

Build an Award-Winning Summer Program: Brick by Brick

A Playbook Inspired by Portland Public Schools



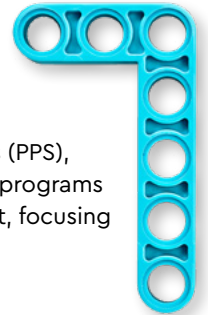


Why Summer Programming Matters

Donee Deschler, a district business-operations analyst, Karla Hudson, a program administrator, and Darcy Soto, the director of learning acceleration, played key roles in bringing Portland's Summer Acceleration Academy (SAA) to life.

"Summer programs are essential for addressing unfinished academic learning for students and the 'summer slide,' a phenomenon where students lose academic gains over the break."

"For the student population of Portland Public Schools (PPS), many of whom come from underserved communities, programs like their SAA provide much-needed academic support, focusing on both closing learning gaps and accelerating skills."



Planning for summer programs starts early, and LEGO® Education is here to make it easier. Recently, we reached out to Portland Public Schools—the largest school district in the state of Oregon and winner of the *2024 New York Life Foundation Excellence in Summer Learning Award* for its Summer Acceleration Academy—to learn the secrets behind its success.

The result:

A straightforward playbook that breaks down its approach and shares practical tips that can help you create an award-winning summer program in your district.

The National Summer Learning Association Weighs in

"... Bottom-line, quality summer and afterschool opportunities have the evidence base to be deployed to help improve student learning and performance on a variety of factors critical to student success."

"...However, summertime experiences are not evenly and equitably distributed, and many children and youth lack access to quality experiences due to the challenges of availability, accessibility, and affordability. The most vulnerable children...face the greatest challenges in accessing quality summertime experiences."



From *The Evidence Base for Summer Enrichment and Comprehensive Afterschool Opportunities*, The National Summer Learning Association. (2021)

Dr. Jenny Says

Dr. Jenny Nash, Head of Education Impact at LEGO Education

Summer programming is critical for keeping students engaged while they're out of school. It keeps them interacting with peers and presents exciting ideas that create meaningful connections. Keeping students engaged in learning year-round impacts academics and social and emotional well-being.

Summer can be a time for students to build on what they learned during the school year through enhanced learning and experiences they might not have access to in the regular school day. Often, we see summer learning as a chance for more collaborative, project-based learning that allows students to apply knowledge and skills in new ways.



What the Summer Acceleration Academy Looks Like

The Summer Acceleration Academy is a supplemental academic summer program for current kindergarten through fifth grade students. It aims to support students in addressing unfinished learning by meeting three main goals:

- Foster joyful learning
- Support unfinished skill development
- Create an on-ramp to the next grade


Academy Timeline

- **5 days** of setup and professional development
- **22 days** of student instruction

●	●	●	●	●
●	●	●	●	●
●	●	●	●	●
●	●	●	●	●
●	●	●	●	●
●	●			

Daily Schedule

- 90 minutes** of literacy instruction, including **30 minutes** with a reading support team comprising a specialist and an assistant
- 60 minutes** of hands-on math
- 60 minutes** of special instruction, including music, sports, arts, and more
- 60 minutes** of STEAM learning with **LEGO® Education**




Facts About the Summer Acceleration Academy

2,400

K-5 students are invited to attend summer programs based on below grade-level scores on winter literacy assessment. To make the program more accessible for families, siblings of the K-5 students who are reading below grade level are welcome to attend.

15:1 student-to-teacher ratio

80% of students are more likely to receive special education or English language development services

What Portland Public School District Educators Are Saying About LEGO® Education in the Summer Acceleration Academy



100% engagement. All of them enjoyed everything they did. They were **creative**, they were **problem solving**, they were testing and retesting. The *Science We Cannot See* units were definitely more challenging. No one complained, no one gave up. They were all **trying their best**.

Grade 3-5 Classroom Educator



Students had to learn to work together and loved having partners or trios. They **built on each other's ideas** and were able to problem solve together.

Grade 1&2 Classroom Educator



Many different skills were being developed: leadership, communication, sharing, problem-solving, building, coding, resourcefulness, creativity, organization, storytelling, math, and science. **It's a GREAT program that should be adopted throughout PPS and the school year!** Nice work, LEGO® Education!

Grade 1&2 Classroom Educator



Total engagement with students conversing about their builds and programming, very good **communication building**, and **engineering-math skills** in action. Little teacher interaction, which made it better: Students had to figure out the reason things didn't work the way they expected.

EXCELLENT brain work.

Grade 3-5 Classroom Educator



It was their **favorite** time of day!

ELD/ESOL Classroom Educator



Students were **super engaged** and were even able to persevere through any frustration.

Grade 3-5 Classroom Educator



Students were **highly motivated, engaged,** and **eager** to participate.

Grade 1&2 Classroom Educator





Tips for Building an Award-Winning Summer Program

Donee Deschler, Karla Hudson, and Darcy Soto share some best practices that can be easily integrated into your own planning.



Center academic needs of underserved student populations

We understand that students from low-income families, students of color, and English language learners face systemic barriers that hinder their academic success. By prioritizing their needs, we aim to dismantle these inequities and bridge the gaps in knowledge and skill development.

Focusing summer resources and opportunities on underserved populations also helps to rebuild trust within communities that feel overlooked by traditional educational practices. This engagement can foster a supportive learning environment where students and families feel valued and empowered, ultimately contributing to student success throughout the year and over long-term outcomes.



Align programs with research-based best practices for summer learning

Every minute counts for our students, so our financial investment must align with research-based best practices to ensure that they achieve measurable positive outcomes from summer learning.



Solicit input and feedback from the community through multiple avenues and use the information collected to refine program design

We gather feedback through electronic surveys and in-person groups from students, families, and staff to best understand what works well and what areas need refinement or enhancement.





Dr. Jenny Says

Dr. Jenny Nash,
Head of Education Impact
at LEGO® Education

Building a successful summer program is not that different than building any other learning program. It starts with the students and understanding their academic, social, and emotional needs. Summer can be a time to enhance learning by taking students further where they're succeeding and by scaffolding growth where they need support.

Don't forget to consider the needs of the teachers, especially if you have community volunteers leading the learning. Ensure that teachers have appropriate support and professional learning options for your summer programs.

Also consider how the community might be involved in the learning. Summer presents an opportunity to break from the regular school schedule and create new learning experiences. This could include more project-based learning, not having a "bell schedule," and bringing in other resources from the community. It's a great way to expand experiences and expose students to different careers.



Provide comprehensive and professional development for your educators

Investing in professional development for educators:

- a. Enhances skills and knowledge:** Ongoing learning keeps educators updated on the latest teaching strategies, making them more effective in the classroom.
- b. Improves student outcomes:** Well-trained educators are more likely to implement effective instructional practices, resulting in better engagement and learning outcomes.
- c. Encourages collaboration:** Professional development provides opportunities for educators to collaborate, share ideas, and learn from one another, fostering a supportive community.
- d. Addresses diverse learning needs:** Professional development equips educators with the strategies needed to meet the diverse needs of their students.



Use high-quality materials and curricula

Selecting the best materials and curricula underscores the importance of student academic progress. While we focus on joyful learning during the summer, we also ensure that it is impactful and supports each student's journey to academic success. We look to sources like [EdReports](#) when selecting resources, as longitudinal studies demonstrate that well-designed curricula enhance engagement, comprehension, and knowledge retention.

Research indicates that schools employing high-quality curricula experience improved academic outcomes, reduced achievement gaps, and increased educator satisfaction. By investing in these resources, we create an environment conducive to learning, ultimately preparing students for success in a rapidly changing world.



Follow an annual process for reflection and continuous improvement

Collaborating with the [District Summer Learning Network](#), funded by the Wallace Foundation, has been a valuable opportunity. This relationship has been supported through work with a consultant, an annual learning summit, and professional learning communities. The Network has developed tools to guide districts through a comprehensive reflection and continuous improvement process. Our team consistently dedicates time to the reflection process—ensuring that program refinements are designed and implemented to improve student outcomes.



Build Your Own Summer Learning Program with LEGO® Education

Step 1

Choose your learning approach

- ✓ Explore theme-based options like our [Space Lessons](#)
- ✓ Dive into STEAM learning with our [Math and Literacy challenges](#)
- ✓ Utilize [lessons](#) designed for LEGO® Education SPIKE™ Essential or LEGO® Education SPIKE™ Prime

Step 2

Plan the time you'll dedicate to each learning experience

- ✓ Quickly implement camp-style learning that allows for a [full-day learning experience](#)
- ✓ Easily integrate [lesson-based learning](#) with other educational experiences

Step 3

Prepare educators who will teach the program

- ✓ Determine if current educators are available or if community volunteers will be involved
- ✓ Consider what support they may need and explore offering [professional development](#) as part of your program preparation

Step 4

Organize learning materials

- ✓ Identify whether you have ready-to-use materials or need to gather additional supplies
- ✓ Review the **Prepare** section available in most lessons.
- ✓ Share [additional resources](#) and support to help your educators prepare for success

We're here to help you build your summer learning program!
Click to request a [meeting](#) today.