



An urban elementary school transitions  
to a year-round calendar to increase  
academic opportunities for students.

# Curb Summer Slide

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**M**ost people—parents, students, and educators, alike—associate summer with family cookouts, long trips to the lake, or kids frolicking in the cool water of their community pools during the sweltering summer heat. But along with the much needed break comes what is commonly referred to as “summer slide,” one of the many factors that contribute to achievement gaps, particularly for students in high-poverty communities.

Research supports the negative academic impact the traditional summer has on student outcomes. In his meta-analysis on effect sizes of educational interventions, *Visible Learning for Teachers*, John Hattie writes that student learning is negatively affected by long summer vacations. Moreover, other studies reveal the role that summer setback plays in the achievement gaps seen in high-poverty communities.

Given the research indicating the impact unequal access to summer learning opportunities have on the achievement gap between students from low- and high-income families, educators should attempt to enact a paradigm shift that moves the needle on one of the field’s finite resources: time. Although the concept of year-round school calendars is not new, it provides an exciting possibility to meet individual student needs and build a bridge to span the achievement gap for students who are most at risk.

So, while students and families at Crestview Elementary School in Kansas City, Missouri, still enjoy and participate in typical summertime activities, during the months of June and July they engage in another activity commonly associated with the months between August and May: learning.

To witness the scene at Crestview Elementary in June, you would surmise from the huge grins, laughter, and giant hugs that the children and adults had not seen one another for months. The reality is that they had only been separated for 14 days.

### Ideas to Action

This initiative started with the North Kansas City School District’s Strategic Plan (2012-2017), which was created by district stakeholders and community representatives. One action step of the strategic plan was to identify an elementary school to implement a summer calendar in an effort to increase academic opportunities for students. A committee was formed to examine multiple aspects of the nontraditional calendar concept. The collaborative group included teachers, teacher representatives, the assistant superintendent of academic services, director of elementary education, director of special education, district support services, district academic services, curriculum coordinators, the school-age child care coordinator, the English-language learner (ELL) coordinator, human resources, support services, communications, food service, and transportation.

The exploratory committee examined research relevant to summer learning loss, number of comparative school days between the United States and other countries, and alternatives to the traditional school year. The 2011 EPE Research Center study, *Year Round Schooling*, found that schools that simply redistribute the approximately 180 days included in a traditional school year had little to no impact on student achievement. On the other hand, the 2007 Educational Policy Brief study, *Alternatives to the Traditional School Year*, supports the notion that expanded learning opportunities could help

minimize the annual three-month achievement gap experienced by students of lower socioeconomic status during the summer months.

The calendar committee also developed criteria to determine which elementary schools would benefit from additional educational opportunities. The committee examined several factors that included longitudinal state assessment data, district reading assessment data to determine growth or regression during summer, leadership, percentage of free and reduced-price lunch, ELL student population, school location, and capacity of the school.

Crestview’s student population includes 59 percent minorities and 27 percent ELL students; 80 percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunch. Crestview Elementary was chosen as one of two elementary schools in the district to implement the summer calendar, adding 31 extra days.



### Game Plan

There are many logistical aspects to providing learning opportunities to students for 12 consecutive months.

- **Programming:** adjusting curricular scope and sequence, preparing summer professional development.
- **Staffing:** adjusting teacher salaries for the additional days worked, hiring new staff with a limited time frame between the ending of one school year and the start of another.
- **Scheduling:** Transitioning between two fiscal calendars, developing an adjusted assessment calendar, and determining grading periods. The typical grading period for elementary buildings is quarterly, but the 31 additional days does not lend itself to be an additional period.
- **Logistics:** Coordinating with operations and maintenance, ensuring building upgrades were completed, and organizing bus schedules.

One challenge that any educator faces is *time*. Our 31 additional days allows us a 15 percent increase in the time our students are engaged in reading, writing, and math workshops along with the arts. Other benefits include:

- Our youth mentoring program provides academic and social support to struggling students.
- The school has been able to expand a partnership with local libraries to provide free books for every student in an effort to promote home literacy. This also encourages students to begin building their own library of high-interest reading materials.
- Bus drivers spend time in the classroom reading with students and engaging them in other curricular tasks.
- Real-time spring data can be used as a baseline to provide students differentiated instruction that meets their individual needs without the fear of having summer regression.
- The summer program allows 4-year-olds to participate in kindergarten, giving them more access to the curriculum. This is especially important due to the fact that 44 percent of incoming kindergarten students had no prior pre-K experiences.

### The Principal’s Role

The administrators’ role during this transition began by holding a community forum informing parents of the rationale for our transition to the year-round calendar. We regularly held meetings with district-level personnel to disseminate information, explore the efficient use of district resources, and brainstorm potential areas of concern. As school administrators, we promoted the benefits of 31 additional school days by meeting with parents publicly, and at times, individually. Communication also played an important role in clearing up the misconception held by some parents regarding the difference between traditional “summer school” and the year-round calendar.

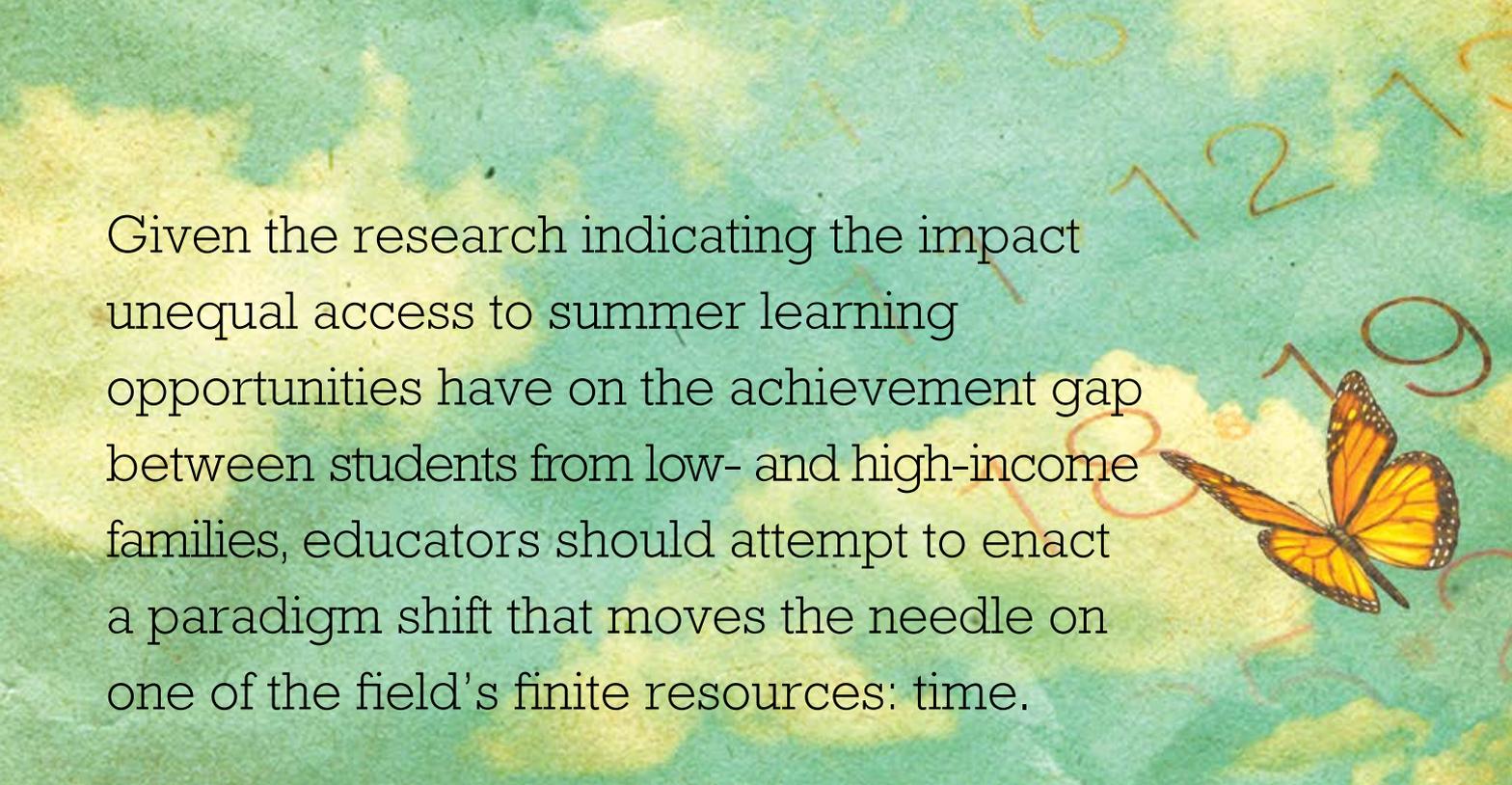
Our school’s implementation of a year-round calendar provided a great opportunity for staff to embark on a new journey, which created a level of excitement. However, this transition presented several challenges. First, the turnover of students from one grade to the next left teachers a short amount of time to prepare their classrooms, so we worked closely with our custodial staff to extend building hours and ensured availability of maintenance to support teachers in reorganizing items in their classrooms.

Some other challenges we faced at the end



### REFLECT ON THIS

- How would the students at your school benefit from 31 additional days in the school year?
- What logistics would you need to consider to lengthen the school year?
- How can your school leverage district and community resources to help curb summer slide—even without lengthening the school year?



Given the research indicating the impact unequal access to summer learning opportunities have on the achievement gap between students from low- and high-income families, educators should attempt to enact a paradigm shift that moves the needle on one of the field's finite resources: time.

of the year were: completing state assessments, administering end-of-year district data assessments, creating class rosters, and enrolling new students while trying to secure their records from schools already on summer break. While some of these challenges were beyond the scope of our control, they were issues that needed to be addressed in order to run an efficient and effective year-long program.

### **The Gift of Time**

Some may wonder how these 31 additional days have been received. Imagine the first day of school for your students, except that it begins in June. Flashes of camera phones going off as parents take their child's beginning-of-the-year photo, the excitement of students meeting their new teacher, sitting at lunch with friends, learning alongside classmates, and spending time outside running and playing during recess. Students have a love of learning and have formed strong and long-lasting relationships with their peers and staff.

From the end of the May 2014-2015 school year to the June 2015 summer session, enrollment has increased by 2.7 percent. As educators, we constantly search for the latest trends, newest programs, or curriculum to better serve our students. Although these new trends could help bridge achievement gaps, time with quality educators is the resource that could most positively impact our results.

Crestview Elementary has embarked on the initial steps on the journey to curb summer slide.

Teachers have commented on their students' readiness to learn and the progress made on our districtwide reading assessment from spring 2015 to fall 2015. An examination of other preliminary data has shown positive impacts, particularly at the primary grades. According to our research based universal screening and progress monitoring system, eight out of our 11 K-5 assessments showed improvement when compared to the fall 2014 assessments. Data shows that in the primary grades, students have a better understanding of letter naming; letter sound, and number identification; oral counting; and basic math computation than shown in the previous year. The immediate instructional benefits of our initial data are an increase in the number of students receiving Tier I instruction and a decrease in the number of students needing Tier II and Tier III interventions.

Every child should be afforded the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills that will help them maximize their individual potential for future success. We have made a commitment to our students, families, and community to take every necessary step within our power and knowledge to help students achieve just that.

Thirty-one additional days provided. Thirty-one additional days received. ■

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