

# Summer school is getting beefed up after remote learning. But some programs struggled to get teachers

By Jason Hanna, CNN



ANDREW JANSEN/NEWS-LEADER/USA TODAY NETWORK

Updated 8:12 AM ET, Wed June 30, 2021

Angela Holloway-Payne, principal at Boyd Elementary School in Springfield, Missouri, shows students a historical photograph of the school during Black History Summer School at Drury University on June 17. **(CNN)**Dan Gannon wouldn't mind a full summer break. The Bronx high school history teacher is as drained as anyone by teaching remotely during the pandemic.

He sympathizes with any educator taking the summer off. Many worked more hours than usual to adapt lessons and [relearn how to instruct](#) -- and carried the weight of their students' struggles with pandemic stress and isolation.

But Gannon will keep working. He's helping lead his school's "summer bridge" program, which in normal years brings in rising freshmen for a few days in July to orient them to the school's policies and culture.

This July, he hopes to invite rising sophomores, since they didn't have the chance last year. And he hopes to extend the program further into the summer, working with community partners to offer art and other activities. This program is in addition to normal summer school; Gannon says he wants teens to find social and emotional support after a year of "anguish and upheaval."

"It's more important than ever that -- if you have the ability and platform -- you use that to make as much of an impact that you possibly can," Gannon said.

Gannon's program is one example of what some K-12 schools across the US are attempting: They are expanding or emphasizing in-person summer school or summer activities to put youths on a better academic, social and emotional footing before fall arrives.

That put districts with wiped-out teachers in a pickle.

A number of them struggled to get the necessary number of educators and faced the possibility of turning away students who wanted to attend. Some districts tried to entice teachers with temporary pay raises -- with varying success.



Fifth-graders program a Bee-Bot during a summer school class on June 14 at Goliad Elementary School in Odessa, Texas.

### Expanded need meets more federal money

Schools are emphasizing summer programs -- some underway now, and others still to come, as summer break varies across the country -- in part because they fear remote learning wasn't the best for academic and social growth.

"We think students are absolutely behind ... where they should be" academically and emotionally, said Evan Stone, co-CEO and co-founder of [Educators for Excellence](#), an advocacy group of more than 30,000 educators.

"We heard from teachers that teaching online just takes longer to get through the same amount of content, and so we know there are a lot of grade level standards that weren't covered," Stone said.



### What schools can do with their Covid stimulus money

Other challenges included varying levels of supervision and support that parents could offer at home. An estimated 60% of K-12 students started the 2020-21 year fully remote, according to consulting group [McKinsey and Co.](#)

Just how far behind students fell is up for debate, as studies have made varying estimates. But whatever the gap is between pandemic performance and usual performance, gaps were worse for [poorer students](#); [Black, Hispanic and Native American students](#); the [youngest](#); and [English language learners and students with disabilities](#), studies showed.

The federal government has responded with cash, giving K-12 schools more than \$192 billion -- roughly six times the amount of base funding for fiscal year 2021 -- in three big Covid-19 relief bills.

From the largest relief bill -- [\\$128 billion approved in March](#) -- districts must reserve 20% for learning loss intervention, which could include summer school. The money is essentially for three years, as it must be spent by 2024.

Summer school this year can be a great way to get students reintegrated and excited to learn in the fall, Stone said.



And [instead of remediation](#) -- revisiting subjects students struggled with -- summer school should especially focus on new things that teachers didn't have to cover this past year, he said, and be full of activities and exciting projects "to build interest in returning to school full time."

A student works with a teacher June 8 during a summer school session at Drayton Mills Elementary just outside Spartanburg, South Carolina.

## A district more than doubled pay -- and it paid off

In Pennsylvania, the Muhlenberg School District outside Reading is using some relief money to go big on in-person summer programs -- activities, projects, academics -- to get kids up to speed and excited about a more normal year. This past year, students didn't even return to class in a hybrid fashion until March 22.

Usually, Muhlenberg's summer school program would serve perhaps 100 kids in one two-week session, focused mostly on remediation.

But because of the pandemic, Superintendent Joseph Macharola wanted a more camp-like environment, open and free to anyone who would take it. The majority of kids, he believes, are going to need help not just with schoolwork but also reconnecting with the school community, he said.

"This is the moment we have to deliver for our children ... and this is how we're going to do it this summer," Macharola said.

So the district signed up 1,750 of the district's 4,000 students to take part in at least one of [three 12-day sessions](#), in June, July and August.

Literacy and math are covered for one 90-minute block, and sampling of activities -- like sports, steel drums, Lego league, theater -- are offered in the second block, with free breakfast and lunch mixed in.

Each core academic session has students practicing academic skills while moving toward a project goal, like planning a summer vacation, school improvements or a small business.

"We're not hammering the kids here. The idea is to rebuild relationships ... (and) build upon the culture," Macharola said.

One challenge: It requires a lot more teachers than usual. So the district decided to raise this summer's pay rate -- from \$30/hour to \$70/hour, with help from the federal windfall.

That helped. Whereas a normal Muhlenberg summer term would need five teachers, now the district has 75 across the three sessions, with help from 50 assistants and college students.

A Muhlenberg parent, Charina Vargas, already was thankful for the efforts that the teachers of her two daughters, 8 and 11, made during the pandemic. One initially struggled with a subject during remote lessons, but teachers made a special effort to focus on her until she progressed, she said.

And now she's grateful to have sent her daughters, rising third-grader Janelle Quintero and rising seventh-grader Neveah Colona, to the summer school program over the past two weeks.

"Every day they come home and tell me different things they learned, and how much fun they have," Vargas said. They've dabbled in dance, art, soccer and baking, and Neveah has been exploring engineering topics in class.

"I'm happy the kids get to go out, get a sense of normalcy, get around their teachers and their principal," Vargas said.

"It's a good way to break the ice after a whole year of remote learning ... getting them to school, and getting them ready to go back" full time, she said.



Students take part in a third grade class during a summer school session June 14 at Golden View Elementary School in San Ramon, California.

### Other districts offering more pay had mixed results

Some districts, though, found getting summer staffing to be an uphill battle -- and some say teacher fatigue was a major reason.

The Rosemount-Apple Valley-Egan school district south of Minneapolis was "struggling to get staff, just like most other districts," district spokesperson Tony Taschner said.

So like Muhlenberg, the district of [about 29,000 students](#) decided to increase its summer pay rate -- from \$31 an hour to \$50 an hour. Officials thought the raise could attract not just more teachers but more-experienced ones, Taschner said.

By mid-June, the increase had a positive impact. The in-person [Camp Propel](#) for elementary students -- running July 26 to August 12 -- was around half-staffed before the raise. As of earlier this month, 95% of needed staffing was hired, Taschner said.



This honors student considered giving up when he had to learn on his phone. He is far from alone, experts fear

As in other years, Camp Propel is by invitation for kids seen to need more literacy or other support. But because of the pandemic, this year it will additionally identify 36 first-graders with the highest needs and instruct them in reading, writing and math for more days and with smaller class sizes, Taschner said.

More pay, though, hasn't always worked.

Virginia's [Arlington Public Schools](#), outside Washington, DC, offered teachers a \$1,000 bonus on top of normal pay, which typically is at least \$33/hour, said Ingrid Gant, president of the Arlington Education Association.

Yet that bonus was less than what some neighboring districts were paying for the summer, and it wasn't enough to stem a teacher shortage that would result, Gant said.

APS typically holds summer school courses for about 2,000 elementary students, inviting them according to need, according to [WUSA](#). But this year it tried to expand eligibility "due to increased learning needs evidenced in the pandemic," the district [said](#). Initially, it told 5,300 students they were eligible for the [July 6-30 session](#), [CNN affiliate WJLA](#) reported.

By mid-May, despite offering teachers financial incentives to work the summer, the district recruited only 175 of the 450 teachers it would need to accommodate all those students, [WJLA](#) reported.

So the district whittled down eligibility to [about 1,900 elementary students](#) -- those the district said had the greatest need. Those left out would be directed to online programs such as [state-run Virtual Virginia](#).

Pandemic-induced fatigue was a large reason the recruitment drive didn't meet its goal, Gant said.

"Most of our educators are just burned out," and some "who normally do (summer school) said, 'Not this year,'" Gant said.



Teacher Nusheen Saadat, second from left, leads students across campus during a summer school session June 14 at Golden View Elementary School in San Ramon, California.

## Why teachers say they're burned out

Leton Hall, a sixth-grade teacher at Pelham Gardens Middle School in the Bronx, has used a few prior summers to be an adjunct professor at a college. He's been tempted to teach summer school for the public school system in the past.

This year, there was no chance he was doing either. This summer, he, his wife and two sons are going to take some trips, and he's going to reset.

"I want to recharge and be ready for next year, because we don't quite know what next year is going to bring," Hall said this month. "I feel like I have to be mentally ready for what comes next year."

In this case, Hall says, his school won't suffer because plenty of teachers there signed up for summer school.

But a look at Hall's experience helps explain why districts are saying many teachers are opting for rest.

When he taught remotely, activities that were easy for him to do in person had to be modified for online. That takes more planning, which means more time outside class hours.

Also, he had to learn the technology itself. And new presentations needed test runs before students saw the real thing.

"You can't do it the first time in front of the students," Hall said.

He taught from his computer setup in his attic, with his wife working below at the kitchen table, and their two young sons also in the home. That largely lasted until February, when he returned to his school building for a hybrid scheme where he'd teach both in-person and remote learners.

From that attic, he didn't get the normal teacher-student interaction that he feeds off -- and that also wore on him.

"It's difficult when they're on the screen -- its easier (for them) to kind of tune you out. Maybe you take offense because you're doing all this work" and they're not paying attention. "And you start to think, 'Maybe it's me; maybe I'm not engaging enough.'"



Bronx sixth grade teacher Leton Hall taught remotely during the pandemic from his home's attic.

Beyond extra planning and learning remote technology for themselves, teachers played a new role in getting children and parents on board with the new systems, said Gant, the Arlington teachers association president.

Because delivery methods and lesson adaptations were new, some material was taught at a slower pace, so "you might not be able to get through all the lessons," Gant said -- a stressful situation in itself, given teachers can be evaluated partly on how much their students progress.

Teachers were also stressed because they saw kids struggle with loneliness and with tensions at home -- and they would tell administrators, "this is what I'm seeing in the house," said Macharola, the Pennsylvania superintendent.

"(Family) bickering -- we saw this online. The pandemic exposed teachers to what they normally wouldn't see," he said.

**'I think parents will want their kids there' this summer**

That said, Hall knows the past many months were challenging for students, too, and he knows this coming year could be an adjustment for his incoming sixth-graders.

"Some of them might not have had (in-person) class for a year and a half," Hall said.

Gannon, the Bronx high school teacher, feels the fatigue and wholly knows that teaching this summer simply isn't a reasonable option for many who are burned out.

Nevertheless, he's looking forward to taking on the summer challenge he's chosen: orienting new students to their high school, and giving them outlets through activities in the building after that.

"My gut is telling me, based on the year (students) had, I think parents will want their kids there," Gannon said.