



Talking Points

*For use by school leaders in presentations
about important issues related to public education*

Bridging the Gaps *Using the calendar gap to narrow the achievement gap*

Key Message: Summer is an optimal time to partner with parents and communities to increase learning opportunities and reduce the learning loss that occurs over summer months when schools are closed.

Since our agrarian beginnings, Minnesotans have valued the benefits of summer break from school and the academic calendar. Even though the practical agricultural reasons for the break have diminished significantly, the traditions and expectation remain. 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.

Unfortunately, summer vacation is also the time of year when students that do not engage in educational activities experience some learning loss. For low-income students, summer can be academically devastating. The learning gap between advantaged and disadvantaged learners grows by as much as two months of grade-level equivalence in just one summer.

Summer bummers

- According to nearly 100 years of research, most kids score lower on standardized tests in the fall than they did the prior spring.
- Summer loss is most pronounced in math facts, computation, and spelling.
- During the school year, low income children's skills improve at close to the same rate as those of their more advantaged peers. During the summer, their learning loss is greater.
- Most students lose about two months of grade level equivalence in mathematical computation skills over the summer months.
- Low income students lose up to 3 months of grade-level equivalency during the summer.
- Middle income students lose about 1 month of grade-level equivalency over the summer.
- A family's socioeconomic status affects children's achievement scores most when school is closed.
- Middle-class students make slight gains in reading achievement over the summer months while low-income students stay at the same level or lose ground.

- 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 suggest that the disparity in summer learning results from different levels of student participation in educationally enriching activities. So the question becomes, “How, in times of inadequate financial resources, do we ensure that all students continue to learn during the summer?”

Simple strides

- Provide leadership for leveraging the summer months for continued learning.
- Coordinate with local media, places of worship, cities, etc., to communicate the importance of summer learning.
- Establish expectations and ideas for parents to engage with kids in creative and meaningful ways over the summer months (i.e. cooking and measurements, trips to the library, free zoo day, plants and nutrition, spelling bees, mentor math, mock credit cards, mileage tracking, etc.).
- Support authentic summer access for all learners to libraries, museums, concerts, sports teams, clubs, lessons and field trips.
- Create summer homework packets for all students, the completion of which will be required by all next-level teachers in the fall.
- Provide summer classes, field trips, etc., when economically possible.
- Enlist and promote partners that are able to make learning experiences available.

“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*.



Information
Is key to
success

Note to members: A copy-ready publication designed specifically for the parents and community members in your school/district is available at MNASA.org, MASSP.org or MESPA.net. Click on InvestMN. It can be easily adapted to make it even more relevant locally.

Information was taken from the following sources:

Alexander, Karl, Professor of Sociology, Johns Hopkins University, *Summer Learning and Its Implications: Insights from the Beginning School Study*

Harris, Alexander, K. L. Entwisle D.R. & Olson L.S. *Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap, American Sociological Review*, 2007

Cooper, *Summer Learning Loss—The Problem and Some Solutions*, LDonline.org, 2003

Sage Publications, *Social-Class Differences in Summer Learning between Kindergarten and First Grade*

Mikulecky, Larry J., *Stopping Summer Learning Loss Among At-Risk Youth*, *Journal of Reading*, Vol. 33, No. 7, April 1990