

The National Summer Learning Project: A Thought Leader Session with Pittsburgh Public Schools and the RAND Corporation

December 5, 2019

- Ian Faigley: [00:00:00](#) Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to today's Thought Leader Round Table, a Conversation on Readiness. Today is part of a regular series of explorations of the key questions of what does it mean for all young people to be ready for life's demands at every stage, and what is it going to take to get there? Karen Pittman, CEO of The Forum for Youth Investment, leads lively and candid conversations with some of the most influential, boundary-pushing leaders working to improve the lives of children and young people across the United States.
- Ian Faigley: [00:00:28](#) Today's session features Catherine Augustine from the RAND Corporation, and Melanie Claxton with Pittsburgh Public Schools. Today's conversation will focus on the national summer learning project, a six year effort to provide voluntary district-led summer programs that offer a mix of academic instruction and enrichment, and test whether they help boost students' success in school. Today's session is generously support by the Wallace Foundation.
- Ian Faigley: [00:00:54](#) A little bit about our presenters. Karen Pittman is president and CEO of the Forum for Youth Investment, and a respected sociologist and leader in youth development. Prior to co-founding the Forum in 1998, she launched adolescent pregnancy prevention initiatives at the Children's Defense Fund, started the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, and served as senior vice president at the International Youth Foundation. Catherine Augustine is director of RAND's Pittsburgh office, and a senior policy researcher at the RAND Corporation. Her research focuses on improving educational outcomes for students in urban school districts. Augustine both evaluates implementation of reforms and assesses their impact.
- Ian Faigley: [00:01:33](#) Melanie Claxton is the coordinator of Out-of-School Time for Pittsburgh Public Schools. She oversees a team of dedicated professionals working to ensure that all Pittsburgh Public Schools students have access to high-quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities. Before joining the district, Melanie was manager of partnerships and quality improvement

for Allegheny Partners for Out-of-School Time, where she supported local system and capacity building initiatives to enhance the delivery of educational services to youth across Allegheny County.

Ian Faigley: [00:02:01](#) There are only a handful of slides for today's session. We will be accepting questions and comments via the chat feature, which will be available, I believe, at the top of your screen. Today's session is being recorded. Early next week we will be providing it to everyone who registered, and also posting it to the forumfyi.org website, including any additional resources that are mentioned on the call. It's not my pleasure to turn it over to Karen.

Karen Pittman: [00:02:28](#) Thanks, Ian, and welcome Melanie and welcome Catherine. Delighted to have you on this conversation. I know as a young person summer was hugely important to me, so I'm always excited when we have a chance to really focus in on talking about summer learning and opportunities to really support summer learning in cities across the country, and particularly excited about this conversation because we're talking explicitly about what we can do to help public school districts really successfully run and sustain high-quality summer learning programs. And you all have done amazing work, both as participating cities and as part of the research team that really sort of helped us answer those really important questions.

Karen Pittman: [00:03:19](#) But before we get to the sort of how you all did this start to answer questions about whether it was successful, let me just ask each of you to reflect for a minute on why this is important. I mean, obviously, when we think about summer, there are a range of activities that are available to families and young people in the summer months, and they've been there for a long time. From public things, from rec departments and libraries, to privately funded programs, to camps, etc. So why is it important for school districts to step into this space and think about how to run high-quality summer learning programs? Why is this an important space for schools to step into?

Catherine Augustine: [00:04:06](#) Thanks Karen, this is Catherine. I'm happy to be here, and I can take a stab at that and then turn it over to Melanie. So even though there have, as you noted, been a lot of summer programs available for kids over decades, not all parents have access to such programs for their kids, and many would want that access if they had it. And public schools are clearly a vehicle and a mechanism for reaching a lot of kiddos, so I think it's great that school districts are in this game and are offering programs, and it's also important because we know that particularly low

income kids are disadvantaged academically over the summer. They come back to school in the fall behind their higher income peers, and so being able to reach them through the school districts and provide programming that maintains the academics that they were offered during the school year is a great advance.

Karen Pittman: [00:05:10](#)

And Melanie, you want to weigh in on the why?

Melanie Claxton: [00:05:13](#)

Absolutely. So first, thank you all for having me this afternoon. And so for Pittsburgh Public Schools, it's really important for us to understand that learning is happening all the time, and we really want to play a key strategic role in what that looks like. And not just what's happening during the school year, but really understanding that what happens during the summer months does have an impact on what's going to happen that next school year for each and every one of our children.

Melanie Claxton: [00:05:38](#)

And so for us, it was a really kind of natural progression to get into this space, because we wanted to play a key role in that, and we really wanted to change learning from just something that happened during these 10 months during the primary school year to something that's happening year round, where we can really create these kind of holistic, positive learning environments for students. And so that kind of led to the development of what is now the Summer Dreamer's Academy, but it benefits our kids because we know that when they're not losing educational attainment but actually gaining during the summer months, then they're better prepared to perform the next school year. And so it was really important for us to make sure that we had a position to play in that.

Karen Pittman: [00:06:19](#)

That's great. Let me reflect back on one more thing, and I will say for the record since people can't see me, when I was in elementary and middle and high school, we're talking 60 years ago so things have certainly changed since then, but one of the things that I remember about summer school as I was growing up through public school was that summer school was the place that you were sent when you didn't do well during the school year. So summer school was primarily about remediation and going in to sort of redo things that you didn't do well enough. Is that still what we're talking about when we're talking about summer learning programs?

Catherine Augustine: [00:07:06](#)

Not necessarily.

Melanie Claxton: [00:07:07](#)

So for us-

Catherine Augustine: [00:07:08](#) Go ahead.

Melanie Claxton: [00:07:11](#) I was going to say, so for Pittsburgh Public Schools, the start of this program actually was a shift because that is how we used to approach summer learning. And what we realized was that we wanted to be taking it from a more asset-based approach, front-based approach, thinking about what are the ways we can incentivize students who really want to take an active participatory role in their education. And so for us, we see it as completely different. We don't even call Summer Dreamer's summer school, it's called summer camp, and that was really intentional because it is a culture shift. It is a different way in which we're thinking about how we approach learning.

Karen Pittman: [00:07:46](#) Great. Catherine?

Catherine Augustine: [00:07:47](#) I'll just add that those traditional summer school programs do still exist in New York City, in Chicago, and other places, and they do help kids who are behind. But there is also, as Melanie was stating, this new kind of district-provided summer program that is more camp-like that involves fun activities, often provided in concert with community-based providers in the region. So it's a very different experience for the kids that provides a blend of academics and more, as they would describe it, fun activities.

Karen Pittman: [00:08:24](#) Great. So I think this idea of making that shift is critically important, and I will say for the record that I actually went to the public schools in D.C., and they were called summer enrichment programs when the D.C. Public Schools ran them, and that was the place in middle school that I actually got to go and learn to play the flute. Which was not a remedial activity at all, but something that they were offering for students. So the idea has been around for a while, but really taking it to scale and making it intentional and demonstrating its value is really important.

Karen Pittman: [00:09:02](#) so let's shift a little bit to talk about the National Summer Learning Project and how this study was set up to really answer the question of whether large urban school districts can successfully run high-quality summer learning programs. And so Catherine, I know that as this program was set up, for you to really have a study design that could answer that question, school districts had to not only recruit enough students into the summer program, they also had to sort of over recruit so you could have a comparison sample. So what were the challenges associated, in general, for recruiting young people into the programs, and then particular challenges for some of the over

recruitment? And what kind of scale goals are we talking about, when schools were setting out to set up the summer learning programs?

Catherine Augustine: [00:09:57](#)

Great questions. So there were five school districts participating in this study, and you can see them listed on a map if you go to slide two. There we go. And indeed, all of them did recruit more students than they had served in the past, because as you know, this was a randomized control trial. And if you just want to go to slide three, you can have a visual of how an RCT is set up. There is what we call a treatment group that participates in whatever activity is being evaluated, and then there's what we call a comparison, or control group that continues on with business as usual.

Catherine Augustine: [00:10:41](#)

And so you're right, Karen, the districts had to recruit more students than they had served in the past, but that did not turn out to be challenging. I can say more about this later, but what was challenging was ensuring regular attendance, and also ensuring that all of the students who signed up actually showed up. Actually came to the programs. But recruiting was not difficult at all. As I mentioned earlier, there's unmet demand for summer programming within communities, and in these five communities, that was the case. So after the programs advertised and recruited and reached out to families, they got enough interest. That was not part of the challenge.

Karen Pittman: [00:11:27](#)

Good. Good. So once they got their numbers, what then had to happen to get to quality? Because again, the test was can urban school districts successfully run high-quality summer learning programs? So we just talked about this is more than just remedial courses, but in the overall definition of what the foundation and the cities were looking for in terms of high-quality programs, how was that defined and how did districts go about doing that? And Melanie, you should certainly weigh in on how Pittsburgh did this. But what were you looking for to get to a definition of high-quality?

Catherine Augustine: [00:12:09](#)

Well, if you'd like to go to slide five, actually. We scoured the literature and interviewed experts to figure out what people thought and research demonstrated was a high-quality program, and you can see the components on this slide. We know more now after having done this study, but back in 2011 when we were designing this study, we wanted to make sure that these programs were of no cost to families, that they ran for a full day, that they ran for at least five weeks. That the students were taught in small classes, both in terms of the academics and enrichment, with no more than 15 kids. That the

teachers who were teaching the academic content were certified district teachers, and that there was academic content provided for three hours out of the day, but that there was also the enrichment activities that I mentioned earlier. And that really ranged, depending on the district.

Catherine Augustine: [00:13:12](#) There was bike riding, and rock climbing, and theater, and visual arts. All sorts of fun things happening in these programs. They also all provided breakfast, lunch, and a snack, and free transportation. So some of these aspects of the programs, you might think how does free transportation relate to quality? What we learned, and what was known prior but what was really confirmed, is that kids have to attend regularly in order to benefit from these programs, so you have to have these components in place in order to get the outcomes you're looking for. So transportation is really a key to having a quality program.

Karen Pittman: [00:13:55](#) That's excellent. And across the cities, and then Melanie, we'll turn to you to hear a little about how it was done in Pittsburgh, you mentioned before community partners. What kind of community partners were recruited to be a part of this, and what roles in particular did they play in the full day activities?

Catherine Augustine: [00:14:26](#) So-

Melanie Claxton: [00:14:26](#) Great.

Catherine Augustine: [00:14:26](#) Oh, go ahead Melanie.

Melanie Claxton: [00:14:26](#) Okay. Great. So one of the things that I didn't mention before is that I actually am in a very unique position to look at this work, as in the first two years that we did Summer Dreamers I was actually a graduate intern with the program, to now 10 years later be leading this work, so I have a little bit insight around our initial processes in terms of how we approach this work. And so particular around community partnerships, what we did is developed a RFP, a request for proposal, to really ensure that we weren't just kind of hand selecting some things we knew about, but that we were really broadening the reach and the opportunities that we would eventually give our students access to.

Melanie Claxton: [00:15:06](#) And so that is a pretty comprehensive document in terms of the things that we're looking for, so not just around the type of activity, but how are you intentionally creating inclusive and least restrictive environments for all students? How are you

ensuring that it is engaging, hands-on, really creating what we know are best practices in learning spaces and learning opportunities for students? And so that was kind of the starting point for us, and so as Catherine mentioned before, there was a variety of things we've been able to connect our students to, such as kayaking and biking and dancing and theater and fencing. And so if you name it, we've been able to really create spaces for those opportunities to happen.

Melanie Claxton: [00:15:48](#)

But we also were intentional in our staffing process. So we do have a camp leadership team that's responsible for the daily operations, and really setting the culture and the tone for each campsite, and within that we made sure we had a specific role that was dedicated to supporting connecting with our enrichment providers. But beyond that, we also within our teaching positions, within our teacher roles, we made sure that there was an individual who was certified that was then matched with and paired with our community partners. So what we really tried to do was make sure that we had experts in a multitude of areas connecting to really make this work happen. So we know that our teachers understand behavior management practices, we know that our teachers understand pedagogy.

Melanie Claxton: [00:16:36](#)

And so helping work with community partners who are experts in their own right, who bring their own knowledge and skill sets to the work, to really think about how does that translate to working with you in cases where you may not have had that experience prior. And so this is really kind of ingrained in all that we do, and so our teachers that are with our students in the morning time are also transitioning with them to their afternoon activities where they continue that support and that connection. And we also, for our particular providers, require what we call a connected writing project, so that's the other way that we try to ingrain some more intentional learning strategies that connect what's happening in the morning to what we do in the afternoon space as well.

Karen Pittman: [00:17:16](#)

That sounds both amazingly intentional and diverse in terms of the range of activities, but the level of intentionality about the connections between the morning and the afternoon, and the continuity of the staff going back and forth is very impressive. Catherine, is this representative of what you've found, in one way or another, in the other districts?

Catherine Augustine: [00:17:42](#)

It is. Some of the five were more school-like, and some were very camp-like and didn't even hold any of the programming in school buildings, and others were somewhere in between,

which is where Pittsburgh fell. But they all offered a range of interesting and exciting, engaging activities, and partnered with community organizations to do so.

- Karen Pittman: [00:18:08](#) That's great. And Melanie, and then Catherine, I know you had a slide talking about overall numbers. We can go back to it if you want, but how many young people are we talking about participating in the summer programs in Pittsburgh?
- Melanie Claxton: [00:18:22](#) So it's different a little bit over time. Right now, our goal each year for the past three years has been between 1500 to about 2,000 students that we've been intentionally trying to engage and have been able to enroll. We talked a little bit about the challenges of translating enrollment into attendance, and so I know we'll have some time later on to talk about some of the strategies that we've utilized to try to get those numbers to match as closely as possible. But our goal is try and hit around between 1500 to 2,000 students a year.
- Karen Pittman: [00:18:57](#) And what's your total student population?
- Melanie Claxton: [00:19:01](#) So for the district, we have about 21,000 students. Currently, maybe only 15 or 16,000 of them would be eligible to participate in something like this, just based off of their grade range.
- Karen Pittman: [00:19:18](#) Okay, so you're serving about 10 to 15% of the eligible population in the district.
- Melanie Claxton: [00:19:27](#) Yep. And then I'll add this piece too, because this is a broader aspect of our work with the office of Out-of-School Time. We do work intentionally with community partners that have their own stand-alone summer programs to make sure that we're connecting students to as many opportunities as possible, and really the opportunities that's the best fit and match for their needs.
- Karen Pittman: [00:19:47](#) Good. Any rough sense of how many young people are also participating somewhere in the greater Pittsburgh area in summer activities?
- Melanie Claxton: [00:20:00](#) So that becomes a tricky number to assess. What I can say is another piece to this is we also participate in something that was called Summer '19 this year. It's actually being changed to be called Bridges to Summer. And so it is a countywide initiative to engage as many young people in some sort of summer learning opportunity. So that might be a workforce

development so you might have a stipended workforce placement, so we actually take some of those students every year that are high school students. Or it might just be participation in a program like summer dreams, or actively utilizing your local library. And so I believe we've had over about 20,000 students across the county that have been engaged in those activities. Specific to the city of Pittsburgh, I'm not sure the exact number.

Karen Pittman: [00:20:52](#) Okay, good. You've raised a couple of things about even how to think about what the universe is so that young people could be participating in summer so we could even track it, and we'll come back to the attendance question in a minute. As always, we're already getting some questions in, so let's sort of weave in a couple of questions that have come in from listeners before we move onto sort of dig in deeper in some of the attendance questions and then some of the impact discussions, as we sort of move through the hour.

Karen Pittman: [00:21:25](#) So one question is, so you're really working on sort of setting up these summer programs that as you said, at least in Pittsburgh, are serving maybe 10 to 15% of the students, and complementing other standalone summer programs and employment programs, and other things that could be happening. Has Pittsburgh considered year-round schools, is one of the questions. If we're concerned about summer loss, is that a better way for districts to really get to this question?

Melanie Claxton: [00:22:03](#) So I don't know that we've had a lot of intentional conversation around that just yet. I know that we're always looking to think outside the box a little bit and rethink our approach to education. We actually just released a new a plan called Imagine PPS, where we're talking about breaking down some of the barriers, changing the way that classrooms are structured, intentionally so that to engage as many students as possible.

Melanie Claxton: [00:22:28](#) So I'm not sure that we're quite at a point where we're talking about year-round learning in that sense, and especially because we know our community partners are doing really great work during the summer months, and we're thinking about how do we make this sustainable. And being able to leverage their resources and the opportunity that they provide is also really helpful for us, because we know that if we go to a year-round model, that might look different in terms of the cost affiliated with that and associated with that.

Karen Pittman: [00:22:55](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). And a related question to that, so was the summer program funded, and certainly from a sustainability

perspective, has it continued to be funded by the Pittsburgh Public Schools? Are there other partners? How is the summer program funded?

Melanie Claxton: [00:23:13](#) Great. So we've actually had a lot of different funding sources. Right around 2009, 2010, we were predominantly funded through some stimulus dollars, so that was the impetus. It was that we had a superintendent at the time who was really thinking about what's something new and unique that we can do with these dollars that we didn't necessarily have before? And that kind of gave some way to really thinking about our approach to summer learning, because we really weren't quite where we wanted to be, or where we knew we needed to be.

Melanie Claxton: [00:23:45](#) And then past that, what we were really fortunate enough to have a lot of great foundations that were invested in this work and really wanting to help us build our capacity, so the Wallace Foundation was an amazing funder. We got monies from local foundations such as the Buhl, the Heinz Endowments, McAuley Ministries, so we've been able to use those dollars to kind of refine the models a little bit. Really better understand what's working, what's not working, what we could continue to improve upon.

Melanie Claxton: [00:24:17](#) And I'm proud to announce that this past summer was the first year that we were fully district-funded. And that was really the plan was we were really leveraging those dollars to be able to help us build our capacity, understand the model we needed to put in place, and once we had those things in place and really had a strong foundation. Then the district was supposed to say either we really believe in this work and we think it's crucial and core to what we do so we take it on, and we fully take it on through our general funds and through some other district dollars, and that's what we did this year, in our tenth year.

Melanie Claxton: [00:24:49](#) So it took some time of us getting here and it took a lot of investment from individuals who had the foresight to understand that this work was really important, and were able to help us talk about this work and tell our story, and be able to use data to show how we could be effective in this space. To be able to really say that now, this is really something core to who we are as a district.

Karen Pittman: [00:25:10](#) That's amazing, so kudos for getting to that place. That's always a goal in terms of sustainability, and I appreciate the fact that you emphasize how many years and how many sort of stages of thinking about this it took to get to that point. Do you have a

sense right now of sort of what the cost per student is of doing this kind of model of smaller classes, plus transportation, etc.?

- Melanie Claxton: [00:25:39](#) So for us, it's differed over time a little bit, and that has been partially based on our funding source. Just because something as simple as what we pay for benefits, the rate for using federal dollars is different than using private dollars, than it is for using public dollars. And so as we've seen different funding sources support us in different ways, that has changed what that cost is per student. But it could be somewhere in between, I would say, if I had to take a rough guess, between \$1500 to \$2000 per student. And that also is dependent on not just our enrollment, but this is based on attendance. So I try not to, obviously, use the enrollment numbers if we're not actually capturing all those kids, so that's roughly based on our attendance. So we know that we have the ability to potentially serve more kids to bring down that cost, if we're able to get more kids into the door.
- Karen Pittman: [00:26:31](#) Okay. There are more questions coming in. I want us to move into the attendance issue and then have a chance for Catherine to talk about some of the findings that happened, really sort of across the districts. But one last question and then Catherine, you can sort of answer this in a more general way. When we're talking about full day, how many hours are we talking about?
- Catherine Augustine: [00:26:54](#) The hours ranged from six to eight, so not all of the districts had the same number of hours or the same times during the day. And Melanie, I don't know, what times do the Summer Dreamers program start and end now?
- Melanie Claxton: [00:27:11](#) So it's 8:30 to 4:00 for our students.
- Catherine Augustine: [00:27:18](#) Yeah, and that's pretty typical.
- Karen Pittman: [00:27:20](#) So six to eight hours in the summer, so for someone... and this is not necessarily a question to answer, it's just an observation... for a family that was truly looking for something that combined summer learning with extended childcare to get before they could come back to pick the young person up, that could be an issue if they didn't figure that out. So let's switch to attendance.
- Karen Pittman: [00:27:45](#) You've both mentioned the challenge of that it wasn't hard to get people to sign up, but it was hard to actually get to regular attendance. What were some of the issues? And you've also mentioned transportation as one of the things to provide preemptively to help with that, but what were the issues

around attendance? Did they range from just the perception of the importance of going every day to issues like childcare for the extra hours? What were the issues that seemed to make attendance a problem?

Catherine Augustine: [00:28:17](#)

Well, we saw across the sights that about 20 to 30% of the students who signed up didn't ever come at all, and we don't know very much about those kids. We didn't survey them or try to talk to them, but it was interesting that no matter what strategies the districts tried... so you know, we worked with these districts for six years, and no matter what strategies they tried over those years, that 20 to 30% didn't move. So we saw that no-show rate consistently, and so we started basically telling people to take that into consideration as you're planning your budget, as you're hiring staff. Of course, an individual district's experience could vary from that. They could get more kids to show up, or fewer. But we don't know why they changed their mind and didn't come. Melanie might have more insights there, if she's trying to capture that population. And then we saw that... oh, why don't you go ahead and weigh in on the show up rate, and then I'll talk about what we saw in terms of attendance.

Melanie Claxton: [00:29:27](#)

Great. So one of the things that we recognized, especially early on, is we had a really late start. So we started in I think mid-July, and so we recognized that at that point in time, if kids have been out for a couple weeks and families are trying to figure out what to do with them, they might be putting them in other summer opportunities. And so we actually adjusted our timeline by several weeks to move up closer to the end of the school year, to kind of encourage families to jump directly into Summer Dreamers versus having to look for alternative options for childcare or other sort of summer learning opportunities.

Melanie Claxton: [00:30:04](#)

So that was one thing that we recognized is something that we really needed to work on. And then we also added a particular role recently called an STFS, and so their role is to basically be able to access student information and enter student data and information into our online platform. And what they were tasked with doing is really reaching out to families to really ensure that we're making sure that they're aware that these are the options, we're making them aware of when program starts. We're making sure that we can answer any questions that they may have about transportation or access to transportation prior to.

Melanie Claxton: [00:30:41](#)

For us, the other thing that we recognize and acknowledge recently is that a lot of our information was being sent out only

in English, but we had maybe somewhere between 5% to 10% of our students who were English language learners, meaning that in their family household some of their family members might not even speak English. And so we actually started sending out information about program in the top three or four languages that we have in the district to try to ensure that we were effectively communicating opportunities and information about camp to families as well.

Catherine Augustine: [00:31:21](#)

Yeah, I think those are great strategies, indeed. And once you have secured the population and the kids are attending, the next challenge is getting them to attend on a regular basis, and your use of those staff to call home when kids were absent, etc. is another good strategy. And we saw that on average, students attended about 75% of the time. And there were some kids who came every day, and some kids who only came once and never came back. The average was 75%. We did, in a couple of the summers, survey the families of the kids who attended less than half of the time to try to figure out what was going on, why was their attendance sporadic? And there wasn't any one overwhelming reason for their not attending. Some were going to other camps.

Catherine Augustine: [00:32:16](#)

For a six week camp, which some of these were six weeks, that's a big chunk of time in the summer. So if you want your kid to also go to this one particular football camp or vacation bible school or what have you, you might pull them out of the district program for a week. They also have relatives visiting, they take vacations, the kids get sick. And I'm sure some of the kids didn't like it. Not all of the kids love these programs. So there's a lot of reasons why attendance is not consistent for all kids, and these programs are not mandatory. They're not compulsory, so it's hard to enforce regular attendance, and there are more challenges than there would be, obviously, during the school year when attendance is mandatory.

Melanie Claxton: [00:33:11](#)

And to that point, it's one of the reasons why we know that in order for our students to actually receive the academic and social and emotional learning outcomes from the program they need to attend 20 days, but our program is 27 days because it is really difficult to get a child to attend 100% of the days in a non-mandatory, voluntary program. And so that was another strategy that we took upon ourselves was to say let's give ourselves more time, and let's give our students more opportunities to get as many days as possible within that range.

Melanie Claxton: [00:33:44](#)

We also really looked at our culture, really looked at things that were designed to ensure that kids would feel welcomed in the

space. From things like our all camp meetings, to we have something we call a promise door is where students can receive these tokens, these tickets, or dollars, however you may utilize them at your site for kind of exemplifying our camp rules of have fun, be nice, and work hard. And something as simple as that would also resonate with students. We recently implemented a book fair, so all of our students will probably leave camp with between three to five books to start their own kind of personal home libraries as another way to incentivize attendance.

Melanie Claxton: [00:34:28](#) We even worked with our community partners to say what is it that we can do? So for our perfect attendees, the Pittsburgh Pirates donate tickets every year for them and their families to attend at least one game, and so we are always continuously thinking about what can we do better to focus on early recruitment and sharing information with families so they understand the importance of attendance, but then once we have students in the space, how are we making sure that this is a space that they want to come back to every day?

Karen Pittman: [00:34:57](#) Yeah, those are such innovative and aggressive strategies for thinking about how to get to attendance, and again, the importance of what you said is this is a non-mandatory summer program. Again, we're getting a huge number of questions coming in. I want to make sure that we have time to really hear about the results so that people can see this. I think some of these questions are actually answered in the whole report, and what we will do is to ask Catherine and Melanie at the end of this to sort of look back through the questions and see if there are things that we didn't get to that we can answer. One question before we shift over, because I think it has an impact on thinking about the results, is as the cities were doing recruitment, were there particular students who got strong recommendations to attend the programs, or was this truly just invitations out to all eligible in the age group, and then first come first serve?

Catherine Augustine: [00:36:01](#) It was not the latter in every district, and in fact, because we were randomly selecting students to participate, students were not eligible if they did have to attend a mandatory summer program. You remember I said earlier that those after school programs still do exist, and some places, like at the time, Duval County in Jacksonville had a mandatory summer program for their most struggling readers, and so those kids were not eligible for this program. And in some districts, absolutely. Teachers and principals would handpick students and talk to them, and talk to their parents, and encourage them to attend.

- Catherine Augustine: [00:36:43](#) But for a variety of reasons, they weren't trying to just get in their lower performing students or their lower income students, but there might have been a mix. They might have thought that a student would benefit because they knew that something was happening in their home life, or in their neighborhood, or they weren't quite grasping a particular math concept that they knew would be covered in the program. So there was a lot of individual outreach, but there wasn't an overarching strategy to try to get a particular kind of student into these programs.
- Karen Pittman: [00:37:17](#) Good, good. So let's shift to talking a little bit about the actual study that RAND did, and that you led, Catherine. How you set it up, and what the findings were.
- Catherine Augustine: [00:37:33](#) Okay, great. Well, if you wouldn't mind going back to slide six, or forward to slide six, I should probably say what we did before I tell you what the findings were. So we collected a lot of data, as you might imagine. The study ran for two years. We worked with these districts for longer than that, but we actually looked at outcomes only for two years. And during the course of those two years, we visited these summer sites every day during the summers when they were in operation and conducted interviews with teachers and administrators. We spent 2,000 hours observing the academics and the enrichment components. We did 1200 surveys of those same teachers and administrators, we looked at attendance records for all of the students in the study, and there were 5,600 of those students.
- Catherine Augustine: [00:38:30](#) They were tested on both mathematics and on ELA, and then we looked at other outcome measures as well. We had a measure of social-emotional learning, for example, and we looked at their state test results in math and in English Language Arts. I should say that these kids were rising fourth graders when they started in Summer One, and then rising fifth graders in Summer Two, and the expectation is that they would attend both of those two summers. And so if you want to go to the next slide, I will tell you what we found.
- Catherine Augustine: [00:39:13](#) So Melanie gave away one of the main headlines earlier when she talked about those 20 days. I don't know if anybody heard that or caught that, but the main headline is that those who did attend consistently, and we see a threshold in terms of benefits at that 20 day mark, so those students who attended 20 or more days in the summer benefited the most and they benefited both in mathematics and in English Language Arts, and in social-emotional learning as well. So we try to quantify that, like if someone asks you, "Well how much do they benefit? Do they benefit a lot, did they benefit a little bit?"

Catherine Augustine: [00:39:55](#) When we look at math, for example, which is on this slide and that first bullet, the learning they gained when we looked at the test scores is about 15% of what students learn in math in a year. And that's to be expected. Six weeks represents about 115 of a 52 week year. The summer you could argue represents 25% of a year, and so you would expect that the impact would be somewhere between 11 and 25%, and that's indeed what we see. So it's not that these kids are all of a sudden Einsteins when they go back to school, but they are benefiting. They're continuing to learn, they're keeping up their skills, they're returning to fall better prepared than their peers who did not go through these summer programs.

Catherine Augustine: [00:40:45](#) And we also, in addition to looking at how many days the kids needed to attend to benefit, we looked at how many hours of math and language arts they needed to have before they were outperforming those students in the control group. And it comes to, and you can see in that last bullet, 25 hours of math and 34 hours of ELA. And Melanie made an excellent point when she said they provide more than that if they have 27 days of programming, but if kids are attending, on average, 75% of the time, you need to provide more than 20 days to get to that 20 day mark, and more than 25 hours of math so that on average that's what the kids are getting. So you need to provide more than this in order for the kids, on average, to get this amount, if that makes sense.

Karen Pittman: [00:41:39](#) Yeah. Good. So overall, I'm assuming that the answer is that these programs were effective, and let's just talk a little about sort of a high level summary of why it looks like it is both possible and useful to really take the kind of effort that Melanie described to create sustainable, high-quality summer learning programs. So what makes them effective, and why is this worth doing?

Catherine Augustine: [00:42:18](#) Well, in terms of what makes them effective, if you want to go to the next slide, slide eight. A lot of these components we did anticipate going in. So sufficient duration is one, and we, at the beginning, recommended at least five weeks and we now stand by that in an even more firm manner. Finding out that kids need to attend to benefit is a real no duh finding, right? It would be odd if you could have these programs and kids would benefit from not attending them. But what the study was able to do was really hone in on those 20 days and those number of hours, because a lot of summer programs are just three weeks long, or are two. And they might have other positive benefits associated with them, but it's unlikely that they're going to give the kids a real academic boost.

Catherine Augustine: [00:43:14](#) And then quality instruction is also a no-brainer. Certainly, we did ask that the teachers in the programs who were teaching academics be certified within their districts, but one of the things we were able to do is when we were in the programs for those 2,000 observing instruction, we had an observation protocol that had measures of quality. And we found that for reading in particular, the students' test scores were higher if our measures of quality of instruction were also higher. So again, that's not surprising. All of these components, sufficient duration, regular attendance, quality instruction, are also important during the school year, of course, as is having a positive climate.

Catherine Augustine: [00:44:00](#) And so we also, when we were doing our observations, had an observation measure for climate. And this is kind of like the transportation requirement, in that we found that in the sites that had a more positive climate, student attendance was higher. So the students were getting those benefits because they were showing up, and we can't say that they showed up because the climate was better, but we hypothesized that that was the case because we do see higher attendance in those sites in which we rated the climate to be higher.

Karen Pittman: [00:44:38](#) And I know that you didn't collect this data at sort of the same level of specificity and sort of measurement rigor, but as I recall, the school districts themselves also got information or saw information about social and emotional gains, so we know that this whole idea of positive climate being associated with supporting the integrated development of social-emotional and academic skills. Is there something that was seen in that area that suggests that that was also working here in the summer months?

Catherine Augustine: [00:45:20](#) You know, I don't know the extent to which the climate was related to the social and emotional benefits that we saw. What we measured was self-regulation and self-motivation, and we selected those... SEL is a very broad field encompassing a number of different competencies and behaviors and skills, so we honed in on self-regulation and self-motivation after talking with the districts about what their own goals were in terms of SEL and how they were trying to reach those goals.

Catherine Augustine: [00:45:52](#) And so if you think about self-regulation, for example, it's not surprising that a student who is attending a program regularly in the summer, and so they're in that routine of going to school, getting up early, they're disciplined, it's not surprising that that would spill over into the school year. So we would see that self-regulation and self-motivation are higher in the kids who went

through the summer program than those who weren't. So there might be a way in which the positive climate was also playing into that. We don't know why we saw the findings we did, exactly, but that's one hypothesis.

Karen Pittman: [00:46:31](#) Right. One question that was asked earlier in a number of the questions was did you see any relationship between attendance or climate and the setting for the program? Whether it was in the school building all day versus part day, versus not at all, was there any difference there?

Catherine Augustine: [00:46:51](#) That's a great question, and out of the five, we had two districts that consistently over four years had the highest attendance. One was the most school-based, so no offsite programming. The kids' day looked very much like a school day, so they might have math, and then visual arts, and then reading, and then gym. And that program had very high attendance, and so did the program that was the least like the school day, where the program was offered on an island, was one of the sites. And also on some state forest lands, there was another site, and cabins. So it's an N of five, I don't know what we can make of that, but we certainly did not see higher attendance in the places that were either more or less like school.

Karen Pittman: [00:47:49](#) Interesting. That's really an interesting finding, and I expect we'll get some more comments about that, because it's not necessarily what people who would've expected for folks who think kids and families want a break from what looks like school, so it might be more attractive to go to something that feels more like a camp. But that's an interesting finding. A question that I'm assuming the answer is going to be it varies, but I'll ask it in general across the cities and the districts. Since you were focused on reading and math, in general did the districts select particular literacy and math curricula that were used consistently across the programs, or did this sort of vary from school to school? How was that done?

Catherine Augustine: [00:48:40](#) Well, in each district they used the same curriculum at all of the sites, but across the districts, the curriculum was different. They wanted to connect it to what they were doing during the school year, make sure they were building off of it. They looked at their own data to see where their own students were struggling the most, and they emphasized those particular modules, but it was centralized within each of the districts.

Karen Pittman: [00:49:06](#) Okay, so if folks dig into the entire report, will they find that level of information?

Catherine Augustine: [00:49:10](#) Yes.

Karen Pittman: [00:49:11](#) Okay, perfect. I'm giving them reason to read the whole report, which is good because it is a great report and I think there's a lot of good information in there. So let's move towards sort of wrapping the conversation up as we're getting to the end of the hour. Again, I know there are a lot of specific questions that we haven't gotten answered, but we'll see if we can get Melanie and Catherine to sort of take a few minutes and answer those offline so we can have those as a part of their recording and posting next week.

Karen Pittman: [00:49:50](#) So if we go on, Catherine, to your next slide. Just to sort of reinforce this idea that if you're going to step into this space, you really have to tackle the recruitment and retention issues. And Melanie, you added a lot of specific information about recruitment strategies, but if there's anything else to add in this space, folks have been saying what does that look like? So let's just talk about the importance of really getting this recruitment and the retention thing right, and then go onto talk about some of the promising practices a little bit. So Catherine, we'll start with you and just do it generally, and then Melanie, we'll sort of take it to you to bring it home for us.

Catherine Augustine: [00:50:33](#) Okay, great.

Melanie Claxton: [00:50:34](#) Okay.

Catherine Augustine: [00:50:36](#) On this slide, one of the things we did not mention is that we did see that because some of the districts assumed that every student who signed up would indeed come, they had hired that number of teachers and they ended up having to let some of them go. So that's another reason to try to be realistic, in terms of remembering that there will probably be a no-show rate. But if you want to go to the next slide, it has some recommendations for trying to reduce that no-show rate, and also increase consistent attendance. The first bullet there on developing compelling and accurate recruitment materials and information, it goes beyond what you might think.

Catherine Augustine: [00:51:21](#) So I think that names of programs, like Summer Dreamers Academy, are very important. I hear people in Pittsburgh all the time talking about Summer Dreamers, and wanting to get their kids in, and their kids loving it. It's got brand recognition, and so developing that kind of brand, and materials that go along with it that are consistent from year to year, I think is really helpful. But I also think it's helpful that those materials be accurate. We had, in one of the districts which was not Pittsburgh, there were

great brochures made with pictures of kids doing all these fun activities, and there was no mention of academics on anything.

Catherine Augustine: [00:52:06](#)

I think that some people do recommend disguising academics, and I think that that can happen and can be successful, but in this particular case kids came in that first week and were saying, "This isn't what we signed up for. We don't want to go to math class". And some of the leaders at that program said to me, "What was promised to these children? They're expecting water slides and elephants coming in, and carriage rides". So I do think it's important to portray that this is also an academic program so the kids don't feel misled, and the parents know that their kids are getting an academic experience as well as the fun stuff.

Catherine Augustine: [00:52:52](#)

And then this third bullet here, Melanie talked about this a little bit in terms of some of the incentives that they provide for students. The districts had varying success with different incentive schemes. One of the districts that did have a really high attendance rate, one of the things they did was provide ice cream sundaes on Fridays to the classrooms where kids had attended every day that week. So there was sort of peer pressure to get your friends to come every day, and they reported that that worked well. We obviously didn't have a counterfactual so we don't know if that was what helped drive up their attendance rates, but there were other sites that gave incentives to individual students if they attended every day in a week, and we saw that those were less successful.

Catherine Augustine: [00:53:49](#)

So trying different incentives, experimenting with them, thinking about what might work with your student population I think is worth doing, but for better or worse, we don't come out and say you should definitely try this kind of incentive. And then we talked about fostering a positive site climate as well, and how that was related to attendance. That really comes down to the relationships that the adults in the building have with students. We saw some really nice examples of warm, caring relationships, and we saw some examples of the opposite. So focusing on, as I know Pittsburgh does, that relationship between the adults and the students is really important in this setting, and it's a great opportunity to have time and space for that without the pressures that teachers and staff are under during the school year. Or at least as many pressures they are under during the school year.

Karen Pittman: [00:54:56](#)

Well, just picking up on that last point, and then Melanie, I'll hand this to you to sort of offer some final reflections for us, since you've been so successful at both thinking about how to do these programs and then sustaining them with public

funding. Summer offers, as you said, an opportunity for a slightly more relaxed climate and experience for both the teachers and the students. It also offers, in these cases and opportunities, for teachers to really work hand in hand with community professionals. Can you speak to whether that aspect of summer programming has had any intended or unintended effects on anything? We often get a handoff between school and afterschool, but we don't often get something as intentional as what you've demonstrated in Pittsburgh and what may have been seen in some of the other sites. So were there any findings in that space, formal or informal, that we should leave as takeaways?

Catherine Augustine: [00:56:05](#)

Well, I think, and Melanie can speak to this probably better than I can, but I do think there was learning on both sides. I think we came in with sort of a prior that having these outside organizations would energize the teachers, and perhaps give them some new tips and tricks on motivating kids. And we did see that, but we also came to realize how much wisdom the teachers had in terms of what Melanie was saying earlier. Managing behavior, and developing and sustaining relationships with a large group of students.

Catherine Augustine: [00:56:40](#)

Even though there may have been only 15, sometimes that was more than these community providers were working with at one time, and so there was really learning and sharing on both sides in terms of how to mentor and motivate, and engage the kids. It was a good marriage. There are other benefits to working with community partners beyond the benefits to the individuals in terms of the diversity of experiences, and some of them came with their own funding from their own grants so that the activities were free for the school district. So those were also benefits, but yes, there was learning on both sides.

Karen Pittman: [00:57:25](#)

Great. Melanie, what are your thinking and final words for us?

Melanie Claxton: [00:57:31](#)

So I absolutely agree. I think everything Catherine said is spot on in terms of the learning that happened, but what we also noticed a little bit more informally is that some of those relationships then transition back into the school year, in the form of either after school programs or during the day programs where we're providing additional supports to students. And that's one thing that we wanted to see, and something that we hope to continue to see become more intentional. And then I wanted to just quickly jump back to the recruitment piece because I saw a couple of questions on that. We start in January. We reach out to schools, we try to make sure that we have a mixture of the way that we're really

recruiting and engaging students, and so 60% of our slots are actually what we call guaranteed slots.

Melanie Claxton: [00:58:16](#)

So schools are given an allotment of you have X amount of students that you can recommend, that you know really well, that you know can really benefit from this program. But then also, there's that relationship to encourage them to actually attend in a way that we don't have in our office. And that has actually been really helpful for us because one of the things as we talk about kind of sustaining this program over time is that our office has naturally kind of shrunk in terms of actual human capacity. So we went from having about five full-time dedicated individuals in the first couple of years to now being in an office where we have shared responsibility, so the equivalent of maybe one full-time person. But the work is still high-quality, the work still persists, and that is in part because one of the works that we have done with RAND and the Wallace Foundation around really understanding our model so that we have something that's easily replicable every year.

Melanie Claxton: [00:59:10](#)

But then also too, without our partnerships around and without our community partners who are also bringing in, as Catherine mentioned, some resources in terms of their own funding to support kids. And so what we try to do in our office is really leverage the existing dollars to maximize them as much as possible, so if we know that you aren't receiving funding to serve our students, why would we be competing instead of thinking what are our strengths? What are we bringing to the table? We know that our teachers are high-quality, so we bring that academic component and we know that our partners have experts and teaching artists who know this work better than anyone else, and so that's kind of what they bring to the table. And so for us, as we sustain it, part of it is making sure that we really know and understand our niche, and the other part is really building champions.

Melanie Claxton: [00:59:57](#)

And so not just in the traditional spaces where you might think of your families and your students, but from our facilities team, because we have to be in the building in the summer months when they're trying to clean. So if they can see and value this work, then they can speak to that. From our HR office, who's helping us and supporting us in the hiring process, to all of these different key stakeholders who play an important role in making this happen. Making sure that they understand that what they're doing is part of a larger vision, and that's something that has been really helpful in us sustaining this work, as well as always continuously connecting what we're doing to whatever our district vision and goals are. And so that's kind of our

guiding star. Is what we're doing on the ground really going to get us to where we want to be as a district?

- Karen Pittman: [01:00:44](#) Melanie, thank you so much for sort of taking it back up to that larger vision, and all of the folks in a district who really have to come together to support this commitment to high-quality summer learning. Catherine, thanks for telling us about the study. Again, I'm going to recommend that everyone goes and downloads the full report, and I'm going to turn this back over to Ian. But again, thanks to both of you for a wonderfully informative and fun conversation.
- Catherine Augustine: [01:01:20](#) You're welcome, thank you.
- Melanie Claxton: [01:01:20](#) Thank you.
- Ian Faigley: [01:01:20](#) Thank you very much to Melanie, Catherine, and Karen. Definitely appreciate their very insightful conversation. Wanted to make a few announcements about upcoming sessions. We have our next Thought Leader session, which will be on January 22. It will feature Ron Berger with EL Education, and it'll discuss taking a whole child, whole school approach. Then we have an in-person opportunity to think through and discuss ideas with a wide range of people who are thinking differently and acting differently to improve child and youth outcomes, and that's our Ready by 21 national meeting. That'll be our ninth annual meeting, and it'll take place in Louisville, Kentucky on April 15 to 17. We will be launching registration within the next week, and I'll include that in the followup from today's session. Again, this is being recorded, and we'll share the recording as well as the slides early next week. So thank you very much, everyone, and have a great rest of your day.

