

# Unpacking the Opportunity Costs of Summertime Programs in Canada: A Crucial Examination and Policy Implications on Education and Social Equity

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the opportunity costs associated with current Summertime programs (SP) available to school-aged children and youth in Canada, while focusing on social disparities and policy implications. The lack of a nationwide quality SP in Canada further contributes to social reproduction and widens the opportunity gaps for families and students. Privatized and institutionalized SP costs have continued to increase despite the challenging economic situation in Canada. Limited financial support for families has contributed to SP becoming a buffet of unaffordable programs only accessible to the elites and upper class. While current SP aims to provide educational enrichment and skill development, it may inadvertently overlook the broader needs of students and further reinforce systemic barriers. This analysis explores the effectiveness of these programs, funding implications, and policy recommendations to enhance the impact and equity of Summertime initiatives. This paper also calls for a policy change. A transformational re-imagination and restructuring of our current K-12 education and the role of government in education and society.*

**Keywords:** *Summertime Program, education funding, opportunity costs, education and social equity, Canada public education*

## 1. Introduction

Canada has a comprehensive education system that presents itself as universal, inclusive and accessible [1], [2]. Fifty years ago, education was preserved for the elites and for those who could afford it or were considered gifted [3]. Thus, marginalized students and families outside these demographics (Indigenous, Black, low-income families and children with disabilities) were left behind and failed to benefit from public education. Undoubtedly, the Canadian education system has come a long way and has seen and survived many reforms and policies aimed at centralizing funding and improving the education system [4], [5], [6]. Since education falls under provincial jurisdiction, each province curate reforms for their specific population. In 1996, the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) released a document titled *Learning: The Treasure Within*, a reform movement that promotes educational outcomes as competencies rather than mainly focusing on skill acquisition [7], [8]. The UNESCO reform gained much buzz, both nationally

and globally. In Canada especially, this reform received a positive welcome but also meant that technological integration into cross-curricular pedagogies must be prioritized to prepare students for the Y2K and beyond. So in 2001, Quebec took the initiative to become the first province to adopt this reform in their education system, followed by Alberta in 2008 [8]. According to Burns, 2017,

*“From Quebec, this reform movement based on the development of 21st-century competencies spread, in a highly disjointed manner, to Alberta in 2008 with literacy curriculum reform (Alberta Education 2008), to British Columbia (Premier’s Technology Council 2010), to Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education 2010), and to Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education 2014), and has begun to emerge as a matter of urgency in Nova Scotia (Nova Scotia Ministry of Education 2015). A website review of the remaining provinces of Manitoba, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and the territories of Nunavut, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories revealed less publicly available evidence specifically recognizable as 21st-century educational reform but did present commitments to teaching and learning that echo this reform movement” (p.284).*

The new reform shaped curriculum design and educational spending. While provincial governments make decisions about their education spending, there is a shared goal and value in pursuing current trends and keeping up with society’s changing demands. This unique arrangement also makes it dicey to generalize educational policies since no “*federal department or office of education*” exists in the country [9]. There is also a fundamental responsibility to maintain structures and practices for skill development and knowledge acquisition [9]. It also meant that these structures in place could adopt those values advocated for by various communities, parents and, of course, students. However, these structures and reforms have not reached outside-of-school (OOS) or Summertime programs (SP), which occur in the months of July and August [10], [8], [11], [12]. The absent of a reform on SP continues to

challenge the meaning and intent of quality education in Canada.

Quality education is associated with accessible literacy and academic support, positive health outcomes and could improve social and economic statuses [13], [14]. However, disparities in accessing universal and quality education and support are present among students from marginalized backgrounds and social descriptors such as ethnic and racial diversity, socio-economic status (SES) of a neighborhood or community, and immigration status [13], [15], [16], [17]. Thus, the prospects of not working to close the literacy and academic support gaps, especially during the summer months, have proven to be an opportunity cost for delivering universal and quality education; after all, taxpayers fund education dollars from January to December, so the idea of only accessing educational resources and support during the school year (September – June) seems counter-intuitive [18], [15]. As such, this paper aims to make a case for accessible SP and question the damage to education due to an agrarian school calendar that does not support ongoing learning specifically in the summer. In the context of SP, this paper aims to examine the extent of the growing disparities between the opportunities afforded to students from marginalized backgrounds (Black, Indigenous, low-income, rural, single-income household, disabilities) compared to the opportunities accessible to students from high – income families and elite status [14], [19]. The construct is on recognizing that a person's bank account should not measure access to education because it further excavates education inequalities, especially in Canada, where education is supposedly universal and accessible [20].

The following section provide an overview of the cost of education in Canada. It is imperative to establish context when addressing profound issues plaguing our society. Understanding how our education system is funded in Canada provides a broader perspective of the economic burdens and opportunity costs on Canadian families accessing SP. Furthermore, the lack of or absence of continuous learning opportunities directly affects students' overall health and educational outcomes [15], [22].

## 2. Literature Review

For over a century, the public school system has been the pillar of society and has impacted the lives of billions of students worldwide. The growth and diversity in the Canadian population has also created other types of schools apart from public schools. Although many provinces now have specialized sports, science, language, and art schools to suit the needs and interests of parents and students, the admission process and eligibility can be problematic and selective [26], [13]. Over the last decade, Canada has seen a drastic increase in its immigrant population. For example, between November 2015 to the end of February 2016, more than 25,000

government-and privately sponsored Syrian refugees were resettled in Canada. Canada also has one of the highest immigrant student's population a percentage of its total population compared to other OECD countries however, the schools have not done an excellent job in integrating students into the Canadian school system [27], [70]. In Ontario, about two million students attend about 5,000 schools [28]. Yet not all students have access to quality SP where they can continue to learn and build social skills.

There is growing evidence of the effectiveness of SP, especially in a developed country like Canada where opportunities and wealth gaps can be so visible and problematic [14], [21], [23]. SP serves multiple motives for parents, students, educators and communities [24]. SP provides students with a space to be engaged in learning and socializing rather than spending time on television and electronic devices or unsupervised [25], [19].

The demand for SP is detected by the economic and social changes in Canadian households and by the growing demands on transdisciplinary interests in supporting students in the ever-changing society. To begin with, the prospect of SP is contingent on the school calendar, funding, human and social resources, and policy change. It also requires a renewed understanding and approach to education and available infrastructure. Ultimately, any policy change would have to address the demands of educational policy and socio-political factors linked to pedagogical thinking on schools and school reforms [21], [4].

Typically, elementary and secondary schools in Canada operate on a ten-month (Sept-June) calendar designed by school boards and approved by the Ministry of Education. Each board creates a calendar recognizing professional development days for teachers and staff and provincial and national holidays. Historically, the use of a 10-month school calendar was justified by agricultural demands so that farmers could have their children assist with farm work in the summer [29]. However, this reasoning appears less relevant now as humans and the economy have moved from an agricultural society to a modern or industrial society. The move to a modern society reinvented our modern education system, but the school calendar is yet to be modernized. According to Siljander, 2017,

*“The origins and development of the modern school are part of the birth of modern society. The two bodies – modern school and modern society – cannot be separated” (p.191), [29].*

Thus, a modern school calendar that considers the socio-economic needs of parents and one that prioritizes literacy needs to be considered. There is also a demand for more instructional time to meet global competition [13], [28], [23]. Many scholars and educators argue that a modern school calendar can meet the demands of families and students [30],[19]. Their demand calls for extended informal

instructional time, especially in the summer months, as it is the most logical thing to do [31]. So, the question then is how can the Canadian education system reconcile its pedagogical objectives with the evolving demands and expectations of students and society?

Countries like Finland, Germany and Singapore have transformed their education systems to focus on pedagogical objectives, prioritizing equity, teaching strategies and early intervention. Singapore, for example, has invested in integrating technology and independent study, which allows students to get their knowledge from their teachers and other reliable sources, thus enhancing learning and classroom engagement [3], [32]. In Finland, equity and early intervention are priorities. Early detection of learning challenges and integrating special education into regular public schools have significantly impacted students' engagement and academic achievement [23], [33], [30]. There are benefits from this style of education, and it is reflected in the high graduation rates, as well as early reading and comprehension in the Finnish school system. A 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey on English language competency found that 15-year-old Finnish students scored higher than Canadian students (520), Korea (514), Ireland (518), and Estonia (523) in reading literacy with a mean score of (520) even though Canada is parallel to Finland in terms of English comprehension [34]. Aside from the high student reading literacy rate, teachers in Finland are highly valued and contribute to curriculum development and change [34], [35]. Finland also offers SP to teachers to network and engage in professional development to enhance their teaching practices. Teacher candidates and graduate students are also welcome to join the SP.

Thus, the case of SP applies to both teachers and students. In Alberta, a University of Alberta professor, Trudy Cardinal, works with school teachers in summer on artificial intelligence. Dr. Cardinal and Andrea Coull, an Indigenous teacher in Edmonton, Alberta, collaborated to create a course exploring literacy through an Indigenous lens [36]. The course promises to change how language literacy is taught by incorporating artificial intelligence. This SP challenges teachers to use their summer break for professional development and engage in deeper learning that may be challenging to prioritize during the busy school year. Dr. Cardinal's course aims to enhance teachers' understanding of emerging educational trends such as artificial intelligence, innovative literacy teaching methods, and other topical subjects. These summer learning opportunities are helping teachers reignite their passion for education, providing them with the space and focus needed to fully absorb new concepts and tools [36]. An opportunity that may never come during the busy school year.

While teachers are provided with opportunities for professional development in the summer, a school in Caledon, Ontario, has a unique approach to

offering students a balanced learning experience. Tony Pontes Public School in the small town of Caledon, Ontario has adopted a balanced calendar model which includes a shorter summer break instead of a full two-month summer break [37]. This new balanced school calendar has received full support from teachers, school administrators, parents, and everyone involved. The principal, Mr. Mohan Mathews, questions why more schools in Canada are not adopting this year-round or balanced calendar despite potential benefits like reducing summer learning loss and student burnout [37]. Mr. Mathews also shared that why this model seems logical and meets modern demands, infrastructure constraints, coordination challenges, and inadequate interest from teachers, could hinder broader implementation. Advocates of the balanced school calendar argue that the balanced calendar offers breaks throughout the year, which helps maintain student engagement, but logistical and political (Government funding allocations and teacher union agreements) barriers remain significant obstacles for many school boards [38], [37].

### 3. Overview of the Canadian Education

*Enrollment and Funding Politics* - The Canadian education system consists of three types of schooling, namely primary or elementary (Kindergarten to grade 8 and preschool being optional), secondary or high school (grade 9-12) and post-secondary education (university, colleges and technical institutions) offering instructions in either or both official languages (English and French Languages) [17]. Depending on the province, children can start elementary school as early as 4 years old (pre-kindergarten) and complete high school at the age 18 [39]. Also, students in grades 6-9 can be considered middle school and then move to high school in grade 10, just like in Alberta [39]. Parents in Canada have options on the type of school they want to send their children to; for example, parents can choose public schools, separate schools, charter schools, private schools, or homeschool their children. There is also an online option and boarding schools, which is not as popular in Canada as it is in the United Kingdom, for instance. However, these options are subject to each province, and the admission requirements into each school may differ from province to province and across territories.

Every province requires children up to 16 years old to attend school in Canada, except for Ontario and New Brunswick, where the mandatory age is 18.

In a 2021/2022 Statistics Canada report, 5,738,181 students were enrolled in elementary and secondary schools [40]. 5230,002 students of the total enrollment numbers were enrolled in public schools, 441,171 were enrolled in private schools, and 67,008 students were home-schooled. However, the number of enrolled students increased in the 2021/2022 school year, especially in public school

education in provinces like Quebec (0.1%). It was also reported that the province of Manitoba (0.8%) saw significant enrollment growth compared to the previous year. Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador (0.5% each) also had one of the most significant growths compared to the previous year [40]. It is worth noting that an increase in enrollment does not equate to an increase in provincial education funding.

According to a report published by the Fraser Institute [41] on education spending in public schools, spending increased from 2012/2013 to 2020/2021 school years. Overall, education spending in Canada increased from \$61.5 billion in the 2012/2013 school year to \$78.9 billion in the 2020/2021 school year (see Table 1).

Table 1. Spending on Public Schools (2012/2013 and (2020/2021)

	2012/13	2020/21	2012/13-2020/21	
			Nominal change	% change
Canada	61,529	78,866	17,337	28.2%
Newfoundland & Labrador	876	945	69	7.9%
Prince Edward Island	229	312	83	36.3%
Nova Scotia	1,438	2,052	614	42.7%
New Brunswick	1,383	1,535	153	11.0%
Quebec	12,660	19,979	7,319	57.8%
Ontario	25,535	30,524	4,989	19.5%
Manitoba	2,335	2,915	580	24.8%
Saskatchewan	2,477	2,738	261	10.5%
Alberta	7,775	8,952	1,178	15.1%
British Columbia	6,320	8,298	1,977	31.3%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2023c.

Source: Zwaagstra and Palacios, 2023, p.3

The Fraser Institute also analyzed public education spending in Canada against inflation and enrolment increases or decreases by province between the 2012/2013 and 2020/2021 school years. Their analysis indicated that nationwide, student enrolment in public schools increased by 2.7% [41]. Their analysis also indicated that Alberta (12.4%) and Saskatchewan (6.9%) had the largest increases in student enrolment. The two provinces whose school boards have reported gross underfunding, aging and dilapidating infrastructures [42]. School boards and the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation (STF) have also indicated issues of larger class sizes and composition [43]. Nevertheless, this harsh reality continues to pose a severe threat to the quality of education Canada often claims. With more than a decade of limited education funding in the province, there is growing evidence of chronic student absenteeism and cuts to crucial support and resources, especially for students with special needs, newcomers and marginalized students [42]. In Saskatchewan, the teacher federation called a strike in the 2023/2024 school year during their bargaining round with the government of Saskatchewan. A

majority of eligible voters rejected a tentative Provincial Collective Bargaining Agreement citing the need to see real changes to classroom complexity and compensation [43], [42].

In addition to the challenges in classroom composition, the Saskatchewan government in 2009 took away the local school board's authority to set their education property tax mill rates and impose a lower unified provincial rate [44], [45]. Pressures from the economic recession and political pressures from rural residents and businesses resulted in the new mill rates. The funding politics in Canadian elementary and secondary school education has caused more harm than good. Many school boards faced austerity measures and made tough decisions to cut essential services and resources (lunch supervision, extracurricular activities, Indigenous support, speech-language therapist and more) that left no room for accessible and quality education which poses long-term effects on students [46]. After-school support was also impacted, and the role of teachers was limited to the classroom and during recess. Support for Summertime education is almost nonexistent in most provinces even though there is well-established evidence of the impacts of the many benefits of Summertime education and teacher-student engagement [47], [48]. The ongoing underfunding scheme poses a long-term educational disadvantage, yet very little is being done about it.

#### 4. Status of Indigenous Education

Education for Indigenous peoples is a form of self-determination and a treaty right not a matter of policy [49], [50]. Indigenous education in Canada has been under the political microscope and has faced decades of underfunding and misunderstanding [50]. Nevertheless, educational programs conducted by Indigenous communities to support inclusive and culturally relevant language education, cultural revitalization and survival have enhanced a sense of kinship, cultural continuity and sustainability [49], [50]. The Indigenous population has seen a steady increase over a decade. A Statistics Canada (2023) report showed that Indigenous student enrolment increased by 5% from the 2020/2021 to 2021/2022 school year [40]. This is the highest number of Indigenous student enrolment since the 2015/2016 school year when the data series began. Furthermore, 40.4% of the total Indigenous student enrolment in the 2021/2022 school year identified as First Nations, 16.2% as Métis, and 1.8% as Inuit, while 41.7% did not specify their Indigenous identity. [40].

In a significant shift to enhance experiential learning, Nelna Bessie John School in Beaver Creek, Yukon, has adjusted its academic calendar to provide students with more opportunities for land-based learning outside the regular school calendar [51]. Since taking control of eight schools in the fall of 2022, land-based learning has been a priority for

the First Nation School Board. The school's five students will return to class earlier in August and experience more frequent week-long breaks throughout the year, culminating in mid-June. The changes were developed with the White River First Nation and local families to prioritize culturally significant activities like hunting and storytelling. These breaks will allow students and their families to engage in on-the-land learning, supported by community elders and working in line with the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action [52]. The Nelna Bessie John School is one of many initiatives by Indigenous institutions to implement land-based education and commit to integrating cultural traditions into education.

## 5. Political Cost of Assessment

The current funding model in the K-12 system has resulted in oversurveillance of student behavior and large-scale cost assessment rather than focusing on academic needs and outcomes [53]. Thus, education is treated as a production process, not an act of social justice. Nagy (2000) suggests that the main goals of large-scale assessments are accountability, gatekeeping and instructional diagnosis [56]. While large-scale assessments are necessary in maintaining provincial standards, they are also time-consuming and expensive and promote the neoliberal agenda that further increases the class and language gap [55], [56]. Furthermore, schools often lack the resources to support students who have been assessed. Thus, the current cost-based assessment is all on performance, not accountability or improvement, which poses serious public policy concerns [55]. The neoliberal cost assessment neglects the educational needs of students, especially new immigrant students whose primary language is not English. As Sanacore and Palumbo, 2008 point out, the increasing number of English language learners (ELL) in Canadian classrooms has sifted the demographic landscape of the school population across Canada due to the need for human resources in the country [57]. Canada needs immigrants for many reasons and the main reason being for economic prosperity. The existing English language education within the K-12 system has faced significant criticism from numerous English Language educators. This criticism is mainly due to the rising controversies and political disputes among competing factions, all vying for greater influence over assessment agendas [58]. The politics of language education in the K-12 system promotes social reproduction that continues to fail ESL and EAL students [15], [58]. Thus, more academic support for students is needed. There is also a desire to examine the current assessment and funding model. In addition, teachers have a significant responsibility not only to complete the language assessments but also to manage, most times, a large classroom with a wide range of student needs, often with inadequate support [15]. They must do so

within a restricted timeframe, causing them to feel burnt out and overstretched. As teachers take a much-needed summer break, ESL and EAL students also take a break from learning. There is well-established evidence of the benefits of continuous language education. The absence of English language learning creates a summer learning loss in English language proficiency and overall academic performance [15], [70]. Thus, a transformative approach to schooling and learning is needed. Accessible quality SP that focuses on supporting ESL and EAL students could be a game changer in providing a comprehensive and well-rounded Canadian education.

## 6. A Case for Summertime Program: Economic and Social Disparities and Implications

### 6.1. Economic Implications

Summertime (SP) or Outside-of-school programs (OSP) (before and after school) are essential for intellectual development, can foster positive educational outcomes, promote skill acquisition and improve the social and mental well-being of children and youth [48], [59]. OSP complements formal education and provides working parents with supplemental care support [59]. However, the cost of SP in Canada continues to increase and differs significantly from province to province [60]. The weekly cost of SP varies based on your location, with a small number of programs offered at no cost (usually offered by charity and non-profit organizations) and others from \$50 - \$1000. Overnight camps are typically more expensive (\$800 – over \$3,000 per week) and offer a range of off-the-grid programs and survival-type activities [60]. The estimated SP per child costs between \$400- \$24,000 (for two months or eight weeks) per household. These discrepancies in affordability and cost further create a broader opportunity and wealth gap for marginalized children and youth, especially Black, Indigenous and new immigrant children and youth. Parents who can afford to take their children to these weekly SPs take advantage of the many benefits of SPs. Working parents who cannot afford to take their children to SP have no choice but to look for other ways to keep their children safe and engaged in the Summertime. Some children can become more vulnerable and exposed to risky activities due to a lack of engagement and inadequate support. According to Smith et al. (2021), although there is well established evidence [22], [67], [68] of the positive benefits to SP that extends beyond preventing summer learning loss and building developmental assets sadly, economic and social disparities such as racism and discrimination contribute to inequalities in SP participation for marginalized youth [61]. In Canada, there are no legislature to address these disparities or to

understand the experiences of marginalized youths in SP. School boards are also not obligated to provide SP to students as teachers' contracts only cover from September to June. The inaction of school boards and provincial and federal government has created a monstrous situation and a costly buffet of programs that remain inaccessible and unaffordable to millions of families and students. Each year, organizations (usually for-profit) promise to offer various SP to improve intellectual, social, and technological skills. These organizations have the luxury to set their prices to any amount they choose and typically look to recruit children with no behavioral needs or children who are characterized as gifted or 'easy to deal with.' Currently, SP is offered by various institutions, organizations (for-profit and non-profit organizations), charities and local organizations to name a few. Yet, there is no regulation on programming, instruction and curriculum. Many types of SP are offered, ranging from day and overnight camps, boys' camps, girls' camps, sports camps, educational camps, music and arts camps, engineering and science camps, and cultural camps. There are also camps for gender diverse youths (camp fYrefly (University of Alberta), camp Rainbow (Newfoundland and Labrado), camp Tapawingo (Parry South, Ontario) that promises to create a safe and gender affirming space where participants can build confidence and a sense of belonging through culturally responsive programming.

The benefits of SP to children and youth are endless. Students who attend SP can gain valuable skills and competencies that can improve educational and life outcomes [2], [3], [21], [15]. SP can prevent youth involvement in risky behaviors and activities [21], [3]. However, the reality is that with the rising cost of living, high interest rates, low minimum wage, institutional racism and unaffordability of SPs, many children are left behind, and families must choose whether to put food on the table or send their children and youth to SP. Growing household debt further adds to the issue and contributes to a wider opportunity cost.

In 1984, the then Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney said in his speech to the Economic Club of New York that in 1967, the public debt per Canadian household was \$4,000. By 1984, it had increased to \$24,000 per household. He argued that if this trend continued, household debt would reach up to \$54,000 by 1990 [62], [63]. The increasing household debt, current inflation, and high interest rates have forced families to choose between survival and educational needs. Prime Minister Mulroney's prediction forty years ago was spot on. Higher borrowing and slower income growth have created a catastrophic economic burden on Canadians.

A 2024 report by the Fraser Institute on household debt reveals that:

*"Among the provinces, Nova Scotia has the highest combined federal-provincial debt-to-GDP ratio*

*(96.8%), while Alberta has the lowest (42.9%). Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest combined debt per person (\$67,471), followed by Ontario (\$60,609). In contrast, Alberta has the lowest debt per person in the country with \$42,293."* [63, p.1]

Despite limited number of government financial support, families still struggle to afford to send their children to SP. Sometimes, eligibility criteria are far from reach, leaving families who genuinely need support feeling left out (see Table 2).

Table 2. Federal and Provincial net debt per person (2007/2008 and (2023/2024)

	2007/08	2023/24	PERCENT CHANGE
BC	7,826	13,760	75.8%
AB	-14,024	8,832	163.0%
SK	8,242	12,485	51.5%
MB	12,486	23,219	86.0%
ON	17,631	27,091	53.7%
QC	22,791	24,877	9.2%
NB	13,334	15,368	15.3%
NS	18,220	18,906	3.8%
PEI	13,755	15,791	14.8%
NL	28,144	32,561	15.7%
FED	22,074	33,682	52.6%

Source: Fuss and Monroe, 2024. P.6.

A Statistics Canada report on the 2021 census survey on the disparities in wealth and debt among Canadian households revealed that the debt-to-income ratio reached more than 180 percent, surpassing that of the United States and Germany by huge margins [64], [71]. This implies that for every dollar spent, a Canadian household owed about \$1.85 [64].

Furthermore, this stark financial reality for many low-income families further prevents their children from accessing SPs. They must worry about the cost of the program, transportation and feeding while navigating systemic barriers. For many Black, Indigenous and racialized families, the debt ratio differs due to generations of systemic racism and discrimination [49], [50]. The impact of systemic racism does not only impact their socio-economic status. The mental health and educational outcomes also suffer, which further creates social reproduction. If Canada is serious about creating a universal, inclusive and quality education, it needs to be serious about transforming current educational structures and focus on continuous learning opportunities, especially during summertime.

## 6.2. Social Implications

Limited access to economic opportunities and social resources contributes to poor schooling experiences [65], [2], [3], [21], [15]. Typically, access to conventional education and social capital has excluded Black, Indigenous and marginalized peoples [48]. Despite this historic exclusion and segregation, racialized and marginalized communities have persisted [65]. For example,



historically, Black students in Canada have been denied access to formal education and support. The denial is socially constructed and ingrained in Canadian K-12 education system [16], [59], [11], [10].

The intersection of this social positions within the education system perpetuates a culture and structure of inequities, creating barriers to social and educational opportunities, particularly for students and families who occupy diverse marginalized social identities (e.g., Black, disabled, low-income) [65], [66]. Thus, to fully understand the educational experiences and impacts of social inequalities of marginalized students, a critical examination of the social and political influence of SP is paramount.

## 7. Recommendation

This paper is a call to action on the current agrarian school calendar and growing demands for accessible SP, education support and programs. There is an urgent call for a policy change and education transformation. Firstly, a modern outlook on education is desperately needed. A model that prioritizes funding based on community and student needs and intentional investment in community learning centers and programs. Secondly, the implementation of a province-wide SP network and coalition to implement accessible and culturally relevant SP that prioritizes early detection of learning challenges and student needs. This coalition will also develop a more comprehensive policy and funding mechanism to ensure access, equity and quality SP. Lastly, on a theoretical lens, a collaboration between the federal, provincial, municipal and local governments and researchers on data collection and evidence-based funding is crucial in implementing a comprehensive program that takes into consideration the voices of parents, students and communities [53]

## 8. Conclusion

There is no doubt that the current education system needs critical examination concerning its role and the absence of a universal, accessible and affordable quality SP. Learning should not only be just a 9 – month venture, rather it is a life-long adventure. This paper calls for the reimagining of the role of public education while also identifying missed opportunities for transformational change. Summertime programs provide so much more than academic support and skill development (economic, health and social implications) yet access to these benefits is subjective given the current economic situation [3], [59]. Since learning is a dynamic transformational process that builds on prior knowledge, short- or long-term stagnation may lead to summer learning loss, health implications and worsen the growing educational deficits [21], [22], [23]. A lot can be learned from the Finnish and Singaporean context that foster a more cohesive and

comprehensive programming and opportunities for continuous life-long learning and support for teachers and students. Aside from financial restrains, structural racism also prevents marginalized youths from participating in SP opportunities. Thus, to begin to unpack the opportunity cost of SP, an urgent call for an equitable collaboration and proper consultation with various stakeholders (community organizations, parents, student groups, government institutions and non-governmental organizations) is critically needed to establish policy change and a comprehensive student focused SP in Canada.

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