

Summer Break: Brain Drain or Brain Gain?

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Inside This Issue

What Happens During Summer Break?

What Do Students Want?

Making Best Use of Summer

Summer Learning Should be Different

Setting up YOUR Summer Learning Program

What Happens During Summer Break?

Summer learning loss is a significant problem, particularly for students who are already falling behind. According to Ron Fairchild, executive director of the John Hopkins University Center for Summer Learning, all students experience learning losses when they do not engage in educational activities during the summer.

A synthesis of 39 research studies conducted by Cooper et. al. found that summer learning loss equals at least one month of instruction---when children return to school after summer break they test at least one month lower than when they left school in the spring. Learning loss in math is the most serious. On average, students lose approximately 2.6 months of grade level equivalency in math computation skills during the summer months.

Research shows that when school starts back in the Fall, teachers typically spend between 4 to 6 weeks reteaching material that students have forgotten over the summer.

What Do Students Want?

Parents may think that their children want summer to be free of learning. But research shows that a majority of students, 56%, actually do want to be involved in a summer program that helps them keep up with schoolwork or prepare for the next grade.

Reading enrichment or improvement over the summer can be accomplished through reading programs. Arranging for math tutoring over the summer can help children fill gaps, retain what they have learned, and return to school with a strength in math that makes them ready to learn what comes next. The best effects are when remedial teaching is individualized to the needs and learning style of the child.

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Making Best Use of Summer

Summer provides three months that can be the valuable time a child needs to strengthen past learning, fill learning gaps, build confidence and be ready to excel in the next grade.

The brain is an organ that needs activity and stimulation. Summer can be a time for growing synapses. Or it can be a time of starving the brain, which leads to boredom. Brain energy, like physical energy needs someplace to go or it will languish.

The choice... will this summer be one of learning loss with your children becoming mental couch potatoes who go to flab through inactivity? Or will it be a summer where your children are energized and engaged young people, enjoying the freedom and fun of learning, without the pressures of the school year?

Summer provides three months that can be the valuable time a child needs to strengthen past learning, fill learning gaps, build confidence and be ready to excel in the next grade. Using tutors for the summer is a good option, especially for math learning, which is particularly vulnerable over the summer months if it is not practiced regularly.

Summer Learning Should be Different

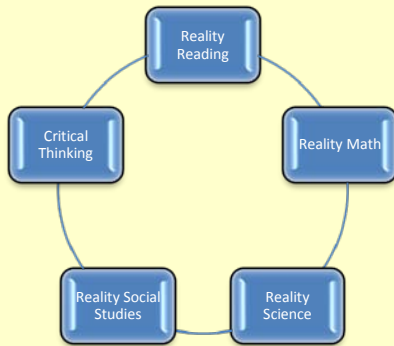
Summer learning needs to be different from "regular" school. More of the same leads to fatigue. Changes in teaching strategy and curricula can be stimulating.

Virtual Summer Camp websites are a valuable tool. Online learning materials, problem-solving, math logic, and other brain stimulating activities can be engaging, but also helpful. And these online camp communities add the all important social interaction that is key. Check out websites like these for daily activities, brain teasers, video, and grade-related math, reading and science work:

- **SurfnetKids.com Summer on the Internet:** <http://www.surfnetkids.com/summernet.htm> Contests, Games, Virtual summer camps and a virtual road trip.
- **MathMovesU.com:** <http://www.mathmovesu.com/>. A vivid, engaging place to explore, have fun and pick up math skills through travel, music, sports, fashion or the "Math Moves University."
- **FreshBrain.org:** Social-networking where teens explore, connect, create and share with technology in the Virtual Summer Technology Camp, or through Learning Paths, Activities or Projects. <http://freshbrain.org/summer-programs>

Set up YOUR Summer Learning Program

Here are 30 ideas for Summer Brain Gain, focusing on freedom, fun, engagement, and mastery. For a free set of *Summer Brain Gain Activity Cards*, visit the MasteryTutors.com website at <http://www.masterytutors.com/>.



Each card describes a learning activity and how to set it up for maximum benefit. Use them to offer choices, but have your child pick at least one from each set.

Reality Reading:

- Reading Circles
- Read aloud
- Reading Plays
- Read to Write
- Championship Reading

Reality Math:

- Building projects
- Cooking projects
- Craft projects
- Design projects
- Championship Math Logic

Reality Science:

- Collections
- Mad Scientists
- Research
- Exploration
- Championship Science

Reality Social Studies:

- Travel/Virtual Travel
- Interviews
- "Today" Show for Time Travelers
- Reenactments
- "Pass" as a Frenchman

Art/Music/Drama/Writing:

- Stories
- Photos
- Drawings
- Music
- Plays

Mind Challenges:

- King's Quest
- Mastery Thinking
- Paper puzzles
- Jigsaws
- LEGOS