

EARLY CHILDHOOD

BEST PRACTICE TO ADDRESS EARLY CHILDHOOD “SUMMER SLIDE” | BRIEF 4

WHO IS THIS LEARNER?

Young children are likely to experience the most summer learning loss because they’re at a crucial stage in their development. “In general, kids learn a lot more in kindergarten, first grade and second grade than kids in middle school or high school, because learning follows a curve where it’s accelerated early in life and then plateaus,” says James Kim, an assistant professor of education at Harvard University. “Things like decoding, letter knowledge and word-reading skills are very susceptible to decay without frequent practice, as are math facts like addition and subtraction.”

Children from low-income families are also disproportionately affected by the summer slide in ways that can affect them years into their education. Research cited by Kim shows that more than half of the gap in reading scores between low-income 9th-graders and their middle-income peers could be attributed to differences in summer learning accumulated between first and fifth grade.

WHY IT MATTERS

According to research from Johns Hopkins University Center for Summer Learning, when the school year ends, children in high-poverty environments struggle not only with basic needs like healthy food and safe places to spend their days but with losing precious time during the summer months to continue academic engagement.

Conversely, during summer months the opportunity for play may be more abundant for all children. Play is critical to children’s development and can promote decision making, social skills and creativity. Play promotes cognitive, social emotional and physical development.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

When planning for summer learning opportunities for PK-3rd grade students, it's helpful when:

- Summer nutrition sites offer activity packs for children to take home for continued academic engagement.
- Teachers and families scaffold reading that encourages sound comprehension and fluency practices and plenty of parent/child interaction.
- Public library programs are well advertised to families of young children.
- Teachers and families use numbers, shapes and pattern activities to capitalize on children's natural curiosity.

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

Over the summer months, young children may experience a range of activities, including summer camps, family vacations and home learning activities. Access to summer activities may vary for children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. What can families do to help offset summer learning loss? The good news is that basic skills aren't hard to maintain while school is not in session. There are a number of ways to keep kids engaged in reading and math over the summer:

1. Make time for smart play. Games and puzzles are a great way for kids to brush up on the basics while having fun at the same time.
2. Get out of the house. The novelty of taking a walk stimulates the brain and promotes learning.
3. Use your imagination. Kids who use their imagination are also expanding their vocabularies and experimenting with new concepts.

<https://www.nwea.org/blog/2018/8-resources-for-parents-to-promote-summer-learning/>

https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/jameskim/files/prof_pub-pdk-white-2011-summer_loss.pdf

<https://www.summerlearning.org/>

<https://libraries.ok.gov/>

<https://www.wallacefoundation.org/pages/default.aspx>

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Teachers, what are some of the challenges your students and their families faced this year?
- Teachers, what strengths did your students and their families show in addressing those challenges?
- Teachers, what are some changes you would like to see in the following year in your classroom or school?
- Families, how did the challenges of this school year impact communication with your child's teacher and/or school?
- Families, what have you learned about the academic needs of your child?

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