

## **Preventing Summer Learning Loss** **Ruth A. Peters, Ph.D.**

Summer will be here before you know it, and if you think that those lazy, hazy months should be all play and no work, take a gander at the following statistics provided to me by Ron Fairchild, Executive Director of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Summer Learning. (Ron and I recently participated in a seminar in conjunction with Johns Hopkins and Sylvan Learning Centers and he was kind enough to provide this information to me.):

- **All students** experience learning losses when they do not engage in educational activities during the summer.
- On average, students lose approximately 2.6 months of grade level equivalency in mathematical computation skills during the summer months.
- Low-income children and youth experience greater summer learning losses than their higher income peers.
- Students may not have the same structured meal schedule and sometimes access to nutritious meals during the summer.
- Studies show that out-of-school time is a dangerous time for unsupervised children and youth.

### **Important Facts:**

- Only approximately 10% of students nationwide participate in summer school or attend schools with non-traditional calendars.
- A majority of students (56%) want to be involved in a summer program that “helps kids keep up with schoolwork or prepare for the next grade”.
- *Research shows that teachers typically spend between 4-6 weeks re-teaching material that students have forgotten over the summer.*
- At least 11% of children between the ages of 6 and 12 care for themselves over the summer months (unsupervised).

What can you do, personally, to help combat summer learning loss with your own kids? Well, there are plenty of options in your community, you just need to be a bit creative and think outside of the box. For instance, my local newspaper, every April or May, has a special section listing all private as well as community-funded summer programs for kids. Many of these are eclectic-types of camps involving swimming, sports, crafts and field trips. However, more and more add in reading enrichment or remediation as well as math tutoring over the summer. In addition to community and private day camps, check out the following options:

- Learn to love your local library (and librarian!). It’s a wonderful place to promote the love of reading, and the librarian can suggest grade-level as well as pure recreational books that will keep your kid’s neurons clicking!
- Check out safe, parent-approved internet sites. There are many that offer a “summer camp” theme—a daily craft activity to do alone or with a parent each

- day, some brain teasers, awesome video streaming of important world events (volcanoes erupting, the Martin Luther King “I have a dream” speech”), and tons of grade-related math, reading and science work to be checked out in a fun way.
- Consider your local newspaper—many have summer writing camps. Your performing arts center has summer camps that involve singing, dancing, set décor as well as script reading (notice the reading part?).
  - Even if your child attends a public school during the year, many private schools offer summer programs for all students that involve academics as well as sports, crafts and field trips. Learning academics is more fun when interspersed with active movement and game-like activities.
  - The summer months are an excellent time for your child to fill in learning gaps or zoom ahead with enrichment activities at supplemental learning centers, or via tutors or last year’s teacher. Your child’s teacher is an excellent resource to give you ideas for summer books to read and math workbooks to complete in between play and television watching!
  - Sleep-away camps can be specialized for leaning opportunities, especially for niche fields such as computers, Space Camp, science camps and even math camps. Lots of other activities are interspersed to keep it an active experience for all. Also, consider Circus Smirkus in Vermont ([www.circusmirkus.org](http://www.circusmirkus.org)), acting and film making ([www.nyfa.com](http://www.nyfa.com)), CyberCamps ([www.cybercamps.com](http://www.cybercamps.com)), and Omega Institute holistic learning camps ([www.omegateencamp.com](http://www.omegateencamp.com)).

Before this school year ends, be sure to check with this year’s teacher(s) to get suggestions for summer workbooks and pleasure books, science activities, etc. He or she will know what will be helpful for next year. Also, you may be able to check with *next year’s teacher* to get his or her advice as to neat summer activities. ***This is especially necessary if your child is “on the bubble” (weak in a particular subject, afraid to answer questions in class for fear of being wrong and becoming embarrassed). Summer is a great time to fill in the learning gaps and to begin the next year in a confident manner.***

And, think of your summer vacation as a teachable moment. It’s sort of like tricking your kids into learning, Stealth learning is a neat way to get your kids reading, doing math, learning geography without them even realizing it! Let the kids go online to sites such as Map quest or one of the travel sites to help “research” the journey to and from the vacation site, as well as activities surrounding where you will be spending your summer vacation. Even if you can’t leave town for a vacation, have your child compile a “virtual vacation” by doing some research and downloading pictures of events that he or she would like to take part in. Who knows, maybe next summer they will be able to actually visit the location!

Don’t forget summer learning opportunities locally, in addition to your library, such as the museums, zoo, aquarium, concerts and parks that they don’t usually get to attend during the school year. Have them keep a journal (writing skills!) of their activities, and perhaps email friends and relatives about what they are doing (again, stealth writing practice!).

Finally, try to motivate your child to complete 5 to 10 math problems (from a grade-appropriate workbook) a few times a week, and to read a chapter in a pleasure book several days a week also. Hopefully, the work will be fun (keep it low-level and simple), and the kid will do it for enjoyment. Or, you can enhance motivation by saying, “You can turn on the television after you’ve read a chapter in your book”. Some parents skip the weekly allowance and reward their children for accomplishing some academics during the summer, by tying their allowance to task completion. You know your kids, use the option that will be most successful.

So, it’s probably a good time *now* to begin to think about keeping the brain stimulated, as well as the body moving over the summer months. Keep it simple, fun, and stimulating. Let the kids pick out the books to read and the sites to research on the internet (again, only safe sites allowed!). Learning alone and informally, or via a structured group for either part of the day or part of the summer will help to prevent summer learning loss and help your child stay sharp for school next year. But, please remember that summer is also for relaxing, taking some time off, and just being a kid. The trick is to balance fun with learning, and with all of the local options available to you, it’s a task worth tackling!

(If you’d like to view an internet video stream of the entire hour-long seminar on preventing summer learning loss, just go to [events.educate.com](http://events.educate.com) (no www is needed!), and you’ll receive even more enticing ideas!).