

Community Special Edition 1. Connections



Summer Learning was a Smash at Gervais School District!

Gervais School District's 2024 summer program wrapped up with outstanding success, and now, as we move through the 2024-2025 school year, we are seeing the positive impact in our classrooms. Funded through a combination of grants from the Oregon Department of Education, Willamette ESD Migrant Services, and other sources, the program offered a range of activities without using any general-fund money.

This year's program proved especially effective in combating the "summer slide," where students often experience learning loss over the summer. "Students who attended would normally have seen regression of 30, 40, or even 50+ points on their Fall iReady Diagnostic exams," said Dr. Creighton Helms, Director of Student Services & Federal Programs. "Instead, they experienced little to no regression, and many even showed growth. Nationally, the average summer learning loss for 3rd and 5th grades is about 20%, but our data shows only 5% to 10% regression. In other words, our summer school students didn't lose ground—when in past years, they would have likely lost a lot."

The district maintained a 5:1 student-teacher ratio, supported by hiring student-teachers from local universities. This low ratio

allowed for personal attention and small-group learning, which contributed to the program's success. English language instruction remained a key focus, with the district continuing to outperform state averages, including a 34% higher score for 5th-grade students.

The program also offered unique experiences, such as binational studies led by two Gervais binational teachers, Bella Hidalgo and Hector Hidalgo from Mexico, who engaged students in music, dance, and art from their home regions. Fridays blended academic instruction with camp-like activities, including sports, coding, and crafts. Partnerships with the Salem Art Association and the



“
There's no opportunity to be a wallflower during our summer program

- Dr. Creighton Helms

Woodburn Public Library further enriched the experience, with students receiving free library cards for the summer.

"This summer gave us the chance to provide the kind of personal attention that's hard to offer during the school year," said Cindy Smith, an elementary teacher. "Students built new skills, maintained social connections, and grew in confidence."

Dr. Helms praised the staff's dedication, which he credited for the program's success. "We set out to create an environment that engages both the mind and the heart," he said. "It's exciting to see our hopes become a reality."

With summer school complete, the district looks forward to building on the progress made. "Now that school has started again, our students are better equipped with new skills and a renewed sense of confidence," Dr. Helms added. "We're excited to see the fruits of our labor and look forward to continuing this momentum throughout the year."