

Building a Bridge

to help kids cross the gaps

Key Message: Summer is a great time for parents and communities to help kids to continue to learn and narrow the learning gap that often increases when schools are closed.

Since our farming beginnings, Minnesotans have valued the benefits of summer break from school and the academic calendar. Even though the original reasons for the summer break don't often exist now, the tradition remains. Summer is that carefree time of year when kids run barefoot, play night games, sleep in, stay up late, go on picnics, ride bikes, take moonlight walks, visit with friends and spend way too much time watching TV or playing video games. It can be a time when kids help with chores and learn new responsibilities.

Unfortunately, summer vacation is also the time of year when students that are not involved in educational activities experience some learning loss. In fact, summer can be academically devastating for low-income students if they do not have learning opportunities at home and in the community.

Summer bummers

- Most kids score lower on standardized tests in the fall than they did the prior spring.
- Summer learning loss is highest in math facts and spelling.
- During the school year, lower income kids' skills improve at close to the same rate as those kids from wealthier families.
- A family's socioeconomic status affects children's achievement scores almost only when school is closed.
- Low income students lose more learning during the summer months, perhaps because they spend their time involved in fewer educational activities.
- Middle income students lose about one month of learning over the summer.
- Most students lose about two months worth of mathematical computation skills over the summer months.
- Middle-class students make slight gains in reading achievement over the summer.
- Two-thirds of the ninth-grade achievement gap between lower and higher income youth has been explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities during the elementary school years.

Both research and experience tell us that the difference in the learning that kids remember is the result of a different amount of participation in enriching activities. So the question becomes, “How can we be sure our kids continue to remember and learn?”

Simple strides

- Give your child(ren) the best chance to succeed.
- Know the importance of summer learning.
- Make your community and home a summertime learning place.
- Do interesting and age appropriate things in your home and community that will help kids continue to learn over the summer months. For example, cook—measure and learn about nutritious ingredients together; take trips to the library; form a family reading club; take walks and observe nature; talk about current events; do impromptu spelling quizzes, crossword puzzles and Sudokus; track your mileage; look up a word-of-the-day; calculate gas consumption; set a grocery shopping budget; bike and explore together; take advantage of free museum, art gallery and zoo days; attend free concerts; enlist kids’ help in mapping our directions when you drive somewhere; review your credit card, check book transactions and budgets with older kids; price and quality compare.

“When school doors close for the summer, what do kids face: For some, it’s a world of interesting vacations, music lessons, and library trips. For others without enriching summertime opportunities, the break can lead to serious academic consequences—and the disparity can be dramatic.” –National Summer Learning Association, *Research in Brief*.

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