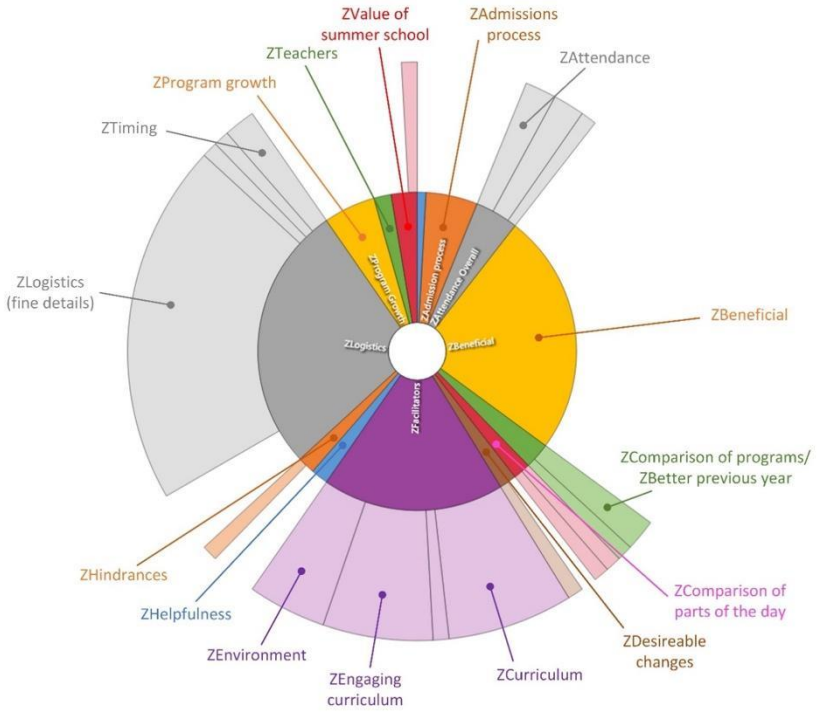
Student Coding Schema

In the following we provide a brief synthesis of the labelled sectors and subsectors in Figure 1 based on our coding of the data we gathered from the students who participated in the summer programming in the three participating districts.

In reading Figure 2, please note that the inner circle is subdivided by radii into sectors that correspond to the top-level codes in the two code books (see Appendix D and E) which, in turn, largely correspond to the prompts to which we invited participants to respond. The angle measure of each sector corresponds to the relative frequency with which we assigned codes to data points. The angle measure of the partial radial subdivisions of the surrounding annulus represents the frequency with which we assigned the various subcodes within each top-level code to data points. The labels identify the codes/subcodes that we identified sufficiently frequently (in general, the aggregation of coding from more than one file or the coding of multiple data points in one file) to warrant our provision of a brief synthesis of what we heard from the voices of our participants as they told us what they valued—proceeding clockwise the 1 o'clock position (ZAdmissions Process). Note that, because some of the code and subcode names are analogous—due to our use of analogous questions across participants' demographics—the student codes are prefixed by "Z."

Figure 1

Coding Frequency Hierarchy for Student Participants



ZAdmissions Process. A participant from District B declared loudly that the reason that they were enrolled in summer program was "because, so I can learn." When asked what they wanted to learn, again with transparent honest, they declared "Like everything." Most focus group

participants in District A referred to being a few points lower on specific tests, but one declared they attended the summer program because their mother didn't want them "layin around the house" while another had sought to gain knowledge pertinent to the following grade.

ZAttendance Overall. One participant in District A wanted "to be smart" as a result of attending the summer program. Grade 5 students in a District A focus group proudly declared that they attended every day to learn more—specifically to "get ahead for sixth grade." They expressed anxiety about how hard Grade 6 would be but were comforted by the story the interviewer told them to show that Grade 6 is not really too scary.

ZAttendance. In a focus group in District A, participants hoped to "learn what I'm missing," and, as one participant couched it, "to remember the stuff that I had to do for second grade." A third participant perceived their attendance as getting them "ready for third grade."

ZBeneficial. A young interviewee in District B enthusiastically declared that they enjoyed the summer program "loved the teacher," but regretted that "I can't even remember, like, EVERYTHING!"

One participant in a District A Grade 4 focus group valued the variety of subjects addressed in the summer program and the ability to learn in groups. A more practical approach was professed by another participant who valued "breakfast, lunch, and goin home," while a more eclectic preference was expressed by a third who appreciated "recess and math."

Grade 2 focus group participants saw the opportunity to associate with their friends as a beneficial outcome of the summer program. Other benefits included a bigger library at the site of the summer school, nice teachers "who [didn't] yell at us," a big playground "that has slides in it," and a larger cafeteria. Even younger students (K-Grade 1) variously focused on being helped to pay attention and follow directions, on just "being here," and on watching TV. In summing up, one of this younger group declared that "I love it and it's fun."

ZComparison of Programs/ZBetter Previous Year. One of the Grade 5 participants in a District A focus group highlighted the fact that the summer program offered "resources and PE" in 2021—neither of which was offered in 2022. Two other participants agreed that it was good to have had "more math" offered in 2021. Yet another enjoyed the field trips taken that previous year.

ZComparison of Parts of the Day. From the perspective of the Grade 5 focus group participants in District A, lunch and recess were two valued parts of the day, as were math ("because I love to do problems and I like the solutions") and reading (characterized as listening to an audio book while relaxing). They valued socializing with friends during recess, in addition to playing games.

ZDesireable Changes. Staying with the Grade 5 focus group participants, one member advocated for extending the recess time, including physical education, "provide a better lunch," and "upgrade the school [building] and science and math and reading." Building upgrades included "building a whole NBA court and a football field and a swimming pool so that—on the Fridays (because we aren't here on Fridays)—we can come here and get in the pool." Later in the focus group, the building upgrade proponent softened their stance and proposed some seemingly plausible organizational changes. Other desirable changes that emerged included an outside Roku TV so students would watch TV during their breaks and fixing the water fountains.

ZFacilitators. Student participants discussed what aspects of the summer program made learning accessible to them.

ZCurriculum. Participants in a focus group in District A focused on how effective they found simply revising what they had studied in class during the previous year. Participants were

in a wide range of classes (Grade 2 through Grade 8) and the subjects they studied included reading, math (addition through integers), and science (ecology).

ZEngaging Curriculum. One young student in District B was engaged with learning because they were studying with a teacher that they liked. Focus group participants in District A found the use of motivational encouragement through the awarding of "tickets" (entitlement to small rewards) to individuals who had done well on learning tasks helped them to be engaged. Several remarked on how engaging they found the use of paper-based games (e.g., hangman) and learning apps such as Kahoot! 360 and Lookit during the summer program. Apropos of the use of learning games, the teacher assistants in District A pointed out that the engagement factor was highly dependent on how hard the teacher worked to make it engaging for the students. They highlighted another inherent advantage of the summer program in declaring that "the kids love summer school more than regular school because . . . it is shorter. They're not here all day. And I agree with them because it's not as long."

ZEnvironment. One student participant in a focus group on District A enjoyed learning outside the building because it afforded them more privacy. Others disagreed because it was too hot outside and preferred to learn in the air-conditioned classroom, although there was some disagreement about whether it was too cold in the classrooms. One participant was "really bothered" by what they described as the long distance between the classroom and the cafeteria.

ZHelpfulness. Participants in a multi-grade-level focus group in District A were open to comparing the recent summer program to the regular school year in terms of helpfulness. There was general agreement that they had learned more about reading, science, and math. One participant who initially expressed a lukewarm opinion about the helpfulness of the 2021 program later revised their opinion and declared it helpful because they had been able to pick up on what they had failed to learn during the school year due to their "not paying attention."

ZHindrances. For some of the participants in a multi-grade-level focus group in District A, the summer program in 2021—characterized as "a cringe year"—incorporated numerous obstacles to learning. For example, one participant critiqued the teachers' lack of familiarity with how "kids use social media" (e.g., Instagram) because "I know how to do this stuff." They reported that their peers sat in class and used social media because the teachers "didn't know what they were doing" or "didn't know how to unlock an iPad."

ZLogistics. Grade 5 students in a focus group in District A valued the fact that the summer program allowed them Friday as a free day so they had 2 nights when they could stay up late because "on Sunday, you have to go to sleep early because you have school on Monday." Having established that perspective, participants speculated about the advantages of a Monday through Wednesday, a Monday and Tuesday, or just Monday schedules. A younger student lent their support for concluding the summer program day at 1:00 p.m. because if it went longer, "my head hurts."

ZLogistics (Fine Details). Describing their typical day in the summer program, a young participant in District A explained "I eat breakfast, and then we do work, and then we do centers, and then we go have brain break, and then we have snack, and then we have lunch." Another young participant enlarged the canvas:

Every single day, I wait in my garage until the bus comes, and then, when the bus comes, I get on the bus, and we have to pick up some people, and then we have to head to the school, and I go to the breakfast, and I head to the gym, and after we're late, we head to our classroom. And also, in our classroom we, umm, do our morning work, and then we start doing our writing, and then we

do some more writing, and then it be lunch time. And then we do phonics, and then it's time for us to go home.

Even younger participants agreed that they ate breakfast during the summer program, then listened and paid attention, in addition to reading books, "doing centers," and playing games on an iPad. They declared that they colored on paper with "pencils that looked like pencils" (there was some debate about whether they had access to "[e]rasers") and that the product "looked like paper."

ZTiming. The Grade 4 students in District A projected a consensus that it was a good thing that the summer program school day concluded at 1:00 p.m. and that it was commendable that they had Fridays "off . . . and could sleep-in." They valued that the day "was really short. Like, you'll do a few things and then by the time you know it . . . it's really short."

ZProgram Growth. Grade 4 students in District A depicted longer recesses as an improvement for future summer programs, together with longer breakfast and lunch times. They were also in favor of later start times to the day in combination with an early conclusion to the day and involvement with less schoolwork. The Grade 2 students suggested greater emphasis on reading and math and "coloring in the classroom on the iPad." One of them also suggested that they should use pens (another later refined this suggestion to specify "red pens") for writing because "I'm tired of looking at that grey color" of the pencil. Along the lines of an earlier comment from an older student about the use of social media in class, another young participant wanted to be allowed to "do TikTok."

ZTeachers. There were few strong opinions voiced about teachers and many intimations of the establishment of positive relationships. For example, one older student in District A described the classroom dynamic favorably: "My teacher, [they] like to talk a lot. So, I really just talk to [them] while I do work."

ZValue of Summer School. In a focus group in District A there was a mixed response to the prompt to ascribe value to their summer school experience. Some depicted summer school as just repeating what they had learned during the regular school year. However, among those who responded favorably, one participant credited the summer program with "helping me learn things I hadn't even learned at my other school."

REFERENCES

Introduction to the Final SBE Report

Allen, M. (Ed.) (2017). *The sage encyclopedia of communication research methods*. (Vols. 1-4). SAGE Publications, Inc. https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411

Appling, B. (2015). *Enhancing our status: The experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/appling_brandee_201505_phd.pdf [Google Scholar]

Augustine, C. H., McCombs, J. S., Schwartz, H. L., & Zakaras, L. (2013). *Getting to work on summer learning: Recommended practices for success.* RAND Corporation.

Augustine, C. H., McCombs, J. S., Pane, J. F., Schwartz, H. L., Schweig, J., McEachin, A., & Siler-Evans, K. (2016). *Learning from summer: Effects of voluntary summer learning programs on low-income urban youth*. RAND Corporation.

Bachrach, E. (2004). *The value of site visits*. Perspectives (Spring/Summer): 3.

Bell, S. R., & Carrillo, N. (2007). Characteristics of effective summer learning programs in practice. *New Directions for Youth Development*, (114), 45-63.

Browne, D. (2016). Summer learning that sticks. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *98*(4), 15-20. https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721716681771

Check, J., & Schutt, R. K. (2011). *Research methods in education*. Sage Publications.

Coburn, C. E., & Penuel, W. R. (2016). Research-practice partnerships in education: Outcomes, dynamics, and open questions. *Educational Researcher*, *45*(1), 48- 54. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X16631750

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). Strategies for qualitative data analysis. *Basics of Qualitative Research. Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*, 3(10.4135), 9781452230153.

Creswell, J. W., & Báez, J. C. (2020). *30 essential skills for the qualitative researcher*. Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.

Davis, A.C., Hitchcock, J., & Tek, B. (2022). *National call to summer learning: How did school districts respond? Wallace Foundation.* https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/national-call-to-action for-summer-learning.pdf

DeWalt, Kathleen M. & DeWalt, Billie R. (2002). *Participant observation: a guide for fieldworkers*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Flick, U. (2019). The concepts of qualitative data: Challenges in neoliberal times for qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *25*(8), 713-720.

Fritz, A., & Morgan, G. (Eds.) (2010). (Vols. 1-0). SAGE Publications, Inc., https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412961288

Given, L. M. (Ed.). (2008). *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Sage publications.

Guajardo, M. A., Guajardo, F., Janson, C., & Militello, M. (2015). *Reframing community partnerships in education: Uniting the power of place and wisdom of people*. Routledge.

Hall, G., Poston, K., & Dennehy, J. (2017). *Summer learning programs: Investigating strengths and challenges. In After-school programs to promote positive youth development* (pp. 1-20). Springer, Cham.

Hammer, D., & Berland, L. K. (2014). Confusing claims for data: A critique of common practices for presenting qualitative research on learning. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, *23*(1), 37-46.

Kitzinger, J. (1994). The methodology of focus groups: the importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of health & illness*, *16*(1), 103-121.

Lynch, K., An, L., & Mancenido, Z. (2021, October). *The Impact of Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Children's Mathematics Achievement: A Meta-Analysis*. In SREE 2021 Conference. SREE.

McCombs, J., & Augustine, C. (2021). *Advancing Student Learning and Opportunity through Voluntary Academic Summer Learning Programs*. EdResearch for Recovery Design Principles Series. EdResearch for Recovery Project.

McCombs, J. S., Augustine, C., Schwartz, H. L., Bodilly, S. J., McInnis, B., Lichter, D. S., & Cross, A. B. (2011). *Making summer count: How summer programs can boost children's learning*. RAND Corporation.

McCombs, J. S., Augustine, C. H., Pane, J. F., & Schweig, J. (2020). *Every Summer Counts: A Longitudinal Analysis of Outcomes from the National Summer Learning Project*. RAND Summer Learning Series. Research Report. RR-3201-WF. RAND Corporation.

McCombs, J. S., Augustine, C. H., Unlu, F., Ziol-Guest, K. M., Naftel, S., Gomez, C. J., Marsh, T., Akinnirayne, G., & Todd, I. (2019). *Investing in successful summer programs*. RAND Corporation.

McCombs, J. S., Pane, J. F., Augustine, C. H., Schwartz, H. L., Martorell, P., & Zakaras, L. (2014). *Ready for fall? Near-term effects of voluntary summer learning programs on low-income students' learning opportunities and outcomes*. RAND Corporation.

McEachin, A., Augustine, C. H., & McCombs, J. (2018). Effective summer programing: What educators and policymakers should know. *American Educator, 42*(1),10.

McLaughlin, B., & Pitcock, S. (2009). *Building quality in summer learning programs: Approaches and recommendations*. New York: Wallace Foundation.

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2023). *Operation polaris 2.0. Navigating students to a brighter future*. https://www.dpi.nc.gov/media/16098/open

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2022). *An impact analysis of student learning during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Report submitted to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, North Carolina General Assembly.

Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage publications.

Riessman, C. K. (2007). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers. The coding manual for qualitative researchers*, 1-440.

Schwartz, H., McCombs, J., Augustine, C., & Leschitz, J. (2018). *Getting to work on summer learning*. Recommended practices for success. RAND Corporation.

Srivastava, P., & Hopwood, N. (2009). A Practical Iterative Framework for Qualitative Data Analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *8*(1), 76–84. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800107

Stake, R. E. (1994). *Case study: Composition and performance*. Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education, 31-44.

State Collaborative on Reforming Education. (2022). *COVID-19 memo: Maximizing summer learning*. Spring 2022. Retrieved from https://tnscore.org/wpcontent/uploads/2022/03/Maximizing-Summer Learning_2022_FINAL.pdf

Terzian, M., & Moore, K. A. (2009). *What works for summer learning programs for low-income children and youth: Preliminary lessons from experimental evaluations of social interventions*. Fact Sheet. Publication # 2009-41. Child Trends.

U. S. Department of Agriculture (2017). *Rural education at a glance*. Washington, DC: U.S.

Government Printing House

Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., & Gullotta, T. P. (2015). *Social and emotional learning: Past, present, and future.*

Williams, J. P. (2008). Non-Participant Observations. *Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*, 1, 561-562.

Witty, E., & Gaston, B. (2008). *Competency based learning and assessment*. ETITO. https://moodle. org/pluginfile.../Assessment_-_Competency_based. Doc.

Yin, R. K. (2004). *The case study anthology*. Sage.

Yin, R. K. (1994). Discovering the future of the case study. Method in evaluation research. *Evaluation practice*, *15*(3), 283-290.

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP BIOGRAPHIES

Alphabetized by Team and Report Order

North Carolina State University: Friday Institute and Duke University: Social Science Research Institute (FI/Duke)

Dr. Adrian Brown serves as a research analyst for the Applied Research and Evaluation group at the Social Science Research Institute. She provides mixed-methods expertise with a focus on program evaluation. Her work has focused on public management and policy, education, digital equity, and healthcare to support critical decision-making and stakeholder experiences across varied organizational contexts.

Dr. Alicia V. Fischer earned her Ph.D. in School Psychology from Pennsylvania State University. Her research interests include fostering school-family-community partnerships, social-emotional wellbeing in students, bullying, and parent-child relationships. She joined the Program Evaluation and Education Research (PEER) Group in August 2021 after two years as a practicing school psychologist. In practice, Dr. Fischer completed over 100 comprehensive multidisciplinary evaluations to determine eligibility for special education services under state and federal guidelines. Dr. Fischer served as part of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII), Student Assistance Program (SAP), and Crisis Response teams. Dr. Fischer was an advocate for minority and LGBTQIA youth in her district and provided resources on how to support and represent these youth to school counselors.

Erin Haseley, M.A., is a Research Analyst for the Applied Research and Evaluation group at Duke's Social Science Research Institute. She is passionate about collaborative and utility-focused research and evaluation with a primary focus on qualitative data. She has experience working with foundations, nonprofits, community groups, and public-school systems.

Dr. Shaun Kellogg is the Director of the Program Evaluation and Education Research (PEER) Group and Teaching Assistant Professor in the College of Education. Dr. Shaun Kellogg has

over 20 years of experience in education as both an elementary teacher and education researcher. Since 2011, Dr. Kellogg has led comprehensive research, evaluation, and capacity-building projects funded by local, state, and federal educational organizations. He currently leads two research and evaluation projects, one in partnership with NC Education Corps and the other with ASSISTments Foundation, explicitly aimed at addressing student learning loss resulting from COVID. Prior to his work in research and evaluation, Dr. Kellogg served 10 years in K-12 public education, beginning his teaching career as a Peace Corps volunteer and later teaching in the public-school systems of Michigan and North Carolina.

Dr. Doreet Preiss is a Research Associate with the Applied Research and Evaluation group at Duke University's Social Science Research Institute. At Duke, her work focused on educational evaluation, with an emphasis on quantitative analyses of educational interventions using large-scale administrative datasets. She has also collaborated on multiple qualitative and mixed methods analyses in both education and healthcare delivery. Dr. Preiss also has a background as a public-school educator and spent several years working in district administration with the New York City Department of Education. She earned her Ph.D. in Sociology from New York University, with a particular focus on inequality and education.

Noelle Wyman Roth, MEM, is the Assistant Director of the Applied Research, Evaluation, and Engagement group at Duke University's Social Science Research Institute. Noelle is a mixed methods evaluator with particular competencies in qualitative research methods. Her work with Duke has included implementing evaluation with various partners, which have spanned diverse content areas, including education, health systems, public policy, and equity.

Dr. Jessica Sperling is the Director of the Duke Office of Evaluation and Applied Research Partnership; she also leads Applied Research, Evaluation & Engagement at Duke's Social Science Research Institute (SSRI), Evaluation and Strategic Planning at Duke Clinical and Translational Science Institute, and teaches evaluation, qualitative methods, and community-engaged research in Duke's Masters in Public Policy Program and the Duke Graduate Academy. She has led, directed, and contributed to numerous evaluation and applied research partnerships with educational and school-partnered youth initiatives; this includes a three-year state-wide

elementary literacy intervention, a state-wide initiative integrating high-impact tutors in schools across North Carolina, a randomized study of a school-partnered youth development program, and a mixed-methods study addressing teacher workforce retention issues. In addition, she has worked as a public-school educator and in public school administration. Dr. Sperling earned her Ph.D. in Sociology, including focus on inequality and education, from the Graduate Center, City University of New York.

Dr. Kevin Winn earned his Ph.D. in Educational Policy and Evaluation from Arizona State University. His ethnographic research addresses how community activists promote racial equity by shaping local education policies through collaborating with school district leaders. Dr. Winn has also taught in a Montessori school in Agadir, Morocco, and he conducted research in Arusha, Tanzania, where he examined how short-term volunteers influence local schools and orphanages. He currently works at the Friday Institute as a researcher and evaluator.

University of North Carolina at Greensboro SERVE Center (SERVE)

Dr. Victoria Coyle, is a Senior Research Specialist at SERVE where she is currently PI on two Evaluation of Opportunity Meeting Innovation Challenge (OMIC) Grants designed to increase Dual Enrollment in three districts in New Jersey. She is a senior research specialist on the Evaluation of Career and College Promise in NC and has served as senior research staff on the i3 College and Career Readiness Expansion (Ohio) project. As PI for this study, she will be involved with all aspects of study design, instrument development, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of findings.

Dr. Bryan Hutchins is a Senior Research Specialist at SERVE where he has served as PI or senior staff on several studies**.** He was co-PI for an evaluation of NCDPI's Read to Achieve Program, and project manager for NCDPI's Race to the Top statewide staff survey. He is lead analyst and author for SERVE's statewide progress monitoring report of NCDPI's 21st CCLC Program. In addition, Dr. Hutchins serves as a senior analyst as part of SERVE's evaluation of North Carolina's CCP as well as a sub-study of CTE advising. He is a member of the CTE Research Network where he serves on the work-based learning advisory group. He received funding through an AERA research grant to study high school STEM CTE course taking. Dr.

Hutchins will serve as Co-PI for this study where he will be involved with all aspects of study design, instrument development, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of findings.

Laura Rosof, M.A. is a Research Specialist at SERVE where she serves as a project manager for an NSF-funded evaluation of a community college undergraduate research program, as well as providing research support and technical assistance for many other studies. Before working at SERVE, she was at the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at NC State University as a Research and Evaluation team member. She earned her master's degree in the Policy, Organizations, and Leadership program at Stanford University's Graduate School of Education.

Educational Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC)

Dr. Sarah C. Fuller holds a Ph.D. in public policy from the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University. She currently serves as Principal Investigator for the multi-year evaluation of the GEAR UP North Carolina intervention, Light the Way: Rethinking K-12 Education, and Back to Normal? The long run effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on student, educator, and school outcomes sponsored by the Spencer Foundation. Fuller is also leading projects examining the impacts of natural disasters on educational outcomes nationwide and the impacts of remote learning due to COVID-19 on schools in North Carolina. Other areas of ongoing research include high school reform models, the impacts of school nutrition on academic outcomes, and the influence of hurricanes in North Carolina on childhood outcomes. Fuller's work leverages large administrative datasets and quasi-experimental designs to estimate the causal effects of particular policies or events on student outcomes. She uses quantitative methods to address research questions surrounding schools and students focusing on questions that could inform policy decisions. Fuller has received grant funding from the Spencer Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Russell Sage Foundation, and the W.T. Grant Foundation. She has recent publications in Economics of Education Review, AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice, AERA Open, and Urban Education.

Dr. Julie T. Marks is the Director of Program Evaluation and a Senior Research Associate at the Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC). She has led over a decade of research-practice partnership projects between EPIC and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

(NCDPI) and the North Carolina State Board of Education (NC SBE). Dr. Marks has served as the UNC Principal Investigator on previous evaluations of federally funded education reform initiatives, including the formative and summative evaluation of NC's Race to the Top grant and the NCT Transformation state partnership grant to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of turnaround supports for the state's lowest performing schools. Dr. Marks has expertise in mixed methods research designs and conducts and oversees research that interfaces with hundreds of teachers and school leaders across the state. She has held lecturer positions in the Department of Public Policy and currently holds a clinical assistant professor appointment within the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

East Carolina University: Rural Education Institute (REI)

Dr. Laura Levi Altstaedter, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Harriot College of Arts and Sciences. Dr. Levi Altstaedter's research focuses primarily on second language (L2) pedagogy, including students' motivation to study foreign languages, perceptions of instructional innovations, and perceptions of assessment. In addition, her research focuses on teacher development. She has published multiple articles focused on L2 pedagogy and educator preparation in premier US-based journals in her field such as Hispania and Foreign Language Annals, as well as in international journals such as Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, and the Argentinean Journal of Applied Linguistics. She serves as the Executive Editor for REI's Theory & Practice in Rural Education.

Dr. Sheresa Boone Blanchard is an Associate Professor in Human Development and Family Science in the College of Health and Human Performance. She received the Merle B. Karnes Award for Service from the Division for Early Childhood, a part of the Council for Exceptional Children, the largest professional organization dedicated to improving the educational success of individuals with disabilities and/or gifts and talents. She was also named a Promising Scholar in the Foundation of Early Childhood.

Dr. Loni Crumb is a Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor Supervisor and faculty in the ECU Counselor Education Program. She has authored scholarly publications and professional

presentations related to counseling in rural areas and issues facing historically marginalized groups. She served as the co-principal investigator on the NC Department of Public Instruction's Students in Crisis School-Safety Grant to help reduce the impact of ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) for students in rural schools and PI for a federal SAMHSA grant supporting school-based mental health services in Beaufort, Jones, and Lenoir Counties. She developed the curriculum for the ECU Integrated Behavioral Health with Rural Youth certificate program, designed to train behavioral health professionals to address the mental health needs of children and youth in rural communities.

Dr. Kristen Cuthrell is the Director of the ECU REI and Professor in the Department of Elementary Education and Middle Grades Education. She has over 18 years of experience working in program improvement and educator development. Over $11 million in grant funding within the past 10 years assures experience with facilitating grant activities. Her scholarly publication record—more than80—exemplifies her experience disseminating information and resources to stakeholders.

Dr. Bethany McKissick has a distinguished academic career focused on the study of the provision of services for students with disabilities and teacher preparation from baccalaureate through doctoral degrees. Currently Associate Professor of Special Education and Director of Clinical Experiences in the Department of Special Education, Foundations, and Research in the College of Education at ECU. She is the PI for the Exceptional Children Regional Consultant (provides Rural Education Institute 6 resources and support for school administrators, teachers of children with disabilities, and students with disabilities across the Northeast and Southeast rural regions in the state) for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. She serves on the editorial board of Rural Special Education Quarterly-the only national journal focused on special education in rural places.

Dr. Robert Quinn, is an Associate Professor, Associate Professor of Art Education and Assistant Dean of Curriculum and Assessment in the College of Fine Arts and Communication, is working with art teachers in Latham Clinical Network schools to determine arts-based interventions with ongoing research regarding mental health and technology integration. He

serves as a section editor in REI's Theory & Practice in Rural Education. He also supported middle grade students in expressing trauma related to hurricanes as key investigator on a federal NSF grant supporting the integration of computational thinking and arts in Jones, Sampson, and Duplin Counties.

Dr. R. Martin Reardon was a high school administrator for 27 years before a higher education career. Associate Professor in the Educational Leadership Department within the College of Education at ECU (9 years). He served as Co-PI on a federal NSF grant supporting the integration of computational thinking and arts in Jones, Sampson, and Duplin Counties. Has published nine edited volumes focused on school-university-community collaborative research including two volumes focused on education in rural places. He serves as a section editor in REI's Theory & Practice in Rural Education.

Dr. Amy Swain, is a Teaching Assistant Professor in the Special Ed Foundations and Research department and was recently inducted into the Servire Society, is examining the impact of racial and equity in rural districts. She recently collected oral histories of Black educators who went through desegregation in northeastern NC.