



Cincinnati's Fifth Quarter: A Community Organized to Support Summer Learning

How can a community organize its resources to address summer learning loss? Community Learning Centers (aka community schools) in Cincinnati are showing the way.

Starting in 2009 the Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) and its community partners have been working together to offer engaging learning experience in June. Now in the planning stage for its 3rd summer, the "Fifth Quarter" is supported by the community school partnership infrastructure that enables CPS and its partners to address many different issues.

Since many community schools around the country are looking toward the summer, this newsletter features Cincinnati's unique summer work. It tells you how a school district committed to community schools has strengthened summer programming by retooling its traditional summer school program through community partnerships designed to improve results for children. In tough fiscal times, the partnership approach on which the Fifth Quarter and community schools are built is the way to go if students are to have access to the summer learning experience they need.

Cincinnati's Community Learning Centers

Cincinnati's CLCs started in 2001 when the Board of Education adopted a vision for a district-wide redevelopment of all schools as centers of their community. At the core of the initiative is the engagement of each school and its surrounding neighborhood in the planning, implementation and ongoing governance of CLCs. The goals of the CLCs are to support student achievement, revitalize neighborhoods and maximize the community's return on their financial investments. All Cincinnati public schools are moving toward full community school implementation. Community Learning Centers act as hubs for community services, providing access for students, families and community to health, safety and social services, as well as recreational, educational and cultural opportunities.

CPS and the community partners have put in place a set of leadership structures to achieve their goals. The *Partnership Networks* are collaborations among agencies and organizations that share a common focus (e.g., health, mental health, early childhood, afterschool, etc.). These networks are committed to shared mission, vision, and goals aligned with the CPSCLCs, the CPS Strategic Plan and other related regional initiatives. The *Cross Boundary Leadership Team* (CBLT) brings together leaders of the partnership networks to plan and organize how resources will be allocated and organized at different sites. At the school site, the resource coordinator works with the community partners as a partner team. This is called a Local School Decision Making Committee that includes parents and



community and does not include the partners as it is like a board of directors which has the hire/fire power relative to the partners. Together, these groups provide the infrastructure to support the results CPS wants to achieve, including summer learning.

The Fifth Quarter: Extended Summer Learning Opportunities

In 2009, new Superintendent Mary Ronan announced her plan to turn around the lowest performing elementary schools by adding four additional weeks of learning time during the summer. She called this summer session, “[The Fifth Quarter](#).” According to [Ronan](#)

We see the Fifth Quarter as the best way to allow learning to continue right after the regular school year ends. Students will be in their same schools, with their same teachers, so the transition will be seamless. We know these students will be better prepared to do well in school in August because of less time away from the classrooms this summer.

Since the community was already organized to support CPS schools and their students through Community Learning Centers, community partners were ready and able to answer Ronan’s call. They immediately began working with selected schools and the district to collaboratively plan new summer learning opportunities using new and existing resources.

How do students spend their days? The Fifth Quarter runs a full school day, from 7:45 AM to 2:15 PM. In the morning, all Fifth Quarter schools focus on reading, English language arts, and math. Instead of serving as a continuation of the previous grade and as a remediation strategy, students in the Fifth Quarter began their transition to the next grade during June through an “acceleration” component. In this way students are already familiar with their new teachers, their new grade levels, and the skills and content they are required to know.

Community and school site teams decide what content and activities to offer during periods of enrichment in the afternoon such as art, music, martial arts, environmental education, as well as activities that enforce reading and math lessons. Community partners provide enriching experiences that help children grow according to their interests. CPS and its CLCs partners are committed to having students engaged in their own learning. According to Rebecca Kelley, Executive Director of Community Services at the [YMCA of Greater Cincinnati](#), a CPS partner responsible for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program (not to be confused with the Community Learning Center Institute) and the CincyAfterSchool Network

We were very intentional about having more learning conducted outside so that the kids during the month of June were able to explore their neighborhoods, explore their schools, continue to work on their container gardens, or their community gardens....we were very intentional about making sure that kids had great experiences outside.

In addition to programming during the traditional school hours, schools and their partners may also offer before and afterschool opportunities beyond the formal Fifth Quarter schedule, just as they would during the school year.

How is the Fifth Quarter funded? The initiative was originally funded with \$1.5 million of Title I ARRA funds and other federal, state, and local funds (e.g., 21st Century, Community Learning Center Institute, and USDA) as well as community resources (e.g., United Way, business, foundation, and volunteers). While government funds pay for the



morning component, community partners provide afternoon enrichment. The initiative has sustained itself financially after ARRA funds ended by combining financing from a variety of sources and sharing the funding responsibility among the school district and community partners. This coming summer, despite financial constraints, the district will contribute approximately 60% of the funds while the community partners will pay for the other 40%. That's the power of having a community organized to support schools.

How many students participate? The summer before the Fifth Quarter was created CPS was only able to attract 750 students in these schools to the traditional summer school. In its first year, the Fifth Quarter attracted 2,000 students across 16 elementary schools, or nearly 40% of all the students enrolled in those schools during the school year. In its second year, 2,500 students participated. The Fifth Quarter is open to all students in the elementary schools and focuses on enrichment and new learning, rather than remediation.

Partnerships Make the Fifth Quarter Work

Partnerships have been essential to making the Fifth Quarter work. Nearly 60CLCs partners work with CPS to create more opportunities for student learning during summer, including for example, MindPeace, Growing Well, CincyAfterSchool, Literacy Network, Adopt A Class, and Leave No Child Inside. CPS relies on the community partners to create the programming for the afternoon. It pays the school's afterschool coordinator to run the Fifth Quarter afternoon programming. This person is responsible for identifying other community partners that can support student learning and enrichment.

Local schools and their partners decide together what additional resources they can contribute to extended opportunities before and after the school day. In 2009 and 2010 schools that had more partners and consequently more opportunities were able to attract more students to enroll in their Fifth Quarter program.

According to Kelley, partners helped distinguish the Fifth Quarter from traditional summer school:

Part of it was the positive asset-based approach [of community-based organizations], the partnership approach, the targeting or focus on the 16 [schools]...And so there was a sense of camaraderie, and all for one, one for all, everybody was doing this together that first year. Both at the district side and the partners... there was a sense of really coming together. People got to know each other ... in a way that then benefited communication about students and student needs and conversations are happening at different levels... That model of embedded community partnerships has a ton of spillover impacts into the school year as well.

Statements from partners reflect the added value of engaging the community in enriching programming. Betsy Townsend, Co-Chair of [Leave No Child Inside-Greater Cincinnati](#) and a Fifth Quarter partner explains

Summer is the time to get kids moving outside, engaging all five senses. The *Leave No Child Inside Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati* is happy to provide CPS kids with experiential learning opportunities during Fifth Quarter - indoors and outside.



Another partner, Outdoor Adventure Expo partner and Paddlefest Chair, Brewster Rhoads, declares

It is so rewarding to see nearly 2,000 children at our Paddlefest Kids Outdoor Adventure Expo bursting with excitement as they experience the natural world in their own back yard - paddling a white water raft, catching their first fish, discovering wildlife on a nature walk, touring a working tow boat, petting their first goat, learning how an electric car works and how the sun creates electricity. Thanks to the Fifth Quarter program, so many disadvantaged children get a summer camp experience that creates memories most of us took for granted growing up.

Conclusion

The Fifth Quarter supports high-quality instruction. It has given teachers the time they need to explore topics in depth, to use project-based learning, and have extended discussions on units. Teachers report that they appreciate the opportunity the extra time has given them to enrich student learning and to engage more deeply in their craft.

Cincinnati has created an engaging learning experience during summer that helps reduce summer learning loss and enriches a student's school experience. Thanks to the support of community partners organized around the CLCs, the school district and its partners are currently planning implementation of the third year of the Fifth Quarter. The Fifth Quarter demonstrates the power of partnerships to respond to a school system's needs, in this case, moving Cincinnati students beyond the traditional school year to help them succeed.

Special thanks to Rebecca Kelley and Darlene Kamine for their assistance with this article. For more information, visit [CPS's Fifth Quarter website](#), read [news](#) about the 5th quarter, and learn more about Cincinnati's [Community Learning Center Institute](#).

