**Fiscal Facts by Wisconsin Policy Forum**

**Will Summer Be the Season for Student Recovery?**

At a time when many Wisconsin students need additional support, statewide summer school enrollment plunged in the early months of the pandemic and did not fully recover last summer.

The initial decline of 2020 hit nearly every district, but in 2021, some districts fully regained their summer school enrollment while others lagged. Districts such as Green Bay reached the highest levels in a decade, while others remained near 2020 levels or – as in the state’s largest district, Milwaukee – actually declined again.

These trends are worth considering at a time when federal relief funds are among the resources available to districts to support summer school programs, as well as other COVID recovery efforts.

The 13 largest school districts in Wisconsin, representing nearly 30% of the state’s overall student enrollment, illustrate the range of summer school enrollment fluctuations the last three years. While all 13 saw a sizeable decline in summer school enrollment from 2019 to 2020, this change varied widely -- from a 32.9% drop in Kenosha to a 75.1% decrease in Appleton.

A year later, the 2020-21 change ranged from an additional 1.4% decrease in Milwaukee to a 232.7% increase in Appleton. Comparing summer 2021 to summer 2019 enrollment, seven of the 13 districts failed to match the statewide rebound to 88.3% of pre-pandemic enrollment.

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Green Bay district officials say there were concerted efforts in summer school to meet COVID recovery needs, as district leadership prioritized in-person, robust programming for summer 2021. Armed with federal relief funds, pre-existing relationships with community partners, and internal leadership and coordination, the district expanded its usual half-day programming to a full-day schedule with both remedial and enrichment offerings. The federal relief dollars also paid for additional resources like literacy coaches, English Learner supports, and special education supports.

Summer school 2022 registration season is now upon us. At a minimum, restoring pre-pandemic summer school enrollment levels throughout Wisconsin would ensure that students are no longer missing out on offerings previously available to them and would forestall state aid and revenue limit decreases for districts. Optimally, school officials would also leverage the additional teaching time and revenue afforded by summer school to accelerate student learning and support students’ socioemotional health.

Summer school is not a silver bullet and may not be the best fit for every student’s individual needs. Still, early evidence has shown that students need additional support to regain their pre-pandemic learning. Programs like summer school that previously played a role in helping students succeed are now more important than ever to help students recover and reach their full potential.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at* [*wispolicyforum.org*](https://wispolicyforum.org/research/state-tax-burden-up-but-overall-burden-still-falling/)*.*