

# NATIONAL SUMMER SCHOOL INITIATIVE

CONCEPT PAPER • APRIL 15, 2020

## THE PROBLEM

Families everywhere are gravely concerned that their children are falling behind.

As schools remain shuttered, parents are increasingly anxious that their children are losing ground academically.

The Education Trust this month [polled](#) 1,200 parents of New York State public school students and found that 89 percent were concerned that their child not fall behind in school. Low-income and African American parents were especially anxious, with **71 percent describing themselves as “very concerned.”** Parents in greater Los Angeles [expressed](#) nearly identical levels of concern. Both surveys found that 84 percent or more of parents worried that their children were bored or under-stimulated at home.

Their fears are well founded. The Northwest Evaluation Association’s [analysis](#) of “the COVID slide” found that if students returned to school in the fall without instruction during school closures, they might **retain only 70 percent of their reading progress** compared to a normal year. In math, the findings were still worse: students could **lose anywhere from half to all of their academic growth in math** from the previous year.

And yet the vast majority of districts are not today providing synchronous instruction or monitoring their students’ academic progress. The Center on Reinventing Public Education reports that just 13 percent of the districts it surveyed are providing curriculum, instruction, and progress monitoring. **Seventy-five percent of districts are providing no instruction at all**, merely access to district curriculum or outside educational resources. By summer, many parents will be desperate to help their children make up lost ground. But districts are unlikely to provide an academically rigorous summer school program.

Families everywhere urgently need high-quality, engaging, and effective instruction. In partnership with districts and charter networks everywhere, we aim to build a **national virtual summer school**.

## OUR PURPOSE

We will create a virtual community where children feel heard and connected—and experience academic success every day.

We envision a national, one-to-many online summer school taught by master teachers and offering a rigorous academic program and best-of-class enrichment and recreational activities.

Organized as a not-for-profit organization, we will:

- Offer dynamic, highly effective teaching and ambitious curricula to students everywhere where schools are shuttered this summer,
- Supplement this targeted coursework with lively enrichment activities in the arts, movement, and recreation,
- Create a virtual community where children feel heard, valued, connected, and successful, and where curiosity and joy are fostered,
- Mitigate learning gaps and equip students with the essential skills for the new school year,
- Expose students, parents, and teachers in our partner districts and networks to master teachers—and the proven instructional practices that have closed achievement gaps in America’s highest-performing charter networks, and
- In a time of national crisis, create an opportunity for charter networks and reform-minded districts to experience working together for this urgent cause.

## CONTINUITY OF LEARNING PLANS

We can assist districts with subsequent closures, social distancing impacts, and remediation.

Where and when schools do reopen this September, families and schools will be faced with immense challenges:

- Children are likely to return with massive learning gaps that must be remedied.
- Districts may reopen with social distancing, permitting only some students to attend school physically while others participate in distance learning.
- Schools may be subject to further closures as the pandemic flares up and subsides.

The platform we build and refine this summer can be deployed this fall to offer districts

- A **virtual remediation program**,
- A **virtual school** for students who cannot be accommodated on site,
- **Professional development** to equip teachers with gap-closing pedagogies, and
- If legislation allows, a **national virtual school** for parents seeking a superior alternative to their zoned school.

## DESIGN

Master teachers, chosen for their record of moving kids academically *fast*, will be watched live by thousands.

We envision a vibrant daily program at every grade, from kindergarten through 12, that combines in equal measure dynamic, ambitious teaching and uncommonly engaging enrichment activities.

**MASTER TEACHERS**, chosen for their record of moving kids academically *fast* and delivering engaging instruction, will be watched live by thousands of students.

**PARTNER TEACHERS** from our partner districts and networks will work intimately with no more than 30 students from their own community. Each will hold an opening meeting each day to build a community that offers their children a sense of belonging and a place to be heard. Then, as the master teacher energetically leads the grade through an expertly prepared lesson, the partner teacher will review, via Kami, the work his or her students are producing in real time in the independent work portions of class. Via Slack, partner teachers will share what they're seeing with the grade's master teacher—and provide immediate redirection in instruction. Each afternoon, teachers at each grade will participate in a virtual “grade team meeting,” going deep on the next day's content (“intellectual prep”), analyzing student work, and reviewing academic data.

The design will be highly **scalable** because master teaching will be delivered via video webinar technology to an unlimited audience, and because an unlimited number of partner teachers will be able to receive intensive training during a week-long virtual training institute before the program launches.

## CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Our partner teachers will become ambassadors in their organizations for the techniques that can surge their students forward.

Lacking teacher-led instruction for months, many of our students will not be equipped to succeed in the next grade come September. In each grade we will

1. **Target the most essential knowledge and skills** to succeed in the next grade,
2. **Offer four hours of synchronous instruction taught by master teachers**, and
3. **Tap the engaging curriculum and teaching methods of New York City's highest-performing charter networks.**

Our founding team members—including Arin Lavinia, Doug McCurry, and Steven Wilson—developed unique methods that helped propel their networks—Success, Achievement First, and Ascend Learning—to **close and then reverse achievement gaps** in the Common Core era for 40,000 students in New York City, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. In addition to academically ambitious, engaging curriculum largely sourced from **The Lavinia Group**, we will show how three essential components

1. **teacher intellectual preparation**
2. a focus **on meaning-making, inciting curiosity, and intellectual discovery, not academic procedure**, and
3. sustained attention on **what students are producing**

move students *fast*, when implemented with fidelity every day.

In science, students will participate in hands-on virtual labs; in English, they will hear and read exceptional literature from across cultures; in history, they will encounter the story of humanity and their cultures; in math, they will devise their own solutions to mathematical problems.

In our partner networks and districts, our participating teachers and leaders will learn and practice these methods—and become ambassadors in their organizations for the techniques that can surge their students forward.

## ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

Enrichment offerings will provide essential breaks—summer fun and discovery every day.

By the time they begin our program, our students will have been sheltering in place for months, with significant emotional and social tolls. They will need more than academics. Enrichment offerings will provide essential breaks—summer fun and discovery every day.

We will offer **music, visual arts, new media, dance, and wellness (including yoga)**, and **virtual field trips** will expose students to exciting new vistas.

Every day, we plan to offer students the rare opportunity to encounter as a guest teacher an inspiring figure in the visual and performing arts, music, dance, or sports.

## BUSINESS MODEL

We will provide content, programming, and training at no cost.

This month, we will secure two or more large and philosophically aligned partner districts or charter networks who will have a seat at the design table. They and subsequent partners will supply “partner teachers,” teacher and student devices (such as Chromebooks), and technology support, and they will identify and enroll students. Their contribution to the cost of the program includes stipending support teachers and local staff.

We will provide all of the content and programming, and the training necessary for partner teachers and tech support people at no cost, supported by philanthropy. During the summer we will build out a business plan for subsequent offerings that is informed by the summer school, feedback from our partner districts and networks, and intensive market research. Our intention is to determine whether this effort serves an ongoing need in the market, whether there is a sustainable business model to fund this work (and other related work that aligns to this effort), and whether these efforts should be built into a stand-alone organization or built into an existing organization as a related offering.

## TECHNOLOGY

Readily available technology will deliver synchronous learning.

Readily available technology will deliver synchronous learning. The core elements will likely be tools such as **Google Classroom** for learning management; **Blue Jeans or Connectivity** webinars and video conferencing; **Kami** document mark-up for students' on-screen jotting, writing, and collaboration; **GoGuardian** for student webpage management and content filtering; and **Slack** for real-time teacher collaboration. This tech stack is similar to what is driving Success Academy's distance learning program.

A tech team will provide the minimal amount of coding and applications development to integrate these components, especially with respect to student rostering and daily parent/student feedback.

## DESIGN TEAM

**Chris Cerf.** Chris Cerf was superintendent of the Newark, New Jersey public schools, where he drove dramatic increases in reading and math performance; graduation rates rose 20 percentage points and the city was recognized as having the most "beat the odds" schools in the country. Newark also developed one of the largest and most successful charter school sectors; Newark charter schools now serve 31 percent of the city's students and 50 percent of its African American students. Previously, Chris was New Jersey's commissioner of education and deputy chancellor of the New York City Department of Education.

**Robin Lake, CENTER ON REINVENTING PUBLIC EDUCATION.** Robin is director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, a non-partisan research and policy analysis organization developing transformative, evidence-based solutions for K-12 public education. Her research focuses on U.S. public school system reforms, including choice and charter schools, innovation and scale, portfolio management, and effective state and local public oversight practices. Robin has written numerous studies and provided expert testimony and technical assistance on charter schools, district-charter collaborations, and urban school reform.

**Arin Lavinia, THE LAVINIA GROUP.** Arin is CEO of the Lavinia Group, which has worked with charter networks to realize dramatic gains in student proficiency in English Language Arts and math. At Ascend Learning, students gained over four years 36 percentage points in English Language Arts proficiency and 40 points in math, the greatest gains of any network in the city. Other clients include Achievement First, Rocketship, Public Prep, and South Bronx Classical. Arin developed Success Academy's THINK Literacy program and pioneered the network's approach to training leaders and teachers; today, 90 percent of Success's students are found proficient in English Language Arts and 99 percent in math.

**Doug McCurry, ACHIEVEMENT FIRST.** Doug is the co-CEO and superintendent of Achievement First, which operates a network of 37 public charter schools educating 14,000 students in New Haven, Bridgeport and Hartford, CT; Brooklyn, NY; and Providence, RI. Achievement First is consistently one of the highest performing charter networks in New York City. Prior to co-founding Achievement First in 2003, Doug was one of the founders of Amistad Academy and served as the school's instructional leader for three years. Achievement First Amistad High is ranked the number one high school in Connecticut.

## DESIGN TEAM

continued

**Ian Rowe, PUBLIC PREP.** As CEO of Public Prep, Ian provides the strategic direction for the network of single-sex elementary and middle public schools that are determined to put their students on a predictive path to earn a degree from a four-year university. Ian was the Deputy Director of Postsecondary Success at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, where he worked to increase college completion rates among low income young adults. Ian worked for MTV as the Senior Vice President of Strategic Partnerships and Public Affairs. Prior to MTV, Ian worked as the director of strategy and performance measurement at The White House USA Freedom Corps office.

**Betsey Schmidt, MESH ED COLLECTIVE.** Betsey led R&D teams for Whittle School & Studios, a global network of independent schools, where she designed and built in-school, after-school, summer, and online programs that foster project-based learning aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Prior to Whittle, Betsey served as chief curriculum and innovation officer at Ascend Learning, where she led the design of a vibrant liberal arts curriculum that between 2015 and 2017 helped Ascend students close the achievement gap of race in New York State.

**Tom Torkelson, IDEA PUBLIC SCHOOLS.** Tom launched IDEA Donna College Preparatory Academy in 2000 and today serves as CEO of IDEA Public Schools, which educates 45,000 students in 79 schools. *U.S. News and World Report* ranked Donna as the 13th best high school and second-best charter high school in the nation. IDEA was named the best school system in the state of Texas. *The Washington Post's* latest rankings of America's Most Challenging High Schools ranked all seven of IDEA's eligible College Preparatory high schools in the top 200 high schools nationwide and in the top 50 in Texas.

**Mary K. Wells, BELLWETHER EDUCATION PARTNERS.** Mary is a co-founder and managing partner at Bellwether Education Partners. She leads the strategic advising practice, which focuses on supporting education organizations with growth strategy, market assessment, business planning, organizational development, and implementation planning. Recent clients include Urban Teachers, The Achievement Network, Teach Plus, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Before joining the Texas High School Project, where she led STEM and new school investments, Mary was a manager and consultant with Bain & Company.

**Steven Wilson.** Steven is a senior fellow at the Center on Reinventing Public Education. He founded and led Ascend Learning, a charter school network in Brooklyn which offers a tuition-free liberal arts education in a warm and supportive setting to 5,500 students. Funded entirely at district spending levels, Ascend reversed the achievement gap on Common Core assessments. As special assistant for strategic planning for Massachusetts Governor William Weld, Steven helped shape the state's landmark 1993 Education Reform Act that made Massachusetts schools the highest performing in the country and gave rise to the Boston charter school sector.

## SAMPLE SUMMER SCHOOL DAY ACADEMIC COMPONENTS

### GRADE 1 OFFERINGS

SYNCHRONOUS

COMPONENT	DURATION	DESCRIPTION	CURRICULUM
<b>Content-Based Read Aloud</b>	30 minutes	Teachers will facilitate a highly-engaging social studies-based content read aloud. All read alouds will occur within an inquiry and project-based unit of study. Social studies topics will be selected from a culturally responsive scope and feature world-class literature, and inquiry and discussion questions that foster evidenced-based creative thinking.	Lavinia Group's <i>Insight Humanities</i>  <b>Suggested Unit:</b> <i>This Land Is Their Land: North and Central American Indian Communities</i>
<b>Content-Based Close Reading</b>	30 minutes	Using grade-level texts related to the social studies unit of study, master teachers will guide students through a close read of a short, complex text to build content knowledge around the unit of study topic, while teaching students to navigate any text with curiosity, confidence, and precision. Students will get feedback on their written work in real time, and teachers will lead student-work based discourse and revision.	Lavinia Group <i>Close Reading for Meaning</i> method
<b>Content-Based Writing</b>	30 minutes	Master teachers engage in shared writing or model writing to set students up for success as they immerse themselves in various genres of writing that are well-suited to the content they are learning in social studies. For example, first graders might write Expert Books to teach others about Native American history and culture.	Lavinia Group's <i>Insight Humanities</i>  <b>Suggested Genre:</b> Nonfiction Expert Books
<b>Project Launch</b>	15 minutes	Master teachers will launch the Social Studies-based Project of the Week. Students will work independently on their projects daily, having 2-3 check-ins across the week with their Partner Teacher. The week will culminate with a Project Exhibition where students share their projects in small groups facilitated by partner teachers.	Lavinia Group's <i>Insight Humanities</i>
<b>Guided Reading</b>	30 minutes	Master teachers will deliver a short book introduction to students who are grouped by reading level. This book introduction will include a brief hook, a preview of essential vocabulary, and a highlighted reading strategy that supports students in reading with strong comprehension and accuracy. Students will then break into smaller groups to be coached by a partner teacher as they read. Partner teachers will also lead a discourse for the small group.	Lavinia Group <i>Guided Reading for Meaning</i> method
<b>Mathematics</b>	30 minutes	In advance of the lesson, students will complete a Story Problem and submit work to the partner teachers. Using a flipped classroom method, master teachers will facilitate a discourse for all students, analyzing and unpacking the thinking behind select student strategies.	Lavinia Group's <i>Math for Meaning</i> method
<b>X-Block</b>	30 minutes	The X-Block will feature a daily virtual field trip or a surprise encounter with an inspiring figure in the visual and performing arts or sports realm as a guest teacher.	TBD
<b>Mindfulness and Movement Breaks</b>	15 minutes	In addition to exercising their minds, students will exercise their bodies through daily movement breaks. Designed to joyfully enrich the academic offerings and get students moving, they will engage in activities such as dance, yoga, and sports.	TBD
<b>Science</b>	30 minutes	Master teachers will facilitate engaging, hands-on, inquiry-based science lessons that feature live experiments. Students will be able to conduct their own experiments alongside the teacher with common household items.	TBD
<b>Accountable Independent Reading</b>	30 minutes	Students will independently read world-class books from across cultures and the globe. During this essential part of the day, students will deepen their love of reading while building stamina and comprehension. Students will keep a reading log that captures their reading history. Partner teachers will have individual check-ins with students throughout the week to discuss their books.	Leveled digital books
<b>Phonics</b>	30 minutes	Students will complete daily phonics lessons through an online learning program.	Digital phonics program
<b>Math Fluency</b>	30 minutes	Students will complete daily mathematics lessons and fluency practice.	Digital math program

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## SAMPLE SUMMER SCHOOL DAY ACADEMIC COMPONENTS

### GRADE 4 OFFERINGS

SYNCHRONOUS

COMPONENT	DURATION	DESCRIPTION	CURRICULUM
<b>Content-Based Read Aloud</b>	30 minutes	Teachers will facilitate a highly-engaging social-studies based content read aloud. All read alouds will occur within an inquiry and project-based unit of study. Social studies topics will be selected from a culturally responsive scope and feature world-class literature, and inquiry and discussion questions that foster evidenced-based creative thinking.	Lavinia Group's <i>Insight Humanities</i>  <b>Suggested Unit:</b> <i>The Gift of the Nile: Ancient Egypt</i>
<b>Content-Based Close Reading</b>	30 minutes	Using grade-level texts related to the social studies unit of study, master teachers will guide students through a close read of a short, complex text to build content knowledge around the unit of study topic, while teaching students to navigate any text with curiosity, confidence, and precision. Students will get feedback on their written work in real time, and teachers will lead student-work based discourse and revision.	Lavinia Group <i>Close Reading for Meaning</i> method
<b>Content-Based Writing</b>	30 minutes	Master teachers engage in shared writing or model writing to set students up for success as they immerse themselves in various genres of writing that are well-suited to the content they are learning in social studies.	Lavinia Group's <i>Insight Humanities</i>  <b>Suggested Genre:</b> Nonfiction Expert Books
<b>Project Launch</b>	15 minutes	Master teachers will launch the social studies-based Project of the Week. Students will work independently on their projects daily, having 2-3 check-ins across the week with their partner teacher. The week will culminate with a Project Exhibition where students share their projects in small groups facilitated by partner teachers.	Lavinia Group's <i>Insight Humanities</i>
<b>Guided Reading</b>	30 minutes	Master teachers will deliver a short book introduction to students who are grouped by reading level. This book introduction will include a brief hook, a preview of essential vocabulary, and a highlighted reading strategy that supports students in reading with strong comprehension and accuracy. Students will then break into smaller groups to be coached by a partner teacher as they read. Partner teachers will also lead a discourse for the small group.	Lavinia Group <i>Guided Reading for Meaning</i> method
<b>Mathematics</b>	30 minutes	In advance of the lesson, students will complete a Story Problem and submit work to the partner teachers. Using a flipped classroom method, master teachers will facilitate a discourse for all students, analyzing and unpacking the thinking behind select student strategies.	Lavinia Group's <i>Math for Meaning</i> method
<b>X-Block</b>	30 minutes	The X-Block will feature a daily virtual field trip or a surprise encounter with an inspiring figure in the visual and performing arts or sports realm as a guest teacher.	TBD
<b>Mindfulness and Movement Breaks</b>	15 minutes	In addition to exercising their minds, students will exercise their bodies through daily movement breaks. Designed to joyfully enrich the academic offerings and get students moving, they will engage in activities such as dance, yoga, and sports.	TBD
<b>Science</b>	30 minutes	Master teachers will facilitate engaging, hands-on, inquiry-based science lessons that feature live experiments. Students will be able to conduct their own experiments alongside the teacher with common household items.	TBD
<b>Accountable Independent Reading</b>	30 minutes	Students will independently read world-class books from across cultures and the globe. During this essential part of the day, students will deepen their love of reading while building stamina and comprehension. Students will keep a reading log that captures their reading history. Partner teachers will have individual check-ins with students throughout the week to discuss their books.	Leveled digital books
<b>Math Fluency</b>	30 minutes	Students will complete daily mathematics lessons and fluency practice.	Digital math program

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## SAMPLE SUMMER SCHOOL DAY ACADEMIC COMPONENTS

### GRADE 7 OFFERINGS

SYNCHRONOUS

COMPONENT	DURATION	DESCRIPTION	CURRICULUM
Shared Novel	30 minutes	Teachers will facilitate a highly-engaging read aloud of a whole-class novel. Students will develop ideas about the novel through discussion and writing.	
Close Reading	30 minutes	Using grade-level texts, master teachers will guide students through a close read of a short, complex nonfiction text while teaching students to navigate any text with curiosity, confidence, and precision. Students will get feedback on their written work in real time, and teachers will lead student-work based discourse and revision.	Lavinia Group <i>Close Reading for Meaning</i> method
Content-Based Writing	30 minutes	Master teachers engage in shared writing or model writing to set students up for success as they immerse themselves in writing pieces within various genres of writing.	TBD
Guided Reading (for students reading below grade level)	30 minutes	Master teachers will deliver a short book introduction to students who are grouped by reading level. This book introduction will include a brief hook, a preview of essential vocabulary, and a highlighted reading strategy that supports students in reading with strong comprehension and accuracy. Students will then break into smaller groups to be coached by a partner teacher as they read. Partner teachers will also lead a discourse for the small group.	Lavinia Group <i>Guided Reading for Meaning</i> Method
Mathematics	30 minutes	Master teachers will deliver a lesson on new content and students will tackle practice problems on screen, with guidance from partner teachers using Kami's interactive technology.	TBD
X-Block	30 minutes	The X-Block will feature a daily virtual field trip or surprise encounter with an inspiring figure in the visual and performing arts or sports realm as a guest teacher.	TBD
Mindfulness and Movement Breaks	15 minutes	In addition to exercising their minds, students will exercise their bodies through daily movement breaks. Designed to joyfully enrich the academic offerings and get students moving, they will engage in activities such as dance, yoga, and sports.	TBD
Science	30 minutes	Master teachers will facilitate engaging, hands-on, inquiry-based science lessons that feature live experiments. Students will be able to conduct their own experiments alongside the teacher with common household items.	TBD
Accountable Independent Reading	45 minutes	Students will independently read world-class books from across cultures and the globe. During this essential part of the day, students will deepen their love of reading while building stamina and comprehension. Students will keep a reading log that captures their reading history. Partner teachers will have individual check-ins with students throughout the week to discuss their books.	Leveled digital books

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