

What We Know about Summer Programs and Virtual Learning: A Thought Leader Session

October 13, 2020

Ian Faigley ([00:01](#)):

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to today's Thought Leadership Roundtable, a conversation about readiness. This conversation is our first webinar in our new Build Forward Together series, part of a new endeavor of the Readiness Projects that will focus on how to bring coherence to local efforts to rebuild and reimagine a community's learning ecosystem. Today's session features Catherine Augustine from the RAND Corporation and Melanie Claxton from 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 student's success in school.

Ian Faigley ([00:42](#)):

Today's session is a follow up on a conversation that we all had in December, and we'll explore the lessons that we've all been learning this summer on how to handle virtual learning and how to handle life in this coronavirus world. Today's session is generously supported by the Wallace Foundation. A little bit about our presenters today. 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.

Ian Faigley ([01:23](#)):

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. 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 School 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 ([02:09](#)):

A few logistical notes for today's call. Please feel free to send your questions and comments via the chat feature. You'll be muted throughout today's session. There are going to be a handful of slides. And lastly, today's session is going to be recorded. We will be providing it to everyone who registered as well as the slide deck and posting it to the forumfyi.org website with any additional resources. It's now my pleasure to turn it over to Karen.

Karen Pittman ([02:37](#)):

Thanks Ian. And again, welcome Catherine and welcome Melanie. And welcome those of you who are joining us. I see the numbers are continuing to climb. It's really important to us as Ian mentioned that we not only do these as live opportunities for a conversation but then post them afterwards. And this is going to be a very important one that kicks off this conversation that we're beginning to have about how we Build Forward Together. And the Readiness Projects are being done in conjunction with the American Institutes of Research and the National Urban League, who have joined the Forum. All of us were deeply involved in the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, professionally known as the SEAD Commission and are also a part of the SoLD Alliance. The Science of Learning and Development.

Karen Pittman ([03:29](#)):

And then all of our organizations obviously have had decades and decades of commitment to really supporting learning and development and all the places where it happens, but this recent push over the past three or four years to really think about the science of how learning has happened has given us an opportunity even before the pandemic to really think and talk differently about learning, not just talk about where and when it happens. So we talk about school and afterschool, but really understand more about how it happens, why it happens with whom it happens and get down to the setting levels. Understand how we really can create quality settings, where all young people feel safe and supported so they can demonstrate their potential and build critical skills and competencies.

Karen Pittman ([04:14](#)):

The pandemic has helped us really recognize that we have to see and hear differently. See, and hear from parents, see and hear from young people, seeing and hear from all the adults who spend time with young people, look at our communities differently as places where learning can happen and figuring out how to do this together. And all of that is important, not just so we can build partnerships. And we're going to hear about some critical partnerships that have been built in Pittsburgh as a part of the Summer Learning Project, but also how we act and react differently as a part of an ecosystem.

Karen Pittman ([04:49](#)):

And that term ecosystem gets used a lot these days, and it means different things to different people. But for us, the most basic idea of an ecosystem is one piece can influence the other piece. So rather than thinking in silos and thinking, "I'm going to make decisions that are most efficient for my system or for my organization or for my family, we have to recognize the decisions that we make have an influence and have a ripple effect. They change the ecosystem so that others have to react and respond." And that's really what we're trying to do with this idea of Build Forward Together. The piece that we're going to start to emphasize today and is hidden under all of this is if we're going to think and talk differently about how learning happens, if we're going to see and hear differently from all of the folks in the ecosystem so that we can act and react differently as we're making our own decisions, that actually means we have to coordinate differently.

Karen Pittman ([05:47](#)):

Everybody can't run around trying to get all that information about what's happening in the ecosystem. Everybody can't figure out, as they're making their own decisions, how to sit down and really have a deeper understanding of what the other folks are doing and how they think and how they listen. We need coordinated horsepower from every place, from the individual level where we're helping young

people and families get better information so that they can make better decisions up to the organization in the classroom level. So that the folks who are working with our young people more intentionally have access to information up to the policy level, and the system level. So this idea of really being able to systematically coordinate and anticipate how to support an ecosystem and how all of our individual decisions support that ecosystem to make it more equitable for all young people is the idea that we're doing.

Karen Pittman ([06:40](#)):

So if you can advance one more slide, Ian and then I'll finish my quick five minutes. We talk about building forward together, and we've picked those words intentionally because it is about building. We don't just want to react and paste things together. We want to use the fact that we come through this disruption to create opportunities to permanently build on what we know about learning and development. We want to go forward very intentionally. So there's no chance of going back. And we know people are talking about reimagining and rethinking. And so all of that has a forward push to it. And then clearly we want to do this together. And this is really an opportunity for us to acknowledge the role that all of the ships were all now ships in a storm. And when that storm comes down, we don't just want the ships to go their separate ways.

Karen Pittman ([07:27](#)):

We actually really want to have figured out how to make sure that we're taking full advantage of all of the opportunities that are there for young people. And we're doing it across time from spring to summer, et cetera. So one argument, and one thing that we're committed to is when we come back in 2021, how can we help school and community leaders, policy and practice leaders think about an 18 month game plan. That's not just, "How do we get through spring?" Then let's do summer. Then let's hope that it's back to normal by the next school year." But how can we take everything that we've learned to really make this a continuous opportunity for expanded learning and development and engage all of those partners.

Karen Pittman ([08:12](#)):

Today we're going to hear more about what's happening in K-5, which is critically important. And a lot of attention is happening in that space clearly during the pandemic because of the clear overlap with childcare. As we do the Build Forward Together work going forward, we're also just going to make sure we make the conversation focus on adolescents. Not to the exclusion of K-5, but often when we talk K-12 we talked generically and we know that adolescents are really responding very differently in this time.

Karen Pittman ([08:39](#)):

So as we go across the next couple of months, you'll hear us also bring folks back to talk about what's happening with middle and high school students. But today, we're really delighted to have Catherine and Melanie come back to join us because when they were with us last December, they were describing the work that they've done over the past several years to really build this coordinated system, to make sure that we're optimizing summer as an opportunity for both learning and experiencing that supports young people moving forward academically, but also gives them ample opportunities to explore their interests, to really make sure that they're maximizing their time together and to use summer effectively as that more flexible time where learning and development can happen.

Karen Pittman ([09:29](#)):

So the question that we had, and we posted to them and asked them to come and talk to us about and Catherine's going to reflect not just on Pittsburgh, but on all of the sites that were part of this work. Was you all had been building up this important coordinating muscle before COVID and then we hit spring and we hit summer. What did being prepared do? What were you better able to do? How were you able to pivot better? What did it mean that you'd already been building this muscle when the time came to actually act differently because of the disruption?

Karen Pittman ([10:08](#)):

So we're going to start with Catherine giving us an overview of what the capacity that had been built and the impact that summer learning done this way was already having. And then we'll have Melanie pick up there and take us forward through the lessons that you all have learned because you had this capacity. So please, as you're listening, put questions in the chat. As Ian said, we'll have those open and try to make this as interactive a conversation as we can. But I'm looking forward now to just sitting back and listening. So Catherine, I will turn it over to you, put myself on mute and you back up and give us some background on how we got to this opportunity.

Catherine Augustine ([10:50](#)):

Great. Thank you so much, Karen. Ian, if you want to go to the next slide. I am really excited about your building forward agenda, and I'm glad that you see summer programming as a coordinating force. And I thought I would start just by reminding people of what that looked like pre-COVID. You're absolutely right, that in Pittsburgh and the other cities we studied, the summer program leaders were coordinating what happened in the summer to what had happened in the prior school year, what would happen in the next school year, and how to bring community partners in to strengthen those connections. And they did that very well. And so just as a reminder, clearly students were benefiting from these summer programs. We were able to document that through our research and return to school having benefited in both math and if they attended regularly in reading as well.

Catherine Augustine ([11:44](#)):

And there are several summer programs that intentionally focus on social and emotional learning as well as academics horizons for you, this one of those, for example. And so those students were also coming back to school, having improved those competencies over the summer, and they had forged new connections to adults in the summer and to other students, and also developed new hobbies through the enrichment offered to them in these summer programs. Whether it be bike riding or swimming or some form of visual or performing art, many hobbies that they could continue to explore through the school year. And teachers also brought what they learned in their summer programs into the school year. And there are summer programs that are very intentional about that.

Catherine Augustine ([12:33](#)):

BellXcel is one, for example, that focuses a lot of professional development on teachers during the summer that they can then bring back to bear in their classrooms in the school year. And teachers also in some districts, try out new curriculum over the summer and get an opportunity to work with a coach on new lesson plans that they will then use during the school year and community organizations too, that our partners in these summer programs are building stronger connections over the summer to district staff, to students, to families so that they can continue to work with those students during the

school year. They might develop a new after-school program as a result of their interactions with the summer program or attract more students to preexisting programs.

Catherine Augustine ([13:19](#)):

So this is a big ecosystem, and I love the notion of thinking about summer as an anchor or a coordinator. And I'm excited to hear what Melanie will tell us about how this ecosystem played out during COVID and what her ideas are for building forward.

Karen Pittman ([13:41](#)):

That's great. And Catherine, one more thing I'm going to ask you before we switch over to Melanie to get more specific, as I remember the last conversation that we had, you had really talked about in this last box of community organizations developing stronger connections. A lot of the information that you were able to pull together to help community organizations think about how to optimize summer learning by getting a better handle on how to basically navigate the dynamics that summer learning isn't mandatory. And so lots of young people enroll, but then they don't always attend. And what were some of the things that across the sites you all were able to learn about really how to help families get the most out of summer and what supports they needed to have to get the most out of the summer?

Catherine Augustine ([14:37](#)):

Well, families needed a few things. So working parents need programs that are full day, that have free transportation, that have free meals so that their kids can be engaged while the parents working. But the kids themselves need a hook, right? To come back every day. And that's really where these community organizations came in. I mentioned some of the activities a minute ago. There was also rock climbing and sand volleyball and science activities and all sorts of things that kids would continue each day to build on from the day before and within those activities, there were competitions built in, there were field trips in some cases so that the kids felt like they were developing a skill over the course of the summer and participating in an activity with their peers that they found to be fun and rewarding.

Catherine Augustine ([15:31](#)):

And as students were aging in these programs, the older kids had an opportunity to pick which activities they wanted to participate in. Which also gave them a stronger affinity to what they were doing, because it's something that they had chosen. So yeah, great point that the community organizations provided an important glue or stickiness to these programs that helped get the kids to come back on a day-to-day basis.

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

Good. And since we're in this looking still at your graphic, when there were teachers who were then in this different experience of thinking about how to coordinate summer, did any of those lessons pay off of what it takes to make sure when people are engaged when their attendance is voluntary, as opposed to mandatory? So if we're thinking about how to Build Forward Together, so you can see where I'm going. What are some of the lessons that we learn because you get the summer, and as you said, parents really want a full day, but young people want something different.

Karen Pittman ([16:38](#)):

Getting that balance and getting that balance with community organizations and teachers, it seems like there was a lot of opportunity for you all to learn things that really could be blended into the school year

now that everything is more fluid and we're looking at hybrid and flexibility. So was there anything else before we turn to the specifics of how this happened in Pittsburgh that you want to share that can be useful for this Build Forward Together idea?

Catherine Augustine ([17:02](#)):

Sure. Well, a lot of the teachers that we surveyed at the end of the summer programs talked about how they felt more relaxed in the summer because they didn't have the accountability pressures that they face during the school year. Now I'm not advocating that testing go away or anything like that. But because they were more relaxed, they were able to try things that they don't have a chance to try during the school year. And a lot of them either have their own initiative or because the program incorporated it, tried new social and emotional learning strategies. Whether it was restorative practices where they would have a circle in the classroom with the students or a warm welcome of sorts, or whether they would personalize greetings for each child.

Catherine Augustine ([17:48](#)):

And that's something that I think is really cool asking children how they'd like to be greeted each morning and then executing that. And what those little experiments allowed the teachers to do is connect to students on a deeper level. And they could carry that into the school year. So maybe they tried restorative practices in the summer and found that X, Y, Z did not work and they weren't going to do that again, but ABC did, and it allowed them to have a stronger connection with students. They could do that experiment in the summer because there were fewer accountability pressures and then carry on whatever approach worked for them to having stronger student-teacher relationships in the school year.

Karen Pittman ([18:33](#)):

That's great. So you've given us a lot to really take into this idea of how do we think and talk differently about learning what would happen in the summer. And now we'll just shift into how did you all use that, Melanie? This has been quite a process to go from you all were planning in a way to do summer, and then summer was a very different opportunity and now you're into the school year. So what's been happening?

Melanie Claxton ([19:00](#)):

There was so, so many things. First, I'll just say, thank you for having me this afternoon. It's a pleasure to be here with you all. And I want to take a step back and say that while I'm so excited to speak about summer dreamers, because it is definitely a program that's near and dear to my heart, my office does so much more than just [inaudible 00:19:21]. And so we really exist to ensure that all Pittsburgh Public School students have access to experiences and opportunities that enhance compliment and really extend the learning that occurs during the school day. And we do that through our coordinated network of community providers. So my work extends beyond just the work that we do with summer dreamers into the school year, around how we always making sure that students have access to the resources they need to be successful.

Melanie Claxton ([19:50](#)):

And I will say much like every other school district, the onset of coronavirus was very telling and so for us, it was whether or not we would even have programming. So whether we would be able to meet in person, is this something we would have to take a year off? We had just celebrated our 10 year

anniversary and so we were really looking forward to continue this work for our students and our families. But most importantly, for us as a school district, what would that mean for the last three months of the school year? And so for us, unfortunately, we weren't able to pivot as quickly as we would've liked to be able to move into this virtual learning component for those final three months. And partly because as a district, we weren't quite ready to be one-to-one.

Melanie Claxton (20:35):

We hope to be so by the end of the calendar year. But that mean we had to think differently about summer. And so, while I was grateful that our leadership was still really committed to mitigating the effects of summer learning loss, they also wanted to ensure that now we were going to be able to address any potential school year learning loss from those last three months where we had this slow rollout of packets and materials. Because when we received the announcement, it was a hard stop for us. And so we knew that our governor was going to make an announcement soon stating that we probably would have to close. We assumed we have a little bit more time to get materials into the hands of our students. And unfortunately, we didn't have that type of time to really respond as quickly as we would have liked to.

Melanie Claxton (21:19):

And so our district leadership took a step back and said, "What can we do for students?" And so really what it was, we went from one, being unsure if we would have summer to now moving into a space where we were going to be offering more summer opportunities. We're actually going to expand our offerings to really begin to target some of the grade levels that we thought might traditionally not be served during this time. And so, while we were still sticking true to our summer program, what we did is we really condensed what we typically do for our summer dreamers K-5, but we made sure that we were really retaining all of the cultural elements of the program and making sure that it was high quality instruction that really focused on math and reading. We didn't want to stray away from the things that we knew would make us successful, but we also wanted to make sure that it was like fun and engaging and relevant for students.

Melanie Claxton (22:07):

And so that meant not just focusing on the academics, but continuing to bring in those community-based partnerships to enhance our offerings and really allow our students to be able to explore and discover new talents and passions. So, in addition to that, we added two new programs as I mentioned, the first being this workforce development program for our eighth and ninth grade students. And so it was really focused on being project-based learning, hands-on for exploration and a way that they could earn wages or potential incentives for participating. And really at a time when we know that a lot of their families are maybe potentially suffering economically, this gave us an opportunity in a way to invest in our students and our families, but also develop their skillset at the same time.

Melanie Claxton (22:51):

And that's finally for our older high school students, our 10th and 11th graders, what to do was figure out how do we help them continue to enhance their academic skills over the summer months so that they can be better prepared and be better successful as they were returning to school in the fall. And so while I will say that this was not the most ideal transition for us, just the simple fact of moving to virtual did open up some doors for us. And now we were able to utilize funds that we no longer had to spend

such as transportation or facility maintenance and really reinvest that back into programming for students.

Melanie Claxton ([23:26](#)):

And so these are some of the things that we really wanted to make sure that we were doing throughout the summer was once again, providing as many opportunities for students to not just mitigate the potential effects of summer learning loss, but also address any learning loss that could have happened during the spring months.

Karen Pittman ([23:44](#)):

Good. So already got questions coming in. Melanie, talk a little bit more about the relationship between Pittsburgh Public Schools and the CBLs. How does that work? How does that partnership actually work?

Melanie Claxton ([23:56](#)):

So there are a couple of ways that we do this partnership. So specifically in the summer months, we have an RFP that we put out. And so just as importantly as the academic component of our program, the afternoon piece is really focused on all enrichment base. And so as Catherine alluded to, you do need that hook, that way to really engage students that they may continuously participate. And for us those have been our providers. And so we have organizations that have worked with us all 11 years, that we've had programming. And so we continue to work with them as they are experts in the field. And so just like I was going to talk about in my next slide around some of the research behind this work, what we really realized is to make it effective program, we had to have experts in each component of it.

Melanie Claxton ([24:39](#)):

So we bring in our teachers who are experts in the academic curriculum face pieces. And so we bring in our community-based partners who have expertise in the arts, who do this work for a living because it makes it really important to make sure that you have the expert in front of the child being able to provide that high quality instruction and engagement. But beyond that, we work with these organizations year around. And so as a district, we actually have a formal process for engaging and working with community-based partners. As of this year, the beginning of the year, we have 121 community-based partners that we work with who serve at least one child in each one of our [inaudible 00:25:16] across all 50 plus buildings we have as a district.

Melanie Claxton ([25:20](#)):

We provide them with data to help inform their programmatic practices. And they provide once again, these really unique services from things like mentoring, tutoring, as well as SATACTprep, dance, arts, music if you name it, they're engaging in it in some way. And so what we're always trying to do is compliment the resources that we have as a district with the resources we know that we have as a community and so we bring that together really effectively during the summer months.

Karen Pittman ([25:51](#)):

That's great. What percentage of young people are participating in the afterschool and summer programs compared to the overall population of young people in those schools?

Melanie Claxton ([26:07](#)):

So during the school year we serve, and I will say this, a couple of things is that we are very much reliant on our providers to submit their attendance information to us. And so we usually have about a 70% response rate in terms of providers that are submitting data to us. And we know that at least 33% of the district students are engaging in some form of either summer afterschool component throughout the year. My anticipation is that it's probably a bit higher than that, but the fact that a third of our students are engaging in this speaks a lot to the power if could really coordinate well and effectively.

Karen Pittman ([26:46](#)):

So you think that number could get higher?

Melanie Claxton ([26:49](#)):

Oh, absolutely. I actually think that number is probably more higher than we have been able to collect, but we are actually introducing a new data management platform called CitySpan this fall, and that will allow us to better track not just if students are participating, but what specific programs that they're participating in and is it aligned with the supports that have been identified or the types of supports that they have identified as needing. And so allow us to do a lot more and understand a lot more how these partnerships work within our buildings and works amongst the community. But I do anticipate that probably more than a third of our students are engaging in some sort of OST opportunity currently.

Karen Pittman ([27:30](#)):

Great. And let me just take a quick question back to Catherine, as we're waiting for more questions to come in. And I know you've got a couple of more slides to catch us up with where you came into the fall. But this hybrid summer model of morning of concentrated academics and afternoon of enrichment interest based activities that allowed you to both keep interest up and keep attendance up so you could get the gains that you wanted. Were the gains that you saw in the summer comparable to gains you'd expect to get in the school year? Greater, less, what's the benefit?

Catherine Augustine ([28:10](#)):

That question, I'm assuming is for me.

Karen Pittman ([28:12](#)):

Yes.

Catherine Augustine ([28:13](#)):

And they were exactly what you would expect from this timeframe, as long as the students attended regularly. And for us that regularly meant 20 days, at least or more in a 25 to 30 day summer program. So when we look at that length of time and we look at the outcomes on student tests at the end of the summer, it's exactly the level of learning that we would see for that length of time in the school year. So that was not surprising, right? I mean, these students were not doing math for the entire day in the summer. They were having math for about the same amount of time they would have on a normal school day. So we didn't expect to see much greater learning gains in the summer or lower gains. And so what we saw is what we had anticipated.

Catherine Augustine ([29:01](#)):

We didn't know how important attendance would be or regular attendance, but that obviously makes sense too. It would be odd if students benefited when they didn't attend and whether they were doing math or reading, the lesson plans included building skills on top of each other. So if a student was not attending early on, it would be harder for them to catch up if they attended later. And another thing I wanted to add is that the Pittsburgh Public Schools and getting 30% of its students to attend or engage in out-of-school time programming is on the high end, in terms of what we see nationally.

Catherine Augustine ([29:41](#)):

We usually see about 20% or so of kids engaged in out-of-school time programming that's coordinated through the school district. Certainly lots of kids are doing things on their own and through their families outside of what the school district is connected to. But I think that makes it all the more important for us to learn from districts like Pittsburgh in terms of what they're doing and how they're achieving that number. And that's great, Melanie that you think you could even attract more kiddos to those out-of-school time activities.

Karen Pittman ([30:16](#)):

Great. So Melanie, I'll give it back to you. Anything else you want to tell us about how summer went and changed before you move into, and as you said, you take these things year round. So then you had to get to planning for the fall. So I will hand it back to you.

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

Great. I'll just say, as you were asking earlier, in terms of how do we make this work, which is we relied on what we've known. And so the benefit of going into your 11th year, having done this for some time now is that we had a lot of systems that were already set in place. So we were able to pivot very quickly. And I will also say the nature of the out-of-school time space is that they are nimble and flexible and adaptable just on a regular. And so for us being able to work with our community partners, it was helpful to see how they could transition to virtual programming because they actually started offering virtual opportunities before summer even started.

Melanie Claxton ([31:07](#)):

So organizations that weren't doing it before, were now able to create those opportunities. And it's one thing that we're looking at, how do we maintain this beyond just what happened this summer as a response to the pandemic because what we also know in Pittsburgh is that certain communities are a little bit more over saturated with opportunities and others are not just based on their locality. And so this allowed us to actually provide more opportunities and accessibility to resources by going virtual in a way that we would not have been able to do with our traditional brick and mortar programming. And so that's one thing that we're hoping to be able to continue to do through our partner coordination is maintain those opportunities for students across the city.

Melanie Claxton ([31:51](#)):

But I will say, we also relied on the research. So we wanted to make sure that whatever we were doing was still high quality and was try and true and test it. And so we made sure that it was still a 27-day program. As I mentioned before, we were hiring certified teachers. We had a week of intensive pre-camp staff training. So not just on what the curriculum would be for the summer, but what does instruction actually look, sound, and feel like in this virtual environment, in a way that we know for a lot

of our teachers, because we've asked them directly said has been really helpful for them as they're now engaging in it, because the district has chosen to be remote for the first nine weeks.

Melanie Claxton ([32:26](#)):

And so we know that our students who participated also got a leg up in this space as well. And so it's just one way in terms of thinking about the benefits of summer, is it allows you to be able to... I don't want to say experiment or do we want our kids, but it allows creative with the way that you're engaging and learning to then influence the way that we do things when it comes to the fall. And that's really what I know district leadership was doing. Was they were looking to summer to see, "Could we make this work and could we make this work on a large scale?" And I think that we were successful in that.

Melanie Claxton ([32:57](#)):

We were intentional about being cognizant of screen time. So we included brain breaks. We were intentional about incorporating SEL based activities and support for students throughout the summer. But I would say the biggest thing is that the entire time we were taking notes. And so we were looking at how do we continue to promote attendance and retention? We actually saw that in our virtual summer program, our attendance rate increased. And so that was something we were a bit surprised to see that we had students attending more frequently and regularly in this virtual opportunity.

Melanie Claxton ([33:29](#)):

We looked at what are some effective methods of communication with staff and families? We were able to pilot and test some technology and navigate some technology issues that the district would later at face come this fall, but we were able to get ahead of it because of the work that we had done during the summer time. And that's really how we hope that the district sees this work as a way to highlight and innovate new ways of approaching and thinking about learning for students. And so with that...

Karen Pittman ([34:03](#)):

Jump in.

Melanie Claxton ([34:03](#)):

I was just going to transition to how this worked for us this fall.

Karen Pittman ([34:10](#)):

Let me ask you one... I mean, go ahead and translate to that slide. That's great. Let me ask you, or just comment on a couple of things. You packed so many things into that last description of what was able to happen in the summer that I'd love for us to come back, really read the notes and unpack. Just a couple of things as I was listening. One is you commented on the flexibility and the nimbleness that community organizations have compared to the district. We'd love to comment on that. And then second, you said, and you were able to have... the district was primed to listen and learn from them. Could you just talk a little bit more because I think both of those things we don't always see in other communities that the district leaders are really primed to listen and learn.

Karen Pittman ([35:02](#)):

You also mentioned the importance of having data, so you were really shaping that listening and learning process. So can you just say a little bit more about each of those, when you say that your

community organizations were nimble, how and why were they able to be more nimble? Who were the district leaders that were listening and learning? And how were you bringing that information into them?

Melanie Claxton ([35:24](#)):

I think just as someone who has experienced in both spaces, just even the decision-making model and recognizing that school districts are bureaucratic institutions. And so there's a lot more checks and balances. There are a lot more things and processes that you have to navigate to get to certain decision points. And I think in the out-of-school time space, a lot of that doesn't exist. And so they have this freedom and ability to think of something and say, "Hey, here's a solution that I can enact tomorrow and let's try it out. Let's see what happens." It may not work, but then the next day we can try something new. And I think within our system, we have a little bit more of who do we need to coordinate with? Who has the table to make this decision happen, which creates a little bit of a lag.

Melanie Claxton ([36:11](#)):

And I understand that the importance and the value of having checks and balances, but with that comes some of the inability to be as flexible and nimble as we would like to be. And so I think that's why our partners were so much more successful because they didn't have some of those same barriers. But I was fortunate in terms of thinking about district leadership that we presented our plans to our executive cabinet, and that includes all of our chiefs as well as our superintendent. And so from the onset, we really had buy in from that group of high stakeholders in this work. And like I said, they were really looking to us to say, "What can we try this summer?" Because we were fully synchronous.

Melanie Claxton ([36:52](#)):

We're not necessarily doing that this fall because of the number of hours, the length of the program, but we were able to be fully synchronous in a way that we as a district had not been before. So I think they all understood what this could mean in terms of trying some new things, helping them better be prepared for the fall. Even we typically don't do testing in this sense, but we even tried out our map testing just to see how that would work in our system in a virtual low stakes environment and learned a lot about it. And learned a lot about it in ways that helped us think differently about how we would implement that in the fall.

Melanie Claxton ([37:26](#)):

And so we were fortunate, like I said, to have the air of our district leadership who really has been bought into this work and has really been supporting this work. And just even, I think the last time we talked, I talked about the fact that we've gone from a program that was predominantly grant funded to a program that is now almost 100% district funded. And so it's a different type of investment when you're making that transition and it requires a certain level of buy-in and commitment to the work to do that.

Karen Pittman ([37:56](#)):

Wonderful. Again, I could ask you more questions, but I won't. I will let you continue to tell us how you got the fall.

Melanie Claxton ([38:02](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. And so even before we started implementing our summer program, we as a district were putting together our plan for reopening and thinking about what that would mean. And so we came up with this new initiative called All In to Reopen Our Schools, because one thing that I think that we've realized over time is that we are not in this work alone, nor can we do this work alone. This partnership between the district, even our local teacher's union, as well as some state advocacy groups to think about how do we all come together to develop a plan to really safely reopen and launch our schools. And it had a multitude of sub-committees focused on things like academics, health and wellbeing of our families, the actual safety and health of reopening buildings, as well as community partner engagement.

Melanie Claxton ([38:52](#)):

And so within our community partner engagement group, there were a couple of things that really stood out. And so what we realized is that we have such a rich resource base here in Pittsburgh locally. So how do we tap into those resources to meet the ever evolving needs of our families, especially during this pandemic? And so, as a district, we started thinking about what does that mean for not just in this moment as we're addressing those immediate needs, but how does this create a long-term system change so that we're working more strategically with community partners to continuously meet those needs of our families years down the road.

Melanie Claxton ([39:34](#)):

But one thing stood out the most and we can move on to the next slide please. And that was our remote learning hub model and the necessity of it, because what we really wanted to do was make sure that for our families that were returning to work, that they had somewhere safe to make sure that their students could still engage in this remote in-person support. And so as a district, we had a very lofty goal and the goal was that for every K-5 family in need, we would create some system or be a part of developing a system that made that a reality for them, so that if they needed to return to work, that they would know that their child could be kept in a safe space and continue learning appropriately with the necessary supports.

Melanie Claxton ([40:17](#)):

And so that requires some more internal planning. And so we work not just with my office, but our office of community schools to develop what we called this two phase model. And so the first was just recognizing that a lot of families were not aware of what was out there and what they had access to. And so we began to start making those connections to families. We began to create this marketing campaign that included our social media, that included updating our website, that included robocalls to families, just to say, "Here are the resources, please make sure that you're utilizing them."

Melanie Claxton ([40:48](#)):

And then the second phase for us was recognizing that maybe they weren't enough. So we weren't quite sure what the need was going to be. And so in the event that we needed to make sure that all of these needs could be met for every family. Then we had to think about how do we increase our provider capacity to serve students. So how do we really tap into their base, their expertise, and then help them build their capacity to serve students more effectively and efficiently. And as a district, financially this pandemic took a bit of a toll on us. So we didn't have the funds to create this, but we had to sit here and say like, "What is it that we can do?"

Melanie Claxton ([41:23](#)):

So we looked internally. And so I started working with some of our departments around our curriculum instruction. I started working with our operations, our food services, our facilities, and what we did is we did a couple of key things that necessarily weren't costly for us, but we think were really impactful for our providers. So something as simple as we were able to distribute single student desks to remote learning hubs so that they could appropriately social distance and serve students. Our food service staff is coordinating daily to give out hundreds of meals to these hubs to make sure that our students have adequate meals.

Melanie Claxton ([42:01](#)):

And then also our Curriculum and Instruction Department has offered trainings and support for our remote learning hub providers. And we've been able to share things like our curriculum maps, our scopes and sequences, we've created how to videos on how to navigate e-learning so that they can best support our students. And so we're thinking about how do we take our internal expertise, the things that we do well and use that to enhance the work that they're doing while they're also doing this really great service to our community.

Karen Pittman ([42:32](#)):

That's an incredible amount of coordination. So a question that's come in is A, is all this work really managed through your office and how big is your office?

Melanie Claxton ([42:44](#)):

I always like to say we have a leader mean team. So my office is two full-time staff members. And if we're fortunate, I have a part-time intern. So we do a lot of work but we never do it alone. And so while we are probably the initial touch point for a lot of our providers. So if there are any requests for information training, connections that will come through my office, but we're also working very closely with every single department within the district. And partly being able to work with the organization or these departments during the summertime has led us to be more successful in working with them during the school year.

Melanie Claxton ([43:27](#)):

Because I tell people all the time, we run a mini school district in the summer. So I work with curriculum instruction, HR, IT, our data research evaluation, transportation food service, you name it. We're coordinating and working together effectively in planning for and leading up to summer every year. And so we relied on those relationships to be able to make sure that we were still connecting to those resources with our providers during the school year.

Karen Pittman ([43:56](#)):

That's amazing. How did the providers who would have been positioned to be providing an out-of-school, which meant part-time, how were they able to respond to the request to basically up their hours?

Melanie Claxton ([44:12](#)):

The great thing is we've also been working closely with our Department of Human Services and so they had some CARES dollars leftover. And so while that funding source will only last until December, they'll

put out a quick RFP to provide additional funding for community-based organizations who wanted to operate in a hub capacity. And one of the things that we're doing as a school district, once again, trying to leverage our position is that we're actively advocating at the state level for additional funding for these providers to continue this work past December.

Melanie Claxton (44:45):

So once again, we may not have the funds, but we're looking at how can we leverage our own internal resources, such as our advocacy efforts to support that initiative. And then we're also pushing for our state, which I believe has just submitted for the ability to utilize 21st century dollars during the school day, because typically those funds couldn't be used during the school day because it would look like it was supplanting the work, but now that we're in this remote capacity, we're looking to have those restrictions lifted as well.

Karen Pittman (45:17):

Amazing. Are all of the hubs in your community organizations or some of them in your school buildings and are teachers connecting these at all remotely or otherwise, or are these all the staff of the community organizations?

Melanie Claxton (45:33):

So the hubs are all located in community spaces. And so one of the things that we have been working internally is figuring out whether or not our spaces would be accessible to. Being remote learning hubs, especially in some of the communities that I mentioned before that tends to have less access to community-based facilities, we have a conversation that we're still discussing, but we haven't been able to move that forward just yet. We do know that once we come back in this hybrid model, we are going to allow providers back into our buildings for before and after school programming. But still trying to figure out if there's a way to navigate having them in our space for remote learning as well. And I apologize, what was the second part of that question?

Karen Pittman (46:14):

Are teachers coming in remotely? How are teachers connecting to the hubs?

Melanie Claxton (46:18):

Yeah, at the moment it's just remotely. So students are logging into their virtual classrooms at the hubs. We are encouraging our school administrators to make sure that they're connecting with the hubs. So actually the gentleman in this picture is the principal at one of our community-based schools. This is one of our community-based sites and he's a principal for the school that feeds into that particular site. So we know that our school administrators have been engaging with and visiting locations to figure out how they can best support teachers that this time are not necessarily in the hubs, but we have been looking into opportunities such as the Retired Teacher administration has reached out to us to see if there are opportunities for them to support tutoring and mentoring both virtually and in person as well.

Karen Pittman (47:07):

Great. So I know we have about 10 minutes left before we hand it back to Ian to give us instructions on what may be coming next. Catherine, I want to get you back in the conversation. I'm not sure how much of this update you knew about ahead of time, but as we're thinking about this idea of Building Forward Together and having more intentionality between bringing some of the innovation that can happen in

summer because of the flexibility into the school year, which now can happen because we're all moving in these hybrid spaces and looking at things like hubs. What stands out to you as a researcher? What would your wishlist be of how will you take advantage of these opportunities as they're happening in Pittsburgh and other places?

Catherine Augustine ([47:52](#)):

Well, this example of these hubs is incredible to me and it provides an opportunity for things that typically happen in a school with the traditional instruction and things that typically happen in and out-of-school time setting, which might involve more mentoring or tutoring one-on-one from adults to happen in the same place. And in theory, interwoven throughout the day, right? I know that in some districts, for example, the intention is for in a class period of 40 minutes or so for there to be 20 minutes of instructor led teaching and then 20 minutes of time to complete the assignments. And to the extent that that's happening, if students are in a hub like this, where they have a mentor or a tutor, helping them with those assignments, that's incredible because that's oftentimes when students who are struggling fall behind, right?

Catherine Augustine ([48:48](#)):

Students who have no problem completing those assignments, move on ahead while other students struggle. And if they're struggling in a classroom of 30 kids, the teacher might not get to them all individually. So I would love to be able to think more about how this interwoven approach could be sustained. How community providers could be providing that one-on-one attention, mentoring and tutoring, not just compartmentalized afterschool, but interwoven throughout the day and maybe into a longer school day, right? Where kids are staying in the same place for longer but having that one on one attention interspersed throughout the day.

Karen Pittman ([49:30](#)):

Right. And Melanie, I'm going to give it back to you for last word, but are these hubs open a longer day?

Melanie Claxton ([49:37](#)):

So a lot of our hubs are because they operate traditionally as afterschool programs. So they've just extended their day beyond to make sure they're still continuing to meet the needs of our families just beyond having that time during the school day. And I guess I'll just end with saying that, we learned a lot about ourselves during this time. So not just about our weaknesses, but really our strengths and our strengths are within our community partnerships and our ability to be able to pivot so quickly because of these community partnerships to make sure that we're meeting the needs of our families and our students on a regular basis. And so I continue to be grateful for the work that they're doing and I continue to try to push this as Catherine was talking about, as a way that we can continue to approach our work and not just something we're doing because of the moment is mandating that we do it this way.

Karen Pittman ([50:26](#)):

Amazing. Well, I would certainly be delighted to stay on and ask more questions, but I know we're at the end of our time. We have started with collaborative communications, the regular project, something called bright spots and clearly this is a bright spot example of what can happen when coordination really happens at all levels. And if there's ever a testament to why a small but mighty coordinating team that really has coordination as your primary goal is valuable, Melanie, you've given it to us. So you guys have

given us a huge amount of things to think about. We will be back to get more information from you I expect, and it won't take this long next time. But thank you so much for the opportunity for sharing this with us and congratulations on the work you've done. Ian, last words?

Ian Faigley ([51:18](#)):

Well, I just want to thank everyone for joining us today and want to send a special thank you to Melanie, Catherine, and Karen for your insightful remarks. I just wanted to mention that there are a number of thought leader sessions and webinars being planned for the fall and spring right now. One that's coming up pretty soon is through the Teachers College of Columbia University. They'll be offering some insights on collective impact in education efforts, and that will be next Thursday at 2:00 PM. So please join us for that session. And again, thank you all and have a wonderful afternoon.

Karen Pittman ([51:54](#)):

Thank you.

Melanie Claxton ([51:55](#)):

Thank you.

Catherine Augustine ([51:55](#)):

Thank you.