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Milwaukee students and teachers join peers from across the US for cutting-edge national online summer school

Nonprofit City Forward Collective coordinates local effort to mitigate learning lost during COVID-19 school disruptions

MILWAUKEE – More than 800 students and educators from Milwaukee are teaching and learning alongside others from around the country as part of a new online summer school designed to shore up lost learning and keep kids engaged during COVID-19.

In Milwaukee, the National Summer School Initiative is being coordinated and financially supported by education nonprofit City Forward Collective as a part of [its COVID-19 School Support Fund](#). Executive Director Patricia Hoben said a key focus of the program is preventing the city's existing academic gaps from widening even further.

"This is a large-scale effort to match the large-scale challenges of COVID-19," Hoben said. "[National researchers predict](#) students lost significant ground this spring when schools closed. Those who were already the furthest behind have likely suffered the biggest losses. That's an injustice we can't tolerate."

Daily classes in session

Following a week of teacher training, classes recently kicked off nationwide and will run through July 31. Daily programming for students runs for four hours and includes dynamic academic instruction in reading, math, and science.

While the initiative's primary goal is to make up lost learning time from school closures, each day includes opportunities for students to connect with one another and teachers, explore new ideas and have fun. Academics are complimented by [lively enrichment activities](#), like dance, yoga, coding, chess, foreign language, and more. Enrichment programming is offered by leading national organizations like BioBus and National Dance Institute.

Each student is also provided free and unlimited access to best-in-class self-directed learning platforms, including DreamBox, Lexia, NewsELA and SORA.

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Programming is for students who will be entering grades 4-9 in the fall and is free of charge. In Milwaukee, students and teachers are participating from Carmen Schools of Science and Technology, LUMIN Schools, Messmer Catholic Schools, Milwaukee Academy of Science, Milwaukee College Prep, Milwaukee Public Schools, St. Augustine Preparatory Academy and Seton Catholic Schools.

Cutting-edge model

The National Summer School Initiative is staffed by a team of [award-winning Mentor Teachers](#), chosen by the program's national leaders for their record of fast academic progress and exceptionally engaging instruction. Mentor Teachers work closely with local Partner Teachers, selected by participating Milwaukee schools.

Each class session starts with an initial lesson given by a Mentor Teacher, which is simultaneously beamed to thousands of children across the country. Local Partner Teachers sit in on the lesson before taking over to work directly with their students in smaller groups. Partner Teachers connect with their students, monitor student work and provide additional individualized instruction. Partner Teachers also share feedback on student progress with the Mentor Teacher, who provides real-time support and advice. Toward the end of class, the Mentor Teacher returns to underscore the lesson's takeaways.

Outside of class periods, Partner Teachers have opportunities to build relationships with students and meet individual needs. Each Partner Teacher holds an opening meeting every day to build community and offer each child a sense of belonging and a place to be heard. Partner Teachers also receive 90 minutes of professional development daily, focused on preparation for the next school day and review of student work.

Opportunity for impact beyond this summer

Aside from directly meeting children's urgent academic needs, the program is also a way for teachers and local schools to glean best-in-class virtual instruction techniques as they prepare for fall. Public health experts warn it is likely at least some students will need to learn from home for some part of the 2020-21 school year.

"Milwaukee teachers will simultaneously be supporting their students while also learning from some of the strongest teachers in the country," Hoben said. "This is an incredible opportunity for professional development, and for teachers to bring national best practices to Milwaukee."

While the National Summer School Initiative was quickly launched to meet current needs related to COVID-19, organizers are hopeful it could be a replicable model for large-scale digital learning in years to come.

ABOUT CITY FORWARD COLLECTIVE: City Forward Collective launched in June 2019 following the merger of two long-standing Milwaukee education nonprofits, PAVE and Schools That Can Milwaukee. The organization works to secure Milwaukee's economic future and quality of life by eliminating educational inequities and ensuring every single child in the city has the opportunity to attend a high-quality school. The group works directly with Milwaukee school leadership teams, teachers, families and communities to build skills, knowledge and power to foster more high-quality schools for the children who need them most.

For more information, visit <http://cityforwardcollective.org> or <http://schoolsreimagined.org>, or contact Isral DeBruin by phone at (414) 459-1894 or by email at isral.debruin@cityforwardcollective.org.

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