

EXPANDING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

SURVEY OF SUMMER ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS AT INDEPENDENT AND PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS IN MASSACHUSETTS

By Lauren Corvese & William Donovan



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This paper is a publication of the Center for School Reform, which seeks to increase the education options available to parents and students, drive system-wide reform, and ensure accountability in public education. The Center's work builds on Pioneer's legacy as a recognized leader in the charter public school movement, and as a champion of greater academic rigor in Massachusetts' elementary and secondary schools. Current initiatives promote choice and competition, school-based management, and enhanced academic performance in public schools.



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INTRODUCTION

Massachusetts has long been a frontrunner in education. The landmark 1993 Education Reform Act sought to improve the quality of public education across the state, improve academic outcomes, and close the “achievement gap” between higher-income, mainly white students and low-income, mostly minority students. From charter schools to vocational-technical schools to the inter-district METCO program, Massachusetts is a hub of educational innovation. Unfortunately, one alternative that is rarely at the forefront of policy discussions is summertime enrichment.

The largest time lapse in a student’s learning occurs during summer break. According to a report by Hanover Research¹, “summer learning loss” is becoming an increasing concern among K-12 educators and was described by the U.S. Department of Education as “devastating.” The report also states that summer learning loss is more prevalent among low-income students, who lose two-to-three months of reading skills during the summer. This regression and related achievement gap could be prevented through effective summer enrichment programs targeted at low-income or low-performing students. A report by Public Profit, a consulting company for public service organizations, confirms this, stating that the inequality of access to summer enrichment programs is a factor contributing to the persistent achievement gap in K-12 education². If academic achievement is the commonwealth’s goal, then summer enrichment programs should be utilized, both to ensure the retention of skills learned from September through June, as well as prepare students for the coming year by introducing new topics.

Throughout the country, and especially in Massachusetts, private schools have the capacity to expand educational access and help close the achievement gap. Some private schools have, admirably, taken it upon themselves to diversify their student bodies and recruit underprivileged children who might not otherwise have access to outstanding academic opportunities. But those efforts are isolated and rest chiefly on the financial ability of the schools to make such commitments.

Pioneer believes there is a significant opportunity to extend student learning through the summer that would mitigate learning loss and improve student achievement, through academically rich summer programs that are or could be offered at the commonwealth’s private schools.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

This policy brief is the first of a three-part series that will explore the current market for academic summer programs

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in Massachusetts and what can be done to expand it, with a specific focus on opening up opportunities for students who are most in need of quality academic experiences. In part one, we attempt what might be called a landscape analysis by surveying private schools in the commonwealth to understand the array of existing summer enrichment opportunities for Bay State students. In the second phase, we will review best practices of summer academic programs at independent and parochial schools in Massachusetts and nationally, specifically looking into financing, student recruitment methods, and program development and depth. Our final paper will be an analysis of the cost to create one to three types of programs in Massachusetts that could serve as a model for anyone wishing to start a program, a culmination of the findings of Part I and II. Through this research, we hope to empower administrators, schools, and organizations that wish to launch a summer enrichment program with the information needed to create one that is best suited for Massachusetts. This report shares the results of our survey of summer academic programs at independent and parochial schools in Massachusetts. Schools both with and without programs were surveyed, in order to learn more about current programs and identify barriers to the creation of these programs at schools that do not currently offer one. Through our survey, we attempted to build as broad a snapshot of the summer program market as was possible.

METHODOLOGY

Identifying Respondents

To conduct this survey, we first created a list of independent and parochial schools in Massachusetts using the website Private School Review³. We excluded only schools with fewer than 100 students, nursery or primary schools serving under grade 6, and those without a website presence. While it’s true that schools with smaller student bodies or those serving lower grades may offer summer programming, these institutions would likely have fewer resources to do so. Given these circumstances, we focused on larger schools we believed more likely to offer an academic summer program.

While generating the list, we compiled contact information for each school in order to form our survey pool. We identified one to two contacts in admissions, development, administration, or the summer program office (if available). Other data fields collected during this stage were the school's address, grades served, size of the student body, co-ed status, religious affiliation, and an explicit mention of a summer program on the website.

It is important to note that the survey we conducted was not scientific. However, the results include hard data: we tabulated the number of schools surveyed, the number that responded, and the number of schools that offer summer programming, both academic and otherwise. But we cannot necessarily claim that our data is an accurate representation of all private schools in Massachusetts.

Survey Composition

Next, the survey underwent a comprehensive peer review process. Our questions were selected with the intent of learning more about the financing, program type and depth, student profile, staffing, and goal of summer enrichment programs offered by private schools in Massachusetts. While the first four questions were related to contact information, the fifth and sixth questions of the survey separated the schools into three categories: those with academically focused summer programs, those with non-academic summer programs, and those with no summer programs. At this point, respondents without an *academic* summer program (the latter two groups) could skip to the 25th question, which asked if the school had ever considered starting such a program. Question 26 then followed up with those who answered "yes" to Question 25, by asking them to identify obstacles that are preventing the creation of a summer enrichment program at their school.

For the first group, schools with academic summer programs were asked a series of questions regarding the grade levels and number of students the program served, subjects taught, hours of instruction per day, applicant eligibility, the benefits of offering the program to students outside the school, and the methods used for student recruitment. Schools with existing summer enrichment programs were also asked about the academic level of students targeted for the program, whether an application was required, how seats are filled when demand exceeds capacity, and who staffs the program. Finally, we included financing questions regarding tuition, funding, and non-profit status.

Survey Distribution

Distribution of the survey was facilitated in a multi-step process. First, a preliminary "mass" email was sent to all schools explaining the project and its goals, as well as

...the responses we received provide valuable insight into the various summer academic programs currently offered at private schools in the commonwealth...

how it might be of interest to the administrators and their schools. In our initial email, we asked educators to complete our online survey, which was made available through Google Forms. As expected, the response rate was low. Next, phone calls were made to school contacts who had yet to fill out the survey. In the interest of time, follow-up phone calls were made to approximately 150 schools, based on the size of the school (200+), grades served (6th and up), and the probability that the school had a summer enrichment program. Follow-up emails were sent to any schools that were left voicemails. Finally, targeted emails and calls were made to schools with large summer programs to gain additional responses. The survey distribution took place from November 2015 to early February 2016 to 285 private schools in Massachusetts.

Response Rate

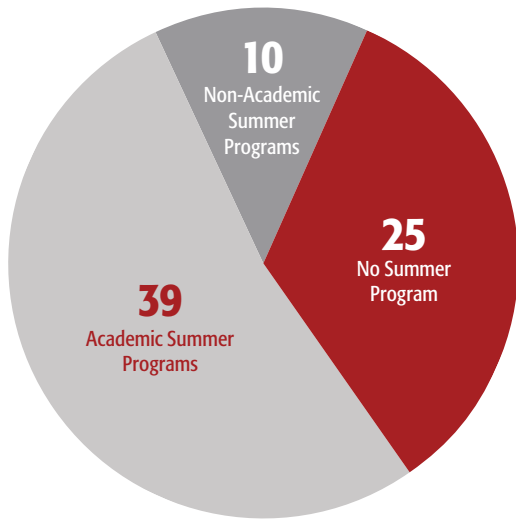
Out of the 285 schools that we reached out to, 74 independent and parochial schools responded, yielding a 26 percent response rate. According to SurveyGizmo, a survey-building website, the typical response rate of external surveys (those distributed to people or organizations without a prior relationship) is 10 to 15 percent.⁴ SurveyMonkey, another popular survey-building website, suggests that a high target response rate for external surveys is between 20 to 30 percent.⁵ Therefore, acknowledging the limitations of surveying, we are satisfied with a response rate of 26 percent. We do not attempt to claim that our data is representative of all summer enrichment programs or all private schools in Massachusetts; we are simply asserting that the responses we received provide valuable insight into the various summer academic programs currently offered at private schools in the commonwealth, and that our response rate is high enough to merit an analysis of the data we collected.

FINDINGS

Our survey provided a wealth of information on the operations of summer enrichment programs throughout Massachusetts. Out of the 74 schools that responded, 49 have a summer program, 39 of which are "academically oriented." Ten have non-academic summer programs and 25 schools

have no existing program. Though more than half of the schools that responded have a summer enrichment program, we do not believe that this is representative of most independent and parochial schools in Massachusetts. Instead, this is likely due to the increased level of interest of these schools in our project, resulting in a higher response rate.

Fig. 1: Summer Programming at Schools Surveyed



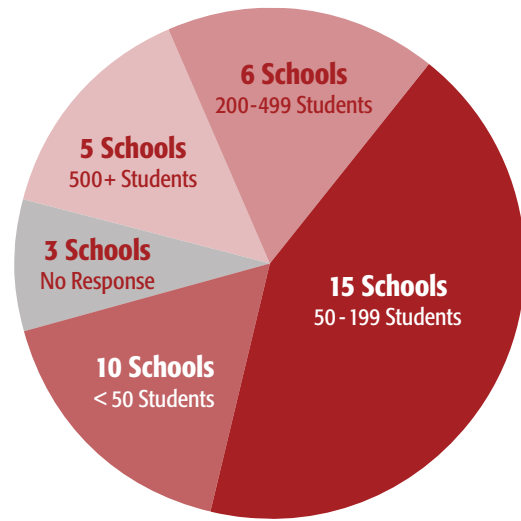
*Of the 74 Schools that Responded

I. Findings: Massachusetts Independent and Parochial Schools with Summer Academic Programs

A. Program Information

At the schools reported as having existing academic summer programs, the number of enrolled students ranged from as few as 10 to as many as 1,500. Due to the large range, it's best to report the results of this question in groups: 10 schools reported having under 50 students attend their summer program; 15 schools have attendance between 50 and 199; six serve 200 to 499; and five schools host over 500 students for their summer programs. Three schools chose not to answer this question. Therefore, we found that most summer enrichment programs serve less than 200 students.

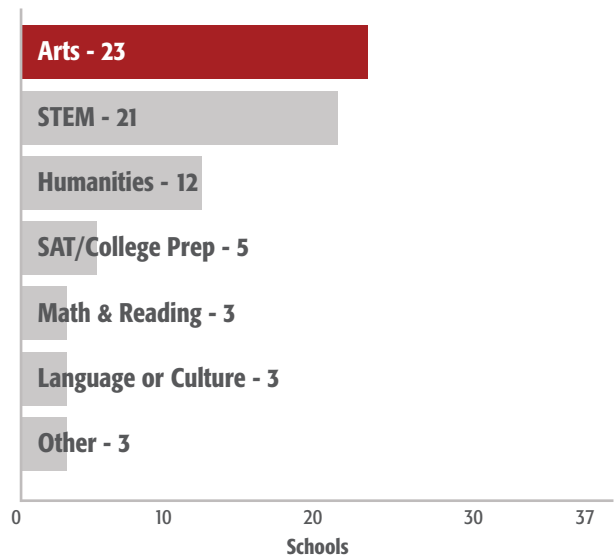
Fig. 2: Size of Summer Enrichment Programs



*Of the 39 Schools with an Academic Summer Program

According to our survey, STEM and the arts are the most popular subjects taught at summer enrichment programs. Of the 37 schools that responded to this question, 23 teach the arts (62 percent) and 21 (57 percent) teach STEM during their summer academic programming. Other popular answers include the humanities, SAT or college prep, reading and math, and language or culture. Other subjects mentioned by less than two schools include farm and land stewardship, study skills and high school preparation. Respondents had the option of choosing more than one subject.

Fig. 3: Subjects Taught at Summer Enrichment Programs



The typical day in a summer enrichment program can vary dramatically by school. Students may be in their academically oriented class from less than three hours to more than six hours per day. Out of the 39 schools with summer academic programs, seven schools teach their academic courses for less than three hours per day, 11 schools have class for three hours a day, eight schools have class for four hours a day and six have class for five hours a day. At seven schools, students are in class for six hours or more per day. Furthermore, five of the schools have summer enrichment programs that are overnight programs. The majority, 32, are day programs (86 percent).

B. Student Profile

Schools offering academically oriented summer programs serve a wide range of students, from first grade to twelfth. Our survey revealed that most of the 39 schools (more than 20) offer summer enrichment to students in grades 2 through 8, with the most popular grades being 5th through 8th grade.

Schools offer summer enrichment programs to different kinds of students with diverse goals in mind. For instance, the academic level of students that are targeted to attend summer programs varies significantly. Out of the 37 schools that responded, 11 target “accelerated” students

and 11 schools also target “proficient” students. Eight schools target students “in need of improvement” and one school’s program targets students that are at risk of dropping out. The largest group of schools, 22, accept students from any or all of these categories, suggesting that they either have no preference or they have multiple programs that fit students of each category.

The status of the students who qualify for summer enrichment programs also differs across schools. Our survey found that out of 39 schools with existing programs, 24 serve current students, 27 serve incoming students, 24 serve prospective students, and 31 serve students from a designated geographic area. Other responses were programs serving “motivated and underserved students in the outside community” and students from “other Catholic schools.”

We asked the 31 schools that offer their summer enrichment program to any student in a certain geographic location to define the area. Twelve schools indicated that students could come from anywhere or that there is no defined area and two did not respond. The remaining 17 schools serve students in various locations across Massachusetts. On the next page is a map of those self-reported locations.

Fig. 4: Grades Served by Summer Enrichment Programs

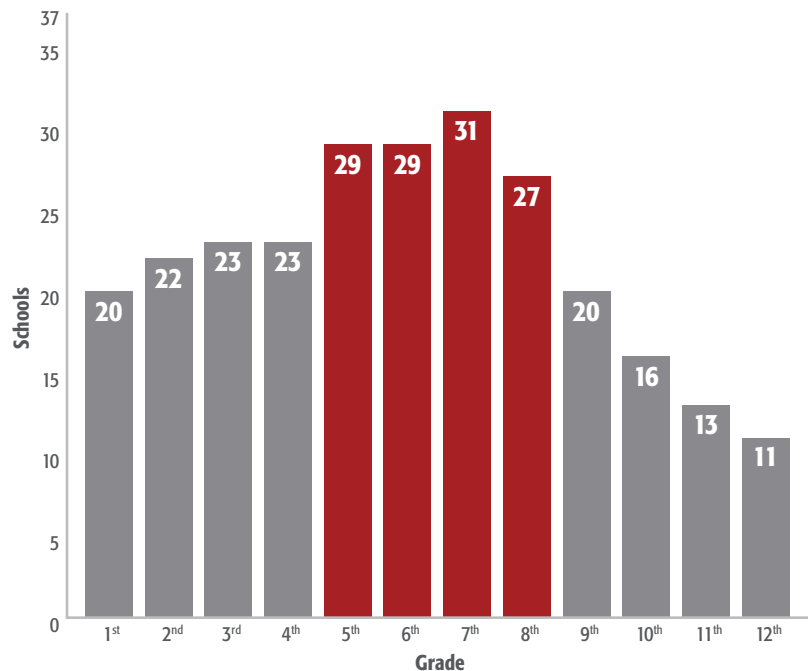
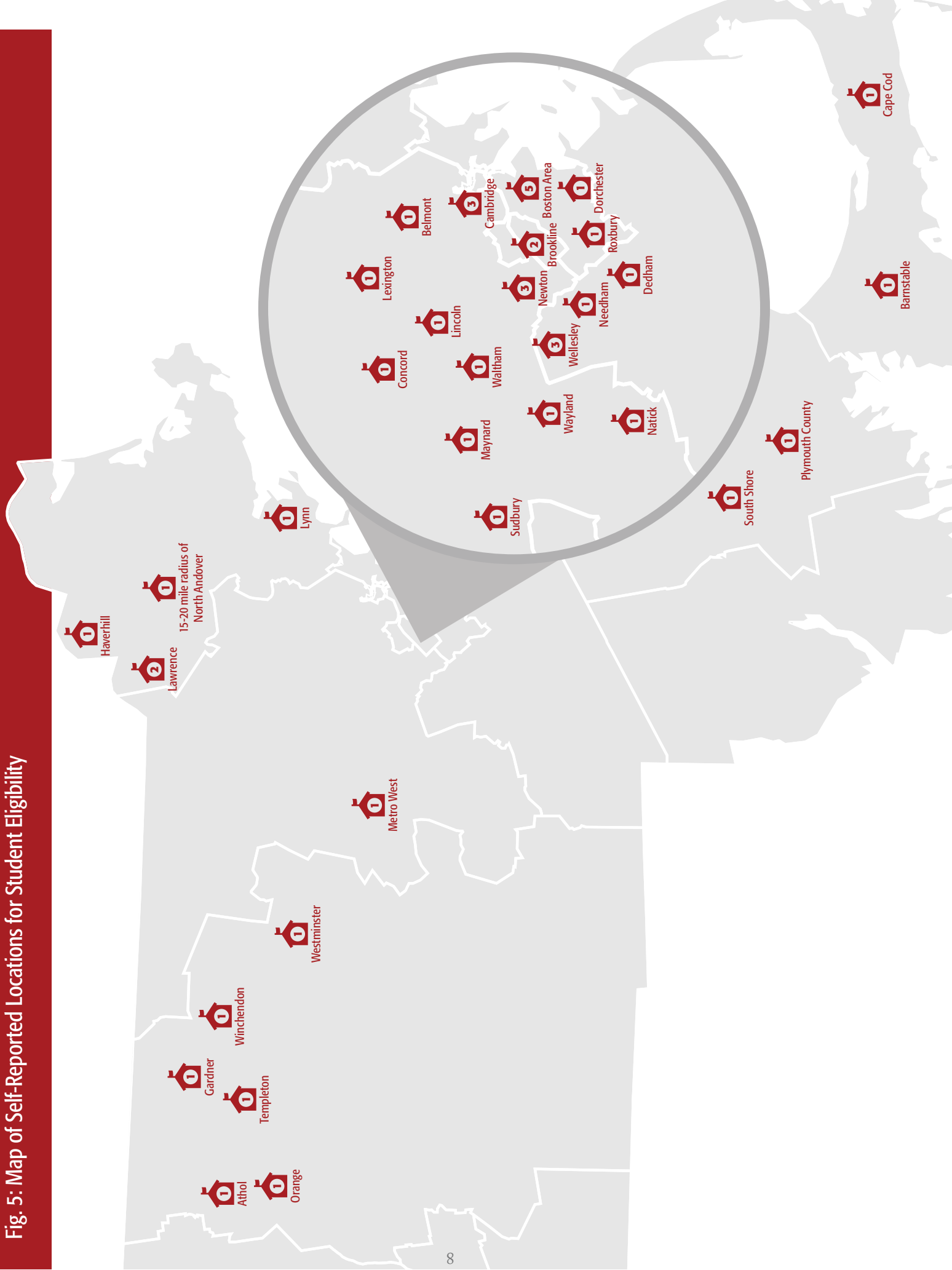
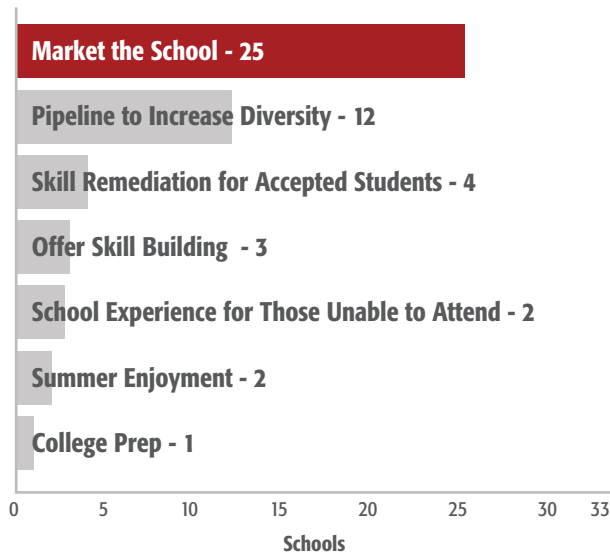


Fig. 5: Map of Self-Reported Locations for Student Eligibility



Schools were also asked why they offer their summer enrichment program to students not currently attending their school. Although the answers varied among the 33 respondents, a majority, 25 schools, do so for marketing purposes. Additionally, 12 schools offer their program to students not currently enrolled in order to create a pipeline for minority students and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged students to increase the school’s diversity. Smaller numbers of schools reported doing so to remediate the skills of accepted students, provide skill-building, offer their school experience to students that are unable to attend, for general recreation, and to provide college preparation.

Fig. 6: Reasons Schools Include Unenrolled Students in Academic Summer Programs



C. Operations

Many of the independent and parochial schools offering summer academic programming employ a variety of recruitment techniques to identify students who would be a good fit for their program. Of the 23 schools that responded to this question, most use some form of advertising or partner with public schools to attract students to their summer enrichment programs. Other popular efforts include partnering with a non-profit or community-based organization, such as The Steppingstone Foundation, and relying on word of mouth. Additionally, one school partners with a governmental agency to recruit students, and two schools claim not to use any recruitment strategies, yet both indicated an interest in learning more about best practices.

Fig. 7: Recruitment Techniques



Moreover, our survey found that most schools require students to complete an application to be considered for their summer enrichment program. Out of 37 respondents, 25 schools require an application and 12 do not. As a follow-up, we asked schools that do require an application to explain how seats are filled when there are more applications than available slots. Of the 25 respondents, 14 schools indicated that seats are filled on a first come, first served basis; one of which stated that this was the case only after a “priority week” for the families of current students. Eight schools reported that decisions are merit-based, and ten schools give priority to returning students. Other responses included third party searches to find students that would be the best fit and one school stated that staff would be increased to accommodate more students. No schools reported using a lottery system.

We also asked schools how their summer enrichment programs are staffed. Of the 38 that responded, nearly all, 37, hire teachers from their school to teach during the summer. Twenty of those 37 schools also hire teachers from other schools and eighteen of the 37 also hire college-aged students to teach or work as tutors. Of those 37 schools, one indicated that it has a parent/partner program, one hires high school students that are alumni of the program, and one hires professionals from the field to come in and teach. The only school that does not hire its own teachers for its summer academic program indicated that it exclusively outsources, making the total number of schools that hire teachers from other schools 21.

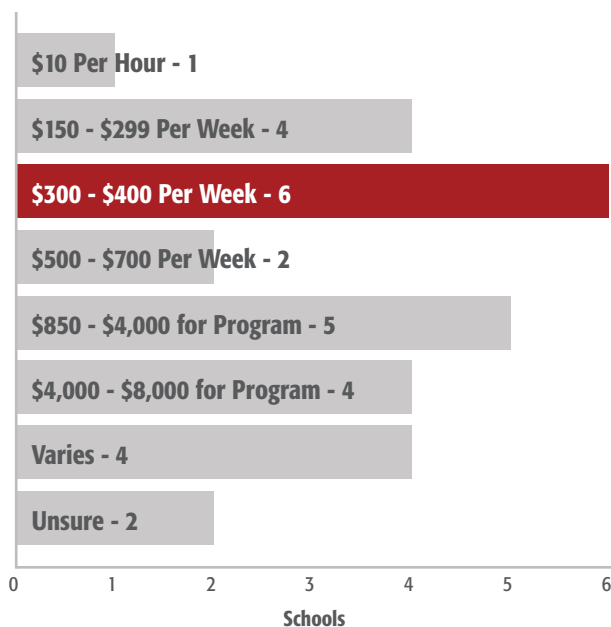
D. Financing

For this project, an important area of study is the financing of summer academic programs. Therefore, we looked into whether schools charged tuition and the cost, what kind of non-tuition funding supports these programs, and

whether the summer program is registered as a non-profit organization separately from the school. Our survey was able to capture basic financial data, and we plan on contacting some of these respondents for Part II of the project in order to gain a more complete understanding of their financial structures.

Of the 38 schools that responded, 29 indicated that they charge tuition for their summer enrichment programs and nine said they do not. Of those 29 schools charging tuition, 28 responded to a follow-up question on the amount of tuition charged, which varies significantly per school.

Fig. 8: Tuition Charged for Summer Enrichment Programs



Twelve schools indicated that tuition is charged on a weekly basis, ranging from \$150 to \$700 per week. Nine schools charge a tuition price for the entire program, ranging from \$850 to \$8,000, with five schools charging tuition between \$850 and \$4,000 and four charging between \$4,000 and \$8,000. One school responded that it charges \$10 per hour for its summer academic program. Four schools indicated that the amount varies and two were unsure of the cost. Clearly, there is a wide variance when it comes to summer enrichment tuition.

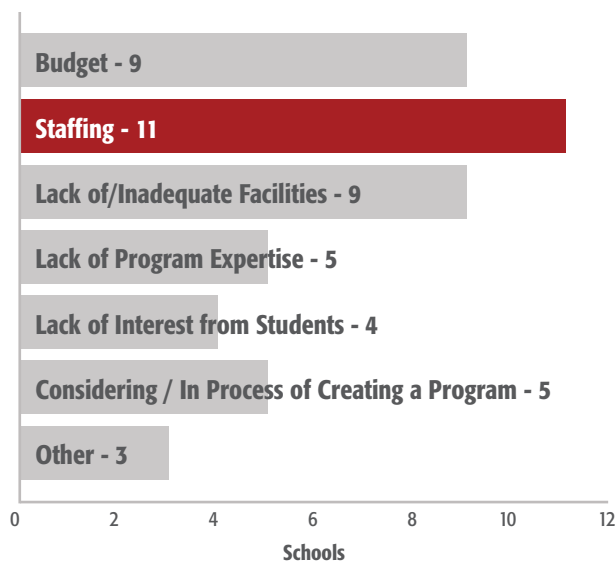
For schools that do not rely solely on tuition, we asked about other types of funding they receive. It is important to note that of the 11 schools that responded to this question, three had previously indicated their school does charge tuition and eight indicated that their school does not. That being said, three schools responded that the funding for their summer enrichment program is included

in the school's budget, nine report that funds are raised through private donations and foundation grants, and one is funded through a federal program. To gain insight into how common it is, we asked respondents if their summer academic program is established as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization separate from the school. Out of 36 schools that responded, five have summer programs that are separate non-profits and 31 do not.

II. Findings: MA Independent and Parochial Schools with No Existing Summer Academic Program

For the 35 schools without an academically-oriented summer program, we asked two follow-up questions. First, we asked if their school had ever considered creating a summer enrichment program. Of the 34 that responded, 22 had considered it and 12 had not. For those 22 that had considered creating one, we asked what obstacles are preventing their schools from creating a summer academic program. Our survey found that nine schools cited budget issues, 11 reported staffing issues, nine claimed to have a lack of adequate facilities, five cited a lack of program expertise, and four reported a lack of interest from students, with three giving other reasons. It's interesting to note that five schools reported that they are considering, or are in the process of creating, a summer academic program for their school.

Fig. 9: Obstacles to Creating a Summer Enrichment Program



CONCLUSION

To reiterate, the purpose of this survey was to perform a landscape analysis of the existing opportunities for Massachusetts students to attend summer enrichment programs at independent and parochial schools. The next phases of the project will analyze best practices of summer academic programs nationally, as well as analyze the cost of starting new programs in the commonwealth. The purpose of the project is to examine the current market for summer enrichment programs in Massachusetts and what can be done to expand it.

The survey was designed to gain a broad portrait of both existing summer programs and schools interested in creating one. For schools that already have academically oriented programs, we found that most serve less than 200 students in all grade levels, but especially grades 2 through 8. Furthermore, the most popular subjects taught are the arts, STEM, and the humanities. Many of our respondents with summer enrichment programs offer their program not only to current or prospective students, but also to students in specific geographic locations. In addition, many programs are open to students of any or all academic levels. When non-enrolled students are offered admission to their summer programs, most schools do so either to market the school or to create a pipeline to increase the school's diversity. Moreover, most schools require an application for their program. We also found that nearly all schools hire their own teachers to teach in the summer program, as well as hire teachers from other schools. In

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regard to financing, a majority of schools charge tuition, which ranges significantly from program to program by thousands of dollars. Program costs, tuition rates, and non-tuition funding are areas that we will investigate more carefully in the next phases of our project.

While the survey results are not necessarily an accurate representation of every academic summer program at all of the commonwealth's private schools, this data lays the foundation for understanding how the current market operates, where additional clarification on program operations is needed, and what areas can be improved. These findings will guide our research for our upcoming reports, in which we aspire to craft a comprehensive guide to starting summer enrichment programs that are best suited for Massachusetts, to prevent summer learning loss and help close the achievement gap.

We Found For Schools That Already Have Academically-Oriented Programs

Most Serve
**Fewer Than
200 Students**
Mostly in Grades 2–8

**Arts, STEM, &
The Humanities**
are the Most Popular
Subjects Taught

Majority of Schools
Charge Tuition
which Ranges Significantly
by Thousands of Dollars

ENDNOTES

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ABOUT PIONEER

Pioneer Institute is an independent, non-partisan, privately funded research organization that seeks to change the intellectual climate in the Commonwealth by supporting scholarship that challenges the "conventional wisdom" on Massachusetts public policy issues.

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