



UNITED
NEIGHBORHOOD
HOUSES

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL:

**Assessing the Efficacy of the
Summer Rising Program in
Meeting the Needs of
New York City Families**

November, 2024



Introduction

Launched in 2021, Summer Rising is a free in-person six-week full-day summer program open to all New York City children in kindergarten through eighth grade. Summer Rising was originally designed to address COVID-19 pandemic-related learning loss and prepare students to return to schools in person in Fall 2021 after a year of remote instruction and social distancing. Funded largely by federal COVID-19 relief funding through the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA),¹ Summer Rising was envisioned as a partnership between the Department of Education (DOE), the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), and community-based organizations (CBOs) who contracted with DYCD to provide both afterschool and summer camp in previous summers. Twenty-five United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) settlement house members operate Summer Rising sites in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Manhattan and Queens.

Prior to 2020, New York City funded an estimated 90,000 elementary- and middle-school age children to participate in summer camp through DYCD-funded programs at CBOs.² Meanwhile, Department of Education (DOE) schools ran separate remedial academic instruction for students who were considered Promotion in Doubt.³ Instead of separate summer camp programs run by CBOs and summer school run by the DOE, all students in Summer Rising—regardless of whether they were mandated for summer school—participate in DOE-led academic instruction in the morning, followed by lunch and CBO-led enrichment in the afternoons, including creative arts, literacy and recreation.

A number of issues have plagued Summer Rising since its launch in 2021. Demand for the program has far exceeded supply, with nearly 138,000 elementary and middle school children applying for 110,000 available seats for Summer

Rising 2024. This meant that thousands of families have been shut out of the program each year. Despite this demand, only about 60 percent of students enrolled in Summer Rising on an average day in 2022 and 2023 showed up to the DOE academic portion of the day.⁴ CBO providers note that the requirement for children to participate in four hours of DOE-led academic instruction in the morning may contribute to low attendance, as families are seeking a more traditional summer camp experience.

The City has not yet conducted a publicly available formal evaluation of Summer Rising to determine the efficacy of this model in addressing learning loss. Four years since the launch of Summer Rising, there are questions about whether a program designed during the pandemic to mitigate learning loss is meeting the current needs of the City's children and families, and whether the City is providing

adequate support to run the program within its overall vision. These questions are especially important now that City tax dollars fund the full cost of the program with the expiration of federal relief funding in 2024. Currently, eighty million of Department of Education funding is not budgeted for summer 2025, calling into question what the Adams Administration's intentions are for next summer.

To fill in the knowledge gaps around the Summer Rising model and determine whether the current program structure is meeting the needs of the City's families, UNH conducted a mixed-methods study of Summer Rising during Summer 2024. This analysis included a quantitative survey of parents of Summer

Rising participants, a survey and focus group with settlement house staff members involved with running the Summer Rising program, and focus groups with middle school students participating in the program at UNH settlement house member sites.⁵ The focus groups were facilitated by youth researchers from the Intergenerational Change Initiative (ICI) affiliated with CUNY's School of Professional Studies. The voices of young people have largely been absent from existing conversations about the Summer Rising model. This report highlights key findings from this study and offers recommendations to improve summer programming for the City's children and families, who deserve opportunities that meet their diverse needs.

Key Findings

1. Free summer programming and learning opportunities are important to parents and children

Summer Rising is helping address parents' child care needs and fill in the gap for free summer program options. Many parents, especially low-income parents, said that they did not have a back-up program option for their children if they were not able to participate in Summer Rising.

Nearly 6 out of 10 (58 percent) parents surveyed said that they did not have a back-up program for their children if Summer Rising was not an option. Just a third said that their

child would have been enrolled at a summer program outside of Summer Rising. Lower-income parents were much more likely than parents with higher incomes to lack a back-up program option for their children—64 percent of low-income parents (those earning less than \$50,000 a year) said that they did not have a program alternative to Summer Rising, compared to 49 percent of parents with household income above \$50,000. This is in line with a recent nationwide survey of parents that found that upper-income parents were more than three times as likely as lower-income parents to report that their child attended a local day camp and more than twice as likely to say that their child took weekly enrichment lessons or classes.⁶

CHART 1: IF SUMMER RISING WAS NOT AN OPTION FOR YOUR CHILD(REN), WHAT WOULD YOUR CHILD(REN) BE DOING INSTEAD?

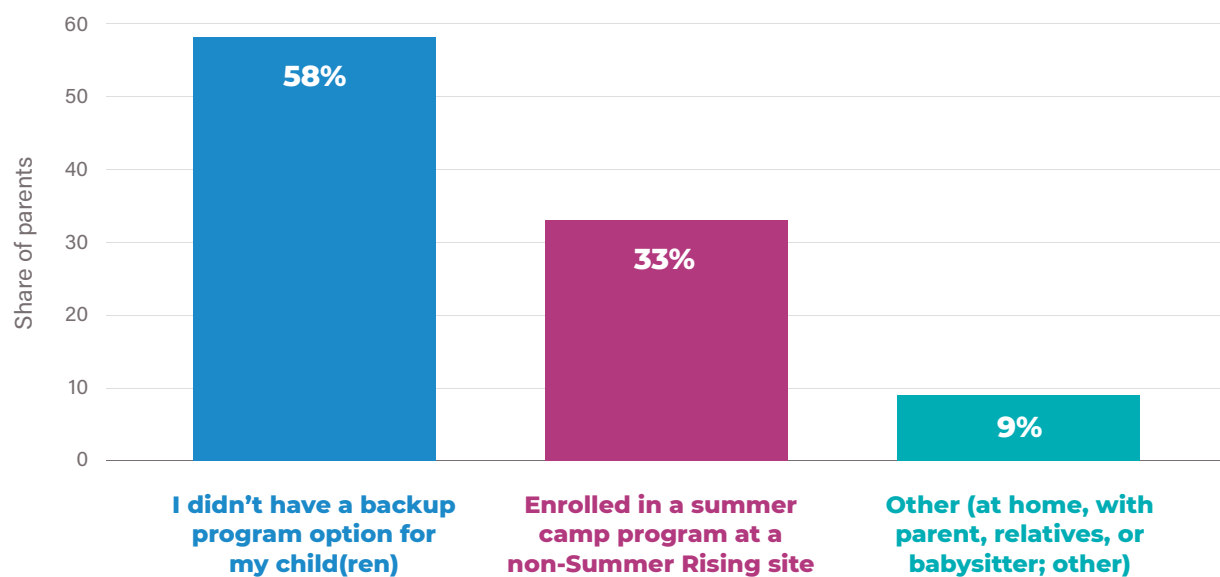
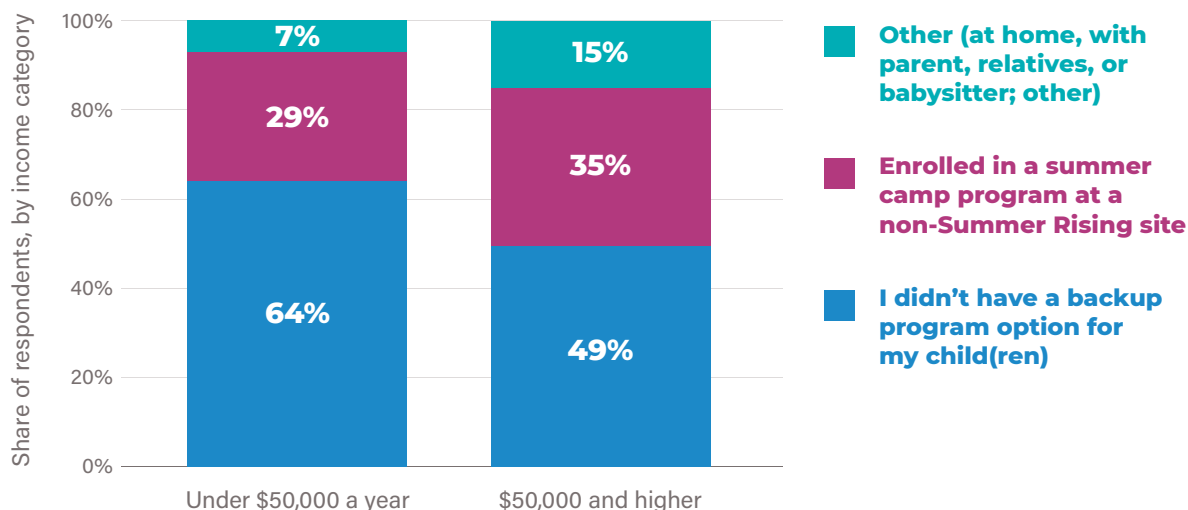


CHART 2: IF SUMMER RISING WAS NOT AN OPTION FOR YOUR CHILD(REN), WHAT WOULD YOUR CHILD(REN) BE DOING INSTEAD?

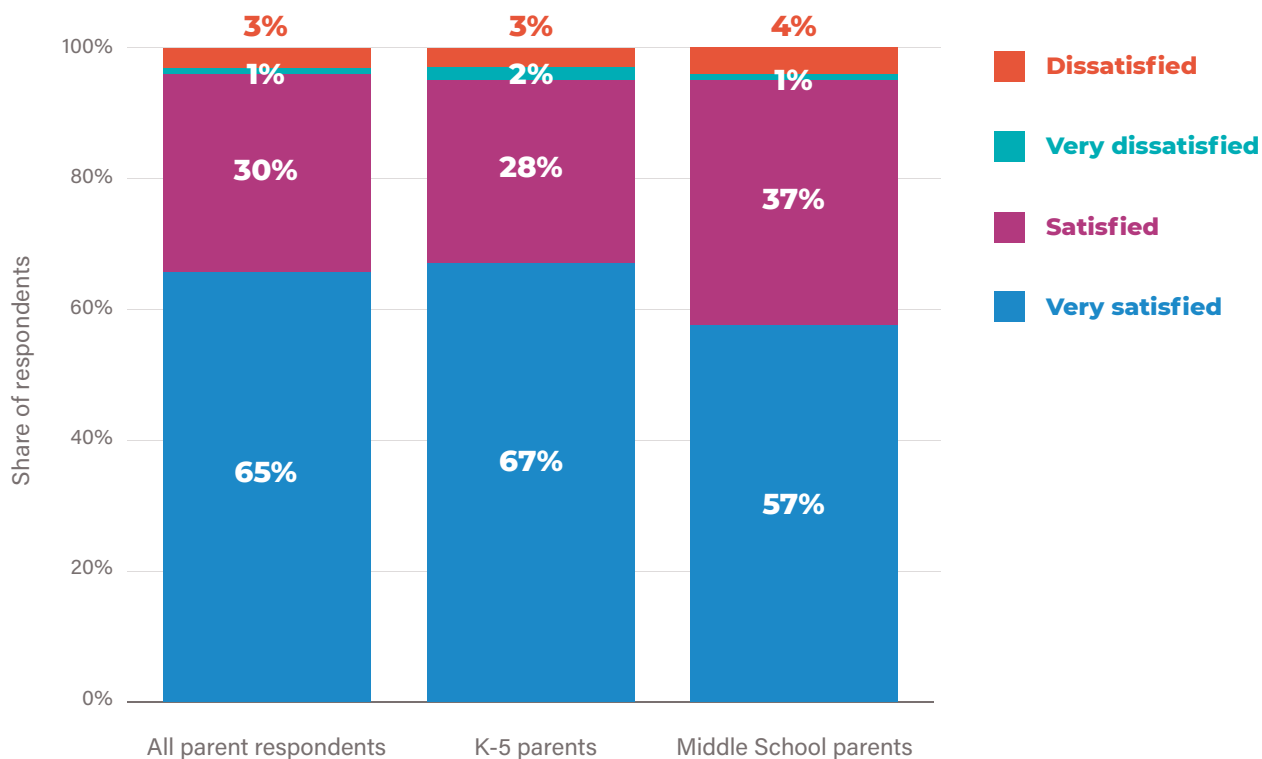


Many parents across incomes highlighted the lack of affordable summer camp options. One parent noted that “Camp in Brooklyn is extremely expensive and not always an option,” and another parent stated that “It is very hard to find all day programs during the summer that don’t cost a lot.” A few said they would pay for another summer camp but doing so would be a financial challenge, with one parent noting that they “would pay for private camp but be in debt.” Without Summer Rising, many parents said that they would keep their children at home or have them spend time with relatives. Working parents noted that they were grateful for affordable, all-day care. One parent commented, “Both parents work so it would have been a challenge to find an activity that lasts the entire day as well as affordable.”

Parents were satisfied with Summer Rising overall and said that they were likely to recommend the program to other parents, with parents of elementary school aged children reporting higher satisfaction levels.

Overall, 94 percent of parent respondents said that they were satisfied with Summer Rising, including 65 percent who were “very satisfied.” Ninety-three (93) percent of parents said that they were likely or very likely to recommend the program to other parents. Parent satisfaction levels varied by whether their children were in kindergarten through fifth grade or middle school. There was a 10 percentage point difference in the share of parents of children in kindergarten through fifth grade who were “very satisfied” with the program compared with those with middle school-aged children (67 percent vs. 57 percent). Furthermore, parents with younger children in kindergarten through fifth grade (75 percent) were more likely to say that their children enjoyed the program “a lot” compared to those with middle school aged children (64 percent).

CHART 3: PLEASE RATE YOUR OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE SUMMER RISING PROGRAM



Parents believed that Summer Rising helped improve their children’s social-emotional development, their confidence and their group socialization skills.

Parents reported that their children grew more confident over the summer and benefitted from spending time with other children in a safe group environment. One parent noted, “My introvert[ed] kid is getting more and more open and active.” Another parent stated, “This year, my children are so happy with the program and look forward [to it] every morning jumping on the bus to see teachers and friends. Also... my child needs help with social skills so having this program in [the] summer gave him a huge

opportunity to keep practicing social skills to prepare him for [a] September school start.”

During the focus groups middle school students described the social-emotional development benefits of the program. They were happy with increased interactions during the afternoon sessions, where they were able to partake in activities that allowed them to engage with peers, such as in sports, art projects, and group activities. Students discussed forming new friendships during the program. One middle school focus group participant noted, “Every time I’ve come to this program, I make friends.”

2. A one-size-fits-all model for Summer Rising doesn't serve students well

Both parents and staff agree that a one-size-fits all approach to Summer Rising does not meet the needs of families, particularly students with disabilities and English language learners.

Given that the program combines children from general education and special education in the same classroom, parents expressed concerns about how this program structure impacted the classroom environment and whether DOE teachers leading the academic portion of the day were able to adequately address the needs of children with various academic abilities. One parent shared their perspectives on the differing educational needs of students:

“ *My daughter who is in the Gifted and Talented program at [her public school] was in class with children from Gen Ed and Special Ed at Summer Rising. While we have no concerns about her making friends from all placement, my husband and I, neither of whom are educators, immediately wondered how a person can teach all three placements at the same time. If that was our immediate thought, I'm still stunned that no one who designed the program and who is versed in education, thought of that. It was a horrible experience for [the children] and for us as their parents. Some of us who had our children in the program solely for the social aspect, ended up pulling our children well beyond the half-way mark. This program was poorly designed.”*

Furthermore, over half (53 percent) of CBO staff surveyed identified a shortage of paraprofessionals to support students

with disabilities as one of the most pressing challenges facing the program. One staff member noted, “I wish there were more paraprofessionals for students with disabilities so they can thrive in their studies.” Another staff member observed that some paraprofessionals were unable to provide the necessary level of support for children with disabilities: “It didn't seem as if the paraprofessionals were aware of the individual child's IEP specific needs and therefore weren't prepared to modify activities for their participants.”⁷

In addition, English-language learners in the focus groups of middle school participants noted that they did not participate in the morning academic sessions with math and English-language arts instruction.⁸ Instead several students noted that they were given arts and crafts projects that were separate from the academic curriculum. CBO staff noted that these students were not able to participate in the academic sessions due to a shortage of teachers who were able to provide support to English language learners. CBO staff also noted that the program should be “more accessible to parents who do not speak English.”

Parents were concerned about the lack of communication from the DOE about the academic portion of Summer Rising, which is valued by parents.

Overall, parent respondents liked the concept of DOE-led academic learning and instruction in the morning, with half of parents reporting that they believed academic learning was the most valuable part of Summer Rising.

For parents who valued the academic portion, many felt that it was preparing their children for school in the fall and they appreciated the additional learning opportunities. One parent

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There was no way for me to know who her teacher was, what they would be learning nor how she was progressing. Had I not been the PTA President for the 2023 - 2024 academic year and had met the Parent Coordinator through that venture, I would have been completely lost as to what was going on with my child. There was no communication given ahead of time on who their teachers were, what they would be learning or how their progress would be tracked. The only communication received for the entirety of the summer, came from the CBO.

For a program which was designed to prevent the “summer slide”, it was ridiculous that the parents weren’t informed about what was being done to prevent it so they could supplement it or support it if it wasn’t successful for their child. My child has been diagnosed with selective mutism due to anxiety and has an IEP stating that. In spite of this, I had no way of knowing how she was coping with a new environment, if her diagnosis was understood and being supported nor if she was feeling comfortable enough to produce any of the assignments.

..... BRONX PARENT OF K-5 STUDENT WITH IEP

”

noted, “I think the academic part is valuable to me because my child would get a head start when returning to school and also would not forget what she has learned from the past academic year.” Other parents noted that they preferred a program without academic learning, with one parent noting “I think it would be nice for [a] summer program with activities only, not academic because they already went to school for 9 months so why continue during summer season? That is part of their break and [they should] enjoy themselves.”

Although many parents valued the academic portion of Summer Rising, they were unsatisfied with the communication from DOE staff about their children’s needs and academic progress. A number of parents expressed disappointment that they did not know who their children’s teachers were and what curriculum was being taught. This was especially troubling for parents with children with IEPs. One parent noted that despite having a daughter who was diagnosed with selective mutism and had an IEP, they did not receive updates from DOE staff on how they

were working to support her in completing her assignments and how she was faring overall.

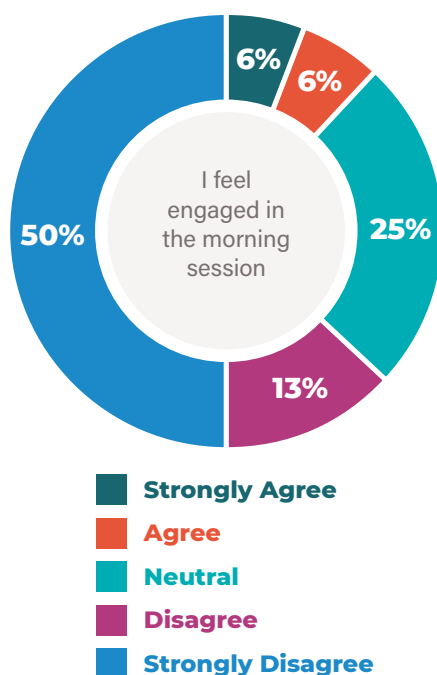
Another parent affirmed the importance of more consistent communication around their children’s curriculum during the DOE-led academic portion: “We want to know how to support and stretch our child’s learning at home, so knowing what they’re doing during summer school is crucial to achieve this goal. Even if it’s a summer program, communication with parents is keen to ensure we all know what to expect, what kind of instruction is being imparted and how we can support that at home.”

Parents felt that the CBO did a better job of ensuring consistent and regular communication with parents.⁹ One parent noted that “there was zero communication with parents from teachers/pedagogues as to the curriculum/what students were learning. There was no orientation at [the elementary school] for parents on academics either so as a teacher myself, I found it very unsettling. The [CBO] camp did have a helpful orientation and communicated extensively.”

3. Lack of student engagement during the academic portion of Summer Rising and desire for more diverse enrichment activities and outdoor time in the afternoons

Many middle school students found the morning academic portion unengaging and felt that they were re-learning material they learned during the school year.

CHART 4: SHARE OF MIDDLE SCHOOL FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS WHO AGREED/DISAGREED WITH THE STATEMENT “I FEEL ENGAGED IN THE MORNING SESSION.”



Many of the middle school students in the focus groups led by ICI expressed frustration and disappointment with the DOE-led academic portion, noting that the morning was often unengaging and repetitive. The students

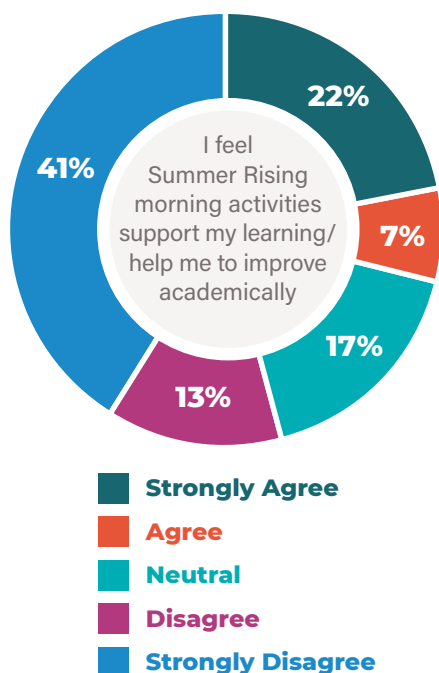
wondered why they were required to participate in the academic portion if they were not considered Promotion-in-Doubt and mandated for summer school. One Bronx student noted, “every time we say, “why do we have to do the work,” they say it’s because there’s some kids in here who actually have to do the work but instead of them pulling out the kids who have to be here to go to the next grade and putting them in a different room to do the work, they make everybody do the work with them, which is unfair if I’ve already learned this.”

Among middle school student focus group participants, 63 percent¹⁰ disagreed with the statement, “I feel engaged in the morning session,” while only 6 percent strongly agreed with the statement. Participants expressed a need for more variety and personalization in their learning experiences. One student noted that the DOE teachers were unable to tailor the lessons to address students’ varying levels of academic knowledge:

“During the school year, our teachers know what we need to improve on, but in Summer Rising they teach one lesson to the entire class and if you don’t get it, they’ll just move on.”

Furthermore, over half (54 percent) of middle school student focus group participants disagreed with the statement, “I feel Summer Rising morning activities support my learning/help me to improve academically.” Students noted that they were often re-learning material during the school year and were not learning anything new that prepared them for the school year ahead. When asked if they thought Summer Rising prepared them for the school year, one student responded, “It’s not helping me for next year because I passed my grade doing that work which is supposed to help me for my next grade.”

CHART 5: SHARE OF MIDDLE SCHOOL FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS WHO AGREED/DISAGREED WITH THE STATEMENT, "I FEEL SUMMER RISING MORNING ACTIVITIES SUPPORT MY LEARNING/ HELP ME TO IMPROVE ACADEMICALLY"



Both parents and students believed that there was inadequate outdoor time, not enough field trips, and limited variety in the types of available enrichment activities in the afternoon.

Parents believed that their children had inadequate access to field trips and outdoor time; and that there was a lack of diversity in the afternoon enrichment activities available to young people. One parent noted: "...I also think summer school should be a time for fun, outdoor activities, and trips. Unfortunately, my daughter didn't have this experience. There were no trips besides going to the camp site on Mondays, which they arrived late to, and did not have enough time to play or go in the sprinklers. Many of the activities promised to parents during orientation were not carried out, which was very disappointing." While this was

not addressed in the survey responses, CBO staff have shared that the hybrid structure of the program and the limited number of hours that CBOs had students in the afternoons made it challenging to organize field-trips and day-long activities. CBOs have to fit the field trips into the afternoon portion or work with the DOE staff to take kids out during the morning academic portion, which is not always guaranteed to happen.

Another parent had similar feedback about limited access to sports, outdoor play and other engaging activities: "It seems as though there was a lot of boredom time where the kids were told to keep their heads down or were given dull activities to fulfill. They did not go outside often; they did not learn to play any sports; and there were no field trips."

Middle school students also expressed a desire for more trips, sports and outdoor activities. One middle school focus group participant noted: "My favorite part is the trips we get to go on and how every week is something new we're doing. But my least favorite part is that we have to do school." Focus group participants also noted their preference for choice-based activities in the afternoon but several students shared that instead of being given choices, they were simply directed by staff on what to do and felt that their opinions were not taken into consideration.

CBO staff agreed that students should not be required to attend the academic portion if they were not considered promotion-in-doubt and mandated to do so.

CBO staff shared that the morning academic portion of Summer Rising was unpopular among families. One settlement house director noted that their program had few

children mandated for summer school, and “parents felt it wasn’t fair to have their kids go to four extra hours of school just to get summer camp.” A CBO staff member noted that requiring children who were not mandated for summer school to participate in that programming “makes it difficult to keep the children interested in the program or even want to attend.” Similarly, another CBO staff member noted that the academic portion of the program impacted enrollment “because most families are interested in a summer camp and not a morning DOE school.” Similarly, another staff member shared that the academic portion of Summer Rising impacted attendance and that they were in favor of reverting back to a “program that doesn’t dictate which children get to go into summer camps.” They added that “school throughout the year is long enough and adding it to summer camps ruins the enjoyment of camp and lowers the numbers as well.”

Several CBO staff were in favor of returning to the pre-COVID model of separate summer camp and summer school programs. A division director noted that under a separate DOE-run summer school program for mandated students, students “get the support they need rather than being lost in a class of mostly students who do not need extra support,” which they note is “arguably a repeat of what’s happening during the school year.” Another CBO staff member commented that the City “should go back to the old model where the CBO has the students that do not need additional help in the morning and the others can join at 12pm.”

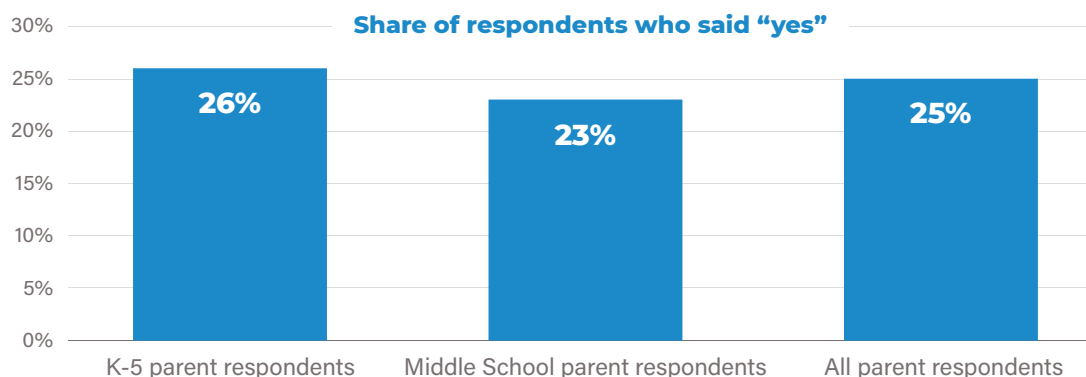
4. Parents and CBO staff experienced enrollment and registration problems

1 in 4 parent respondents said that they were waitlisted for a spot at their preferred Summer Rising school site.

There was a mismatch between programs children were assigned to and their proximity to home and their afterschool program during the school year. Parents voiced frustration when their children were waitlisted for their preferred program, which were typically programs closer to home or programs run by CBOs that their children are involved with during the school year. Several middle school focus group participants mentioned struggles with their long commute to the program site, and noted that this contributed to feeling “tired” during the morning portion of the session.

A parent reported that although her child attended one CBO’s program during the school year, she was placed with a different CBO-run program co-located in the same building: “My child was placed in the program not chosen [by us]. She has been attending [CBO A] consistently for many years and was placed with [CBO B] without opportunity to change despite both programs [being] housed in the same building.” In another case, a parent reported that although they loved the Summer Rising program her child was in, their “top choice was a program closer to home. Unfortunately, my child was on the waitlist in the 1,900s! It is horrendous that a neighborhood waitlist would be that ridiculous.”

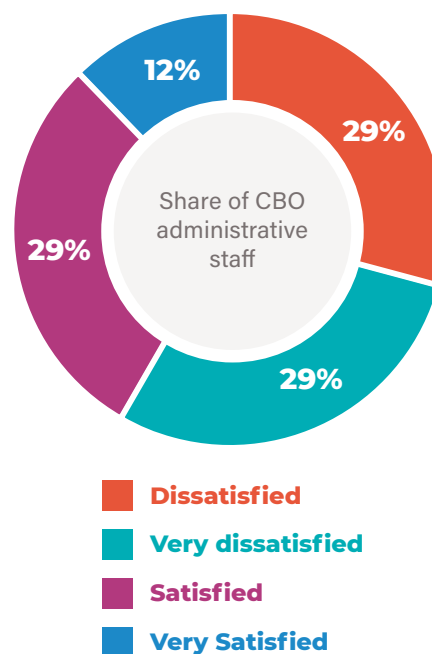
CHART 6: WAS YOUR CHILD(REN) WAITLISTED FOR A SPOT AT YOUR PREFERRED SUMMER RISING SCHOOL SITE?



Fifty-nine percent of CBO program directors and administrative staff respondents reported that they were dissatisfied with the enrollment and registration process for Summer Rising.

Over the last four years, settlement houses have strived to help families enroll in Summer Rising programs. Yet they and other community-based organizations (CBOs) do not have control over enrollment in their programs.¹¹ CBO staff reported that the application process was confusing and difficult for families to navigate, especially given barriers that families faced around technology and language access. Staff were frustrated with the way that waitlists were organized, noting that their inability to accept children based on grade impacted the speed at which they were able to move families off waitlists: "The waitlist was very disorganized and did not make any sense. You cannot accept children based on grade, so when a 1st grader drops, and the next one on the list is in 5th grade, you can't accept [that child] because they cannot be placed in the group of the child that dropped." Staff noted glitches with the transfer of information from MySchools, the DOE portal that parents used to submit their Summer Rising application, to DYCD Connect, DYCD's platform.

CHART 7: CBO ADMINISTRATION STAFF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION, "PLEASE RATE YOUR SATISFACTION WITH THE ENROLLMENT AND REGISTRATION PROCESS"



Thirty-seven (37 percent) of CBO staff respondents reported that the confusing application and registration process was one of the most pressing challenges facing the Summer Rising program. A similar share (35 percent) of CBO staff respondents identified

the lack of coordination between the DOE, DYCD and CBOs as another major challenge facing Summer Rising.

During a UNH-convened meeting of settlement house staff in August, staff confirmed that the waitlist process created a situation where programs were under-enrolled despite parents' need for Summer Rising, with one director noting that the "community needs this program and we can't help those who want it." Given these enrollment challenges, CBO staff felt limited in the number of families they could serve under the current system. Staff also noted that they were dealing with volatile attendance throughout the duration of the program and had difficulties managing the turnover of families each week. One director noted that their program experienced "dozens of discharges per week," adding that the constant changeover of children created a destabilizing experience for children in their program.¹² Senior-level CBO staff noted that their programs remained under-enrolled because they were unable to get in touch with families on the waiting list. When CBO staff were finally able to get in touch with parents, these parents informed them that their child had already enrolled in other summer programming. Furthermore, CBO staff noted that they had received guidance from DYCD to wait three days for a family to accept a waitlist offer, which made it difficult to quickly enroll new children into the program.

Most program directors and other senior-level CBO staff reported that they were satisfied with the DOE principal and staff at their site, although only 53 percent said that they were "very satisfied" with this relationship. CBO staff noted that they experienced conflicts

with DOE staff when it came to unenrollment and moving children off the waitlist, and that there was confusion among both CBO and DOE staff about the enrollment process. One director noted that they faced a situation over the summer with principals at several sites who refused to unenroll students who were not attending the program. Under the previous CBO-led summer camp model where CBOs controlled the enrollment process, a division director noted:

“ CBOs never had the issue we are seeing with a revolving door of participation. We fully enrolled at the beginning of each summer and remained that way all summer.”

Program staff prefer consistency between the families in their school-year programs and those in their Summer Rising programs

Like parents, many of the CBO staff highlighted the challenges of not being able to serve families from their school-year programs at their Summer Rising sites. One staff member noted, "A lot of students who usually come to our site were dispersed into different programs and sites because of the confusing lottery method of application and... there was a disconnect with our community." Within UNH's survey sample, 21 percent of CBO Summer Rising administrative staff reported that they were not selected to operate Summer Rising at their school-year afterschool site. One group leader noted, "It would be better for CBOs to work in their own school building with their own students and families; that way they could continue to grow the community they have at hand."

5. CBOs are facing challenges with co-location and staffing

Co-location of programs is frustrating for many CBOs

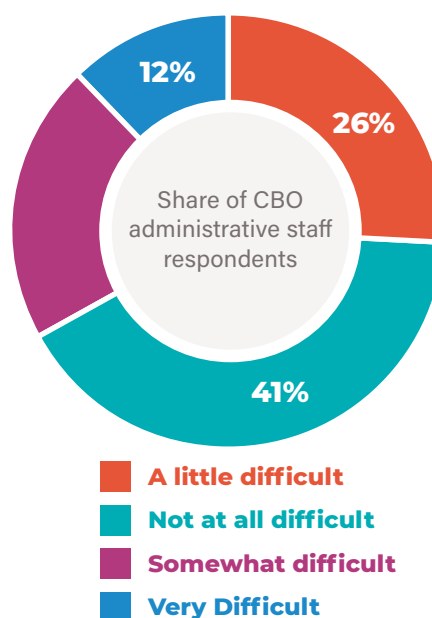
CBO staff have found it challenging to share space in the same building with other CBO providers running Summer Rising programs. During a UNH-convened meeting of settlement house providers, a program director noted that co-locating multiple CBOs in the same building can lead to fewer shared spaces that can impact program quality for participants: "A huge issue is squishing multiple CBOs into one school...trying to share a gym, auditorium, and cafeteria with multiple programs hurts the enrichment for the kids."

DYCD made it difficult for CBOs to ensure adequate staffing levels for their programs

Almost a third (32 percent) of program directors and senior staff¹³ reported that they found it somewhat or very difficult to hire staff for Summer Rising 2024. Furthermore, 26 percent of program directors and other senior staff reported that they were not fully staffed for Summer Rising. The staffing challenges that CBOs faced may have been attributed to several factors. CBOs were not notified of their Summer Rising slot allocations until mid-April, and the funding restoration of afternoon sessions and full-day programming for middle school students was announced by Mayor Adams in June, just weeks before the start of the program in July.¹⁴ When CBOs were informed in April of how many students they would have per site, they received guidance that DYCD and DOE would assign CBOs up to 15 percent more Summer Rising participants than their funded program seats to account for "historical family offer acceptance rates and daily attendance patterns."¹⁵ This meant that the City anticipated a drop in attendance rates

for Summer Rising, but CBOs still needed to ensure adequate staffing levels for their higher enrollment targets. However, they would only be paid for attending students, setting up an impossible bind where CBOs were required to staff programs at proper ratios and could not be guaranteed they would be paid for it.

CHART 8: CBO ADMINISTRATION STAFF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION, "PLEASE DESCRIBE THE LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY YOUR PROGRAM FACED WITH RECRUITING AND HIRING AN ADEQUATE NUMBER OF STAFF FOR SUMMER RISING 2024"



Nearly half of program directors and other senior staff reported that one of the biggest barriers to fully staffing their programs was their inability to provide higher wages due to inadequate per-student contract rates. One senior staff member noted that their "budget is still not enough to cover the staff we need to hire to run [the] program." Twenty-one (21) percent of senior CBO staff reported that they faced competition from retail, food and other sectors when it came to hiring staff. Several frontline staff respondents noted that they would like to see a raise in wages and staff appreciation rewards, indicating that staff felt underpaid for the work that they were doing.

Recommendations

Summer Rising is filling a critical need for free child care and summer program options—nearly 60 percent of parents surveyed said that they lacked a back-up program option if their child was not enrolled in Summer Rising. However, the findings underscore that a one-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter approach to designing and implementing summer programming for youth does not work. This approach has been detrimental to the goal of ensuring a high-quality, enriching summer experience that meets the needs of New York City’s families. Chalkbeat found that daily attendance for Summer Rising’s academic portion was lower than the CBO-led programming of previous summers. This kind of drop in attendance should be alarming for City officials, and calls for new approaches to programming beyond just the Summer Rising program model. Furthermore, the findings reveal that there is high demand for summer programming that does not mandate narrowly defined academic instruction as part of the experience. Both parents and staff expressed frustrations with the mandated academics of Summer Rising, and identified that a re-design of summer programming could benefit all students, especially those with disabilities.

Settlement houses and other community-based organizations (CBOs) have deep experience providing services and programming that are tailored to the needs of the youth and families within their communities. To improve summer programming and create a high-quality, effective and lower cost summer program for

New York City youth, the City must listen to and take direction from settlement houses and other CBOs who have successfully operated traditional summer camps and school-year afterschool programs for decades and are leaders in the positive youth development movement in New York City. Below are UNH’s recommendations to ensure that all youth have access to quality summer programs that meet their needs.

The City Must Provide Choice for Families and Fund Flexible Models for Summer Programming

Families of students who are not in need of remedial instruction should have choice and control over what their summer experience looks like. Families should have options for summer programming, so that students who need and want extra academic support can access it, but students who do not want or need the extra academics are not required to participate just to get access to free summer programming. Regardless of income and whether families can or cannot afford to pay for private options,¹⁶ all families should be offered the same choice and variety in their summer programming. This is especially crucial for middle school students, who expressed strong feelings about mandated academics and are likely experiencing a developmental desire to have more choice and control over their days. Keeping these students engaged in summer programming is critical, as middle school years are full of growth, change, and exploration.

The City must ensure that there are full day summer camp options for those families who need access to crucial child care services in the summer, but are not in need of remedial academic instruction. This model currently exists in center-based COMPASS programs and Cornerstones who do not participate in Summer Rising and should be expanded to school buildings and to other community-based sites. Many current Summer Rising providers previously ran summer camps prior to the creation of Summer Rising and would be able to shift back to a summer camp model as soon as Summer 2025.

The City also should explore ways to infuse extra academic instruction into summer programming where there is demand, since many families did see this as a valuable part of Summer Rising. This could take a more targeted approach by using curricula centered around topics like STEAM learning, creative writing, computer programming, or more. Themed summer camps are common for youth as they get older; providing options of programming and enrichment can help increase youth agency and buy in at a program, something that middle school focus group respondents highlighted as currently missing. This can be led by the DOE when there is a strong relationship between a school and a CBO, or could be led by the CBO with enhanced funding in their contract. We know that summer comes every July; this kind of local planning can happen throughout the winter to avoid last minute scrambles and give families the kind of thoughtful, engaging programming they deserve.

It is also crucial to accommodate students who are Promotion in Doubt and who need

academic instruction in summer camp programs. Before Summer Rising, these students received their academic instruction and then moved into a corresponding summer camp for the afternoon. The City must ensure that this continues so that these families have access to a full day of child care when they need it. This could be accomplished by matching these students to a program in their building, or providing transportation to another program site.

Tailor Programming for English Language Learners to Emphasize English Instruction

The summer months serve as an ideal opportunity to provide intensive English instruction and tailored learning opportunities to students who are English language learners. However, based on input from the middle school focus group participants and CBO staff, DOE-led instruction for this population varies widely, not often reflecting the needs of participating students. DOE should work with DYCD to develop program sites throughout the boroughs that are equipped to support English Language learners in both the academic and enrichment portions. At the same time, DOE and DYCD should partner to provide additional curriculum and professional development supports to all staff working in summer programs to ensure this population is served appropriately and receives the same support and access to services as any other student.

Invest in Additional Supports for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities should have the same access to summer programming as any other youth. Yet, since the launch of the

program, there have been persistent concerns around how Summer Rising serves students with disabilities. Program staff have detailed a delay in paraprofessional support and feeling unprepared to work with students with emotional and academic disabilities. To adequately and appropriately serve this population, the City should invest in resources, such as additional paraprofessionals, and year-round, hands-on staff training, that can equip all summer staff to better support this population. This could also have the added benefit of making it easier for students with disabilities to participate in school-year afterschool programs as well.

Additionally, DOE should work with bus companies to allow for later afternoon bussing to accommodate students with disabilities who are participating in the full afternoon enrichment program. Students with disabilities are entitled to year-round bussing services but this schedule is typically aligned with an academic school day, not with the schedule for CBO programming in the afternoons. Extra end-of-day accommodations would alleviate this problem.

DOE and DYCD Should Work with CBO Providers to Improve the Siting and Co-Location of Programs

Most Summer Rising providers also run school-year afterschool programs, equipping them with established relationships with families and partnerships with schools. Although we understand that many schools will be closed during summer months for construction, every effort should be made to locate summer programs as close as possible to their corresponding school-year programs. When programs are required to change locations, DYCD should engage providers to ensure that they are able to serve families from their school-year programs at their new summer sites and ensure consistency of services for families already utilizing school-year afterschool programming.

When co-locating programs, DOE and DYCD should first catalog the amenities of a building, (particularly the shared amenities like the gym, cafeteria, outside space, etc.), and take into consideration which providers will be co-located and how much time ahead of programming they have to plan collaboratively.

Conclusion

Parents across the country are faced every year with the “summer scramble” to secure safe, affordable, and enriching summer activities for their children. New York City has rightfully addressed that burden for thousands of families across the city, easing their financial strain and giving them peace of mind that their children are engaged in safe programs throughout the summer. Now, the City must take the next step to design thoughtful summer programs that give families choice and provide a range of options depending on needs. New York City’s students deserve no less.

Appendix

Methodology

UNH conducted a mixed-methods study that involved both quantitative and qualitative components. For the qualitative component, UNH partnered with the Intergenerational Change Initiative (ICI) affiliated with CUNY's School of Professional Studies to conduct seven focus groups of middle school students (grades six through eight) participating in Summer Rising during Summer 2024 in four boroughs at UNH settlement house member Summer Rising sites. A total of 52 students participated in these focus groups, including English language learners. Youth and adult researchers from ICI staffed the seven focus groups, with two youth researchers facilitating each focus group. CBO staff provided translation for the English language learners in each group.

UNH created and developed a survey questionnaire in Google Forms for parents and CBO staff. To ensure that the survey questions yielded data that would be helpful to providers, policymakers and communities, UNH first collected feedback on the questionnaire from settlement house staff, including those involved with running Summer Rising sites and staff involved with research and evaluation. For parents whose children participated in Summer Rising during summer 2024,

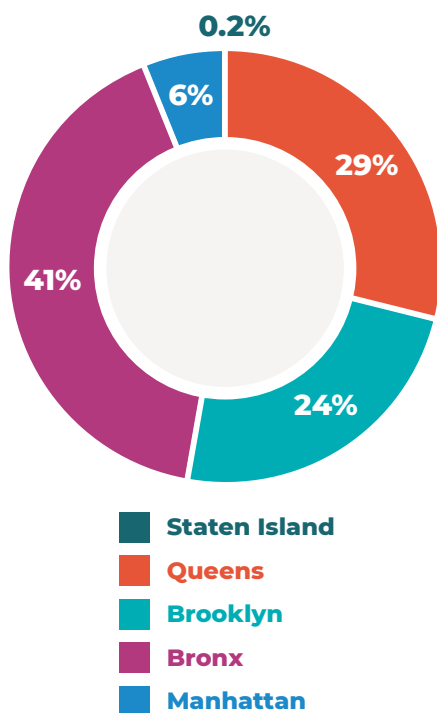
the survey questions sought to gauge their children's experience with the program and their satisfaction with the program. For staff involved with Summer Rising, the questions were focused on identifying programmatic challenges and improvements to the program.

UNH emailed program directors and other senior-level staff at 25 settlement house members running Summer Rising sites to distribute the survey to staff and parents through fliers and emails with customized QR codes for each settlement house.¹⁷ The survey was open from July 25, 2024 to September 10, 2024, and was available in both English and Spanish. In total, the survey garnered responses from 700 individuals from 17 settlement houses, including 488 parents/caregivers whose children attended Summer Rising during Summer 2024, 10 parents whose children attended summer camp at a non-Summer Rising site, and 202 staff members affiliated with CBOs.¹⁸ Parents made up the majority of the sample (71 percent) while 29 percent of the survey sample was CBO staff. This survey relied on voluntary participation from parents of Summer Rising participants affiliated with UNH settlement house members. This is not a scientific survey that used a weighting methodology to ensure a representative sample by geography, race or age.

Overview of survey sample

Bronx residents made up the largest share of the parent sample (41 percent), followed by Queens (29 percent), Brooklyn (24 percent), and Manhattan (6 percent). Three settlement houses—one in Brooklyn, one in Queens and one in the Bronx—accounted for 60 percent of the parent sample. The borough distribution of parent respondents is based on an analysis of responses to the question, “Which zip code do you live in?”

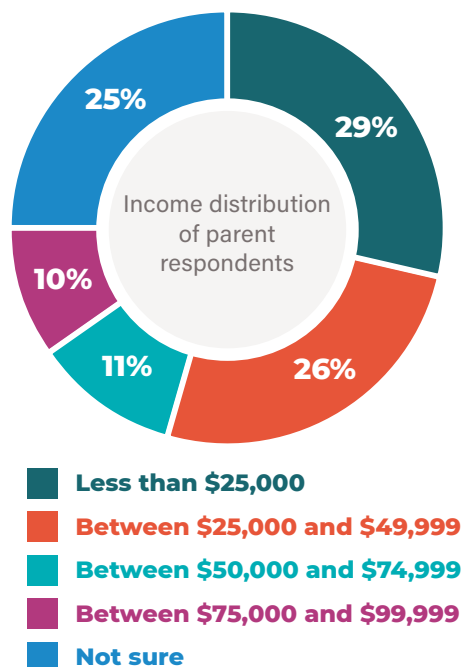
CHART 9: BOROUGH OF PARENT RESPONDENTS



Income distribution of parent sample

The parent respondents were predominantly low income – overall, 54 percent of parents reported that their households earned less than \$50,000 a year before taxes, with 29 percent who said that their household earned less than \$25,000 a year before taxes.

CHART 10: IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS, WHAT WAS THE APPROXIMATE AMOUNT OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME EARNED BY ALL ADULTS LIVING IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD BEFORE TAXES?



Birthplace of parents and their children

Furthermore, nearly six out of every 10 parent respondents were born outside of the U.S. (57 percent), compared to 43 percent of parent respondents who were born in the U.S. However, in contrast, the vast majority of parent respondents (87 percent) reported that their children were born in the U.S.

CHART 11: BIRTHPLACE OF PARENT RESPONDENTS

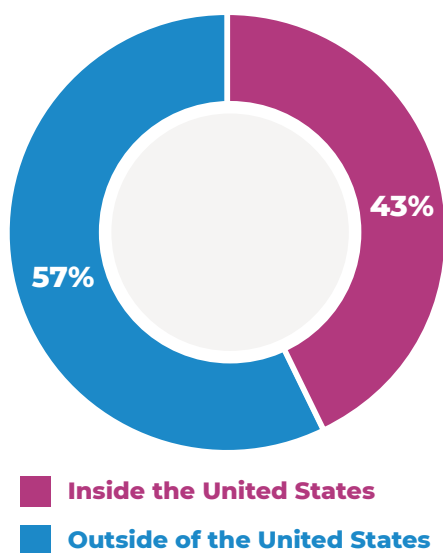
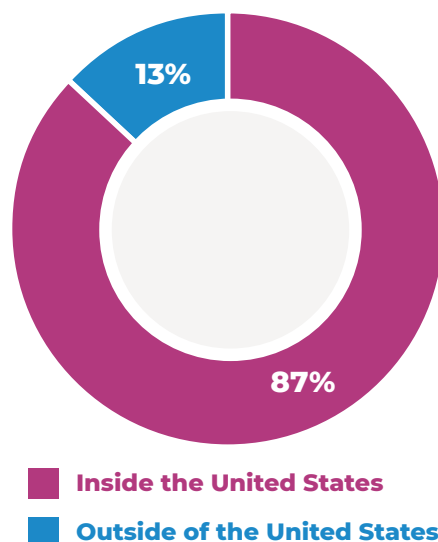


CHART 12: BIRTHPLACE OF CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN SUMMER RISING



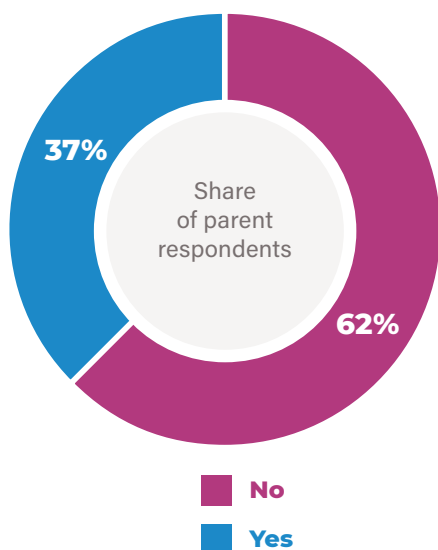
Grade of Summer Rising participants

The vast majority of the parent sample (81 percent) was parents with children in kindergarten through fifth grade, while just 29 percent reported that their child would be entering sixth through eighth grades in Fall 2024.

Prior Summer Rising participation

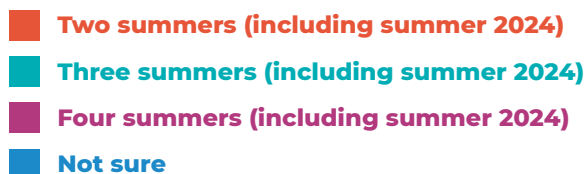
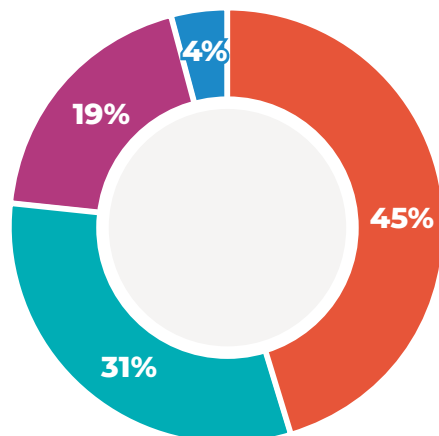
Many of the families we surveyed are not new to Summer Rising – more than 60 percent had participated in the program for multiple summers. Of those who participated in the program for multiple summers, half had participated in the program for three or four summers (including Summer 2024).

CHART 13: IS THIS THE FIRST TIME YOUR FAMILY HAS PARTICIPATED IN A SUMMER RISING PROGRAM?



Slightly more than half (51 percent) of parent respondents said that their children attended school or an afterschool program at their Summer Rising site during the school year. A third of parent respondents reported that they had more than one child enrolled in Summer Rising during Summer 2024.

CHART 14: HOW MANY SUMMERS HAVE YOUR CHILD(REN) PARTICIPATED IN SUMMER RISING SINCE THE PROGRAM BEGAN IN 2021?



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- BronxWorks**
- CAMBA**
- Center for Family Life**
- Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation**
- East Side House**
- Goddard Riverside Community Center**
- Grand St. Settlement**
- Hudson Guild**
- Kingsbridge Heights Community Center**
- Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement**
- Mosholu Montefiore Community Center**
- SCAN Harbor**
- Shorefront YM-YWHA**
- St. Nick's Alliance/ School Settlement**
- Sunnyside Community Services**
- Union Settlement**
- University Settlement**
- WHEDco**
- Henry Street Settlement**

This report was written by the following members of the UNH team: Irene Lew, Senior Manager of Research; Kate Connolly, Senior Policy Analyst; Rachel Klepper, Research Analyst; and Nora Moran, Director of Policy and Advocacy. UNH would like to thank Tracey Maurer for her stellar design work on this report.

Endnotes

- 1 Nationwide, the Biden administration set aside \$122 billion in ARPA funding to support the re-opening of schools and help students catch up academically, including through the expansion of summer programming. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/20/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-invests-in-summer-learning-and-enrichment-programs-to-help-students-catch-up/>
- 2 <https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2024/07/29/low-student-attendance-for-nyc-summer-rising-raises-questions-about-program/>
- 3 However, PID students were able to and often did join summer camps after their summer school classes.
- 4 <https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2024/07/29/low-student-attendance-for-nyc-summer-rising-raises-questions-about-program/>
- 5 For more information about the survey methodology and sample, please visit the Appendix at the end of the report.
- 6 https://www.afterschoolalliance.org/afterschoolsnack/New-survey-results-show-parents-want-more-summer_07-26-2024.cfm
- 7 According to DYCD's Summer Rising Operations Guidebook (p. 47), school-year teachers were supposed to create Summer Rising Accommodation Plans for every student with an IEP. That Plan was to be shared with the Principal in charge of the site who is supposed to "ensure paraprofessionals and nurses are arranged, and they will also communicate with the community-based organization (CBO) running the afternoon program to ensure they have the information they need to effectively support the student." In separate conversations, some CBO staff shared that they received little to no information about accommodations and only knew if a student had an IEP. Others said they were aware of the IEP details for school-year students, but did not have any information for students from other schools.
- 8 English-language learners in the focus groups received translation support from CBO staff.
- 9 A higher share of parent respondents said that they were "very satisfied" with the communication they received from the CBO (65 percent) vs 60 percent who said that they were "very satisfied" with DOE communication (60 percent).
- 10 The analysis of responses to these focus group questions were conducted by adult and youth researchers from the Intergenerational Change Initiative.
- 11 In a different process from school-year afterschool programming, all families were directed to apply for Summer Rising through MySchools, an online DOE platform where they were able to rank up to 12 programs. Several priority areas were taken into consideration when making offers, including students with a 12-month IEP, students in temporary housing, and siblings. For those who did not receive their first choice, they were put on a waitlist which would fluctuate based on open seats and the student's priority group.
- 12 According to the DOE and DYCD 2024 Summer Rising operations guidebook: following a student's 6th consecutive absence and a minimum of three documented outreach attempts by the CBO and DOE staff, a student is unenrolled (discharged) and removed from the Summer Rising program roster. Report authors did not have access to guidelines on unenrollment that were issued by the DOE to principals. However, based on follow-up discussions with several UNH members, it seems that CBOs are able to unenroll students with approval from the Principal in Charge.
- 13 Note that this was only 34 respondents (for director level staff) out of 202 total CBO staff, although there are fewer directors within the UNH network overall.
- 14 <https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2024/06/04/eric-adams-nyc-education-funding-restored-fiscal-cliff/>
- 15 Information provided to CBOs during DYCD-led convenings of CBOs around Summer Rising
- 16 54 percent of parent respondents reported household income of \$50,000 or less. See appendix for a more detailed distribution of families' incomes.
- 17 The perspectives and opinions of school principals or other DOE staff were not included in this report, with the exception of several paraprofessionals who responded to the survey.
- 18 The CBO staff also included a handful who self-identified as paraprofessionals.



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