

Use it *or* Lose it!

PREVENTING SUMMER LEARNING LOSS

BY EVA VANDER GIESSEN

➤ **MOST PARENTS INTUITIVELY** know that kids forget a lot of what they learned in school over the summer months. What parents haven't known is how far-reaching the effects of this loss can be. Summer Learning Loss is the loss of academic skills and knowledge over the course of summer vacation and is proven responsible for 2/3 of the achievement gap between low-income and affluent youth. Reading, math, arts and science are the subjects hit hardest, with the brunt of the learning loss occurring in families with little access to summer enrichment opportunities.

If low-income children were given quality summer learning opportunities, they would be 2/3 more likely to pursue a college preparatory path in high school, to graduate, and to lead the way in our competitive global society. Without summer learning opportunities, these same children are more likely to drop out, to slip between the cracks, and to lose the curiosity that is innate to every child.

This is not, however, an issue only for low-income families. Researchers note that children across the socio-economic spectrum lose an average of over 2 months' learning from the previous school year in math, science and reading. Cumulatively, in K-12th grade, this counts

for three academic years lost!

Without intervention, the impact on basic skills such as reading is crippling.

- Another recent study found that the cumulative effects of differences in summer learning experiences explain as much as two-thirds of the reading achievement gap between low-income ninth grade students and their higher income peers.
- The problem of summer vacation, first documented in 1906, compounds year after year. What starts as a hiccup in a 6-year-old's education can be a crisis by the time that child reaches high school. After collecting a century's worth of academic studies, summer-learning expert Harris Cooper, now at Duke University, concluded that, on average, all students lose about a month of progress in math skills each summer, while low-income students slip as many as three months in reading comprehension, compared with middle income students.
- Informal activities at camps or with families provide a conceptual framework and context for learning: they cultivate such things as reading for pleasure and experimenting out of sheer curiosity; exploring interests and developing passions; a sense of mastery in something one cares about; and opportunities to practice and see the meaning of skills in the course of everyday life.

Enriching summer learning opportunities are a must for all children. The Public Agenda survey in 2009 discovered that "87% of parents who did send their children to summer programs that included academic and enrichment activities agreed that the programs helped prepare their children for the school year." However, a mere 9% of 48 million public school students attend summer school programs. Per *Time Magazine*, as "our modern-day reformers strive to civilize summer as an educational resource, the trick is to seize the opportunity without destroying what's best about the season: the possibility of fun and freedom and play." According to Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, "We could do lots of creative things in the summer, such as summer camps and enrichment programs. The more time we have with students the better they are going to do." Summer offers unrivaled opportunities to inspire curiosity through hands-on, curriculum-aligned learning. All children deserve this opportunity and the future this opportunity provides. ◀

Eva Vander Giessen is the Development Manager at Edventure More, a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to inspiring a life-long curiosity in children. Through partnerships with top Bay Area Museums and talented professionals, Edventure More's enrichment camps, Camp Edmo and Camp EdTech, fill the summer learning loss gap through quality, fun, playful, educational programs that keep students' minds active during the summer. www.edventuremore.org

THE NATIONAL SUMMER LEARNING ASSOCIATION HAS COMPILED A FEW IDEAS TO SUPPORT FAMILIES IN COUNTERING SUMMER LEARNING LOSS:

- Read with your children every day, go to the library and participate in the library's summer reading program
- Explore parks and nature preserves
- Practice simple math skills while baking or at the grocery store
- Ask your child's teacher what they will be learning in the next grade, and ask for ideas about how you can begin building those skills during the summer
- Explore websites and publications that offer fun, summer activities

