

OPINION: We know how to avoid the dreaded 'summer slide'

By Kristine Baggett
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Kristine Baggett: 'This pandemic has taught us we can create new solutions.'

Heading into summer, much is at stake as Oregon schools prepare for students to return to full-time, in-person learning in the fall.

Even before the pandemic, research showed students face a real learning loss over summer break — referred to by teachers as the "summer slide."

Research tells us that low-income students are at even greater risk of also losing math and reading skills. This is in contrast to their more affluent peers who might make slight gains in reading during the summer months.

In 2013, Beaverton Education Foundation (BEF) worked with teachers from one Beaverton elementary school who wanted to prevent "summer slide" for their students experiencing barriers to learning. BEF recognized the potential this big idea could have on students across the Beaverton district and funded a pilot program called Camp Achieve.

Data captured since 2013 shows an overwhelming majority of Camp Achieve participants not only didn't experience summer slide, but some students even improve their reading score by small, but meaningful, percentages.

We won't know the full scope of pandemic-related educational loss for a while, but we do know our kids can't afford to slide anymore — summer or otherwise.

Over the past seven years, through private donations and philanthropic grants, including recent support from the Meyer Memorial Trust, BEF and the Beaverton School District have been fine-tuning, improving, and scaling Camp Achieve. New federal and state funding to support summer learning has many school districts scrambling to create programs from scratch in the matter of a few short weeks, but not Beaverton.

In July, Camp Achieve, a proven, pre-existing model, will be rolled out across Beaverton elementary schools.

This is no small feat given the size and diversity of the Beaverton School District, the state's third largest. The district stretches from Rock Creek to Scholls Heights, from Hazeldale to West Tualatin

View, includes 54 schools and almost 40,000 students. A majority-minority district, 54% are students of color and more than a third of all students qualify for free or reduced lunch.

BEF is proud to support district-wide programs like Camp Achieve, but often our greatest impact is meeting specific needs for a particular school or classroom. From updating the library at Barnes Elementary to include books that more accurately reflect community diversity and feature main characters that look and sound familiar to students of color, to pickleball equipment for Stoller Middle School to help students gain new physical skills and experience fun, positive and healthy social experiences, BEF delivers bottom-up solutions to meet individual needs.

This pandemic has taught us we can create new solutions. Things will look different in the future, but BEF will continue to match targeted solutions to classroom needs because Beaverton students and staff are fortunate to live and work in a community that is committed to helping students reach their highest potential.

Kristine Baggett is executive director of Beaverton Education Foundation. Since 1988, Beaverton Education Foundation has partnered with private donors to raise money to fill in the gaps for Beaverton School District students.