Summer learning loss or summer slide refers to the loss of academic skills and knowledge that students often experience during the summer months. A study published last year followed students in grades 1 through 6 across five summers and showed that 52% of students lost an average of 39% of their total school year gains during the summer months. Summer learning loss following this past school year may be of particular concern due to the pandemic. A recent Curriculum Associates study found that fewer students were on grade level in spring 2021 compared to previous school years. The anxiety, stress and isolation from peer groups caused by the pandemic have also heightened the need for students to be re-engaged social-emotionally.

A notable amount of research exists regarding the effectiveness of high-quality summer enrichment programs. The RAND corporation conducted a longitudinal study of summer learning programs. RAND found that after one summer, high-attenders outperformed control-group students in mathematics in the fall. Subsequently, high attenders
outperformed on the spring state assessment. After the second summer, high attenders saw advantages in mathematics, language arts and social-emotional skills, with the outperformance in math and language arts continuing through the following spring. A recent National Academies of Science report concluded summer learning programs play a vital part in academic, cognitive, social and physical development. Further, the report found summer enrichment opportunities are unevenly distributed. Low-income students and students of color are much less likely to have access to enriching summer programs because of cost and availability.

Unmet demand for summer programs remains high. Afterschool Alliance’s nationally representative parent survey, America After 3, discovered that nearly 1 in 3 children not in a program during summer 2019 would have been enrolled in one if it was available to them. The survey also observed higher unmet demand and lower summer participation among families with low incomes. COVID-19 grew this unmet demand. A 2020 survey of program providers found that, on average, summer programs served about half as many children in 2020 as they served in 2019 due to social distancing guidelines and reduced student-staff ratios.

**State Action**

After COVID-19 school closures, many states responded by introducing legislation to combat unfinished learning. This has been approached in myriad ways, including using extended or expanded learning opportunities to accelerate learning. These opportunities refer to learning environments occurring outside of the traditional school day, such as afterschool and summer learning programs.

Colorado enacted legislation that funds local education providers, including school districts, for extended learning opportunities to address disrupted learning related to COVID-19. In the bill, summer programming is defined as one of the options for extended learning opportunities. Similarly, North Carolina establishes school extension learning recovery and enrichment programs in each local school administrative district. This directs school districts to offer in-person summer school that target children at risk of academic failure due to COVID-19 and requires innovative benchmark assessments. Tennessee enacted legislation that establishes a variety of afterschool learning and summer camps. This legislation also requires the state department of education (SEA) to develop and implement a new benchmarking and assessment system, which will be piloted as the pre and post-test assessment at the camps. However, there have been other summer and

afterschool policy trends aside from unfinished learning. Maine enacted legislation to establish the Summer Success Pilot Program Fund to encourage the facilitation of high-quality summer success pilot programs in elementary and secondary schools. Idaho and Alabama have taken a different direction and passed legislation allowing students to receive credit for participating in extended learning opportunities. Oklahoma enacted legislation that creates the Out-Of-Schooltime Task Force which aims to improve and increase their number of affordable out-of-school programs.

Some summer learning bills are pending. These bills include the establishment of grant programs to expand summer programming, using lottery funds for summer learning programs, literacy assistance in summer programs, requiring K-12 public schools to offer or expand summer learning programs, establishing an out-of-school time advisory commission and requiring recovery plans, which could include extended school day strategies.

**Federal Action**

On March 11, 2021, President Biden signed the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (H.R. 1319) into law. The bill provides funds to state and local education agencies to support students and their learning recovery through summer enrichment and afterschool programs. The bill requires state education agencies (SEAs) to allocate at least 1% of their Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER III) to evidence-based summer enrichment programs. This can be done directly or through grants and contracts. SEAs are also required to reserve 1% of their ESSER III dollars to comprehensive afterschool programs. The legislation directs SEAs to reserve at least 5% of their ESSER III funds and local education agencies (LEA)’s reserve at least 20% of their funds to address learning loss. The bill states that allowable learning loss interventions include comprehensive afterschool, summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day and extended school year.

In spring 2021, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) launched the Summer Learning & Enrichment Collaborative (“The Collaborative”). The Collaborative is a professional learning community and partnership between the ED, Council of Chief State School Officers, National Governors Association and other national partners. Through a series of virtual learning meetings, The Collaborative is building the capacity of the 50 states and territories, along with school districts and partners, to understand how to use federal funds to increase summer programming, leverage partnerships across sectors to expand amplify learning opportunities and apply evidence-based practices to program design.