

Preventing “summer slide” in elementary students

By Cheryl Irving, Lincoln Park Public Schools assistant superintendent

Everyone in the school community, including students, families and teachers, looks forward to summer vacation. It’s a much-needed opportunity to relax and recharge before school resumes in the fall.

Vacations, cookouts and trips to the park and community pool are synonymous with summer vacation so it’s easy to forget that children should still be practicing important skills like reading, math and language even while on break. It’s important to remember to set aside time regularly for this kind of learning and to brush up on the skills gained in the previous school year. Failing to do so has been found to lead to learning loss, also known as “summer slide.”

Studies show that students can lose up to two months of math skills and two or three months of reading skills if they don’t spend time practicing them during the summer. Research also shows “summer slide” is most prevalent in elementary students. As we head into the final stretch of summer, here are a few ideas to keep your children’s minds sharp in reading, math, and language development.

Math

Math is around us all the time. An easy way to practice math is by highlighting it in everyday activities. For instance, when grocery shopping, have your child add up the sum of your items. To practice fractions, try having them adjust ingredient amounts while cooking by one half, one fourth, etc.

Children love games, so try playing games that incorporate math and numbers. Games like Monopoly, Uno and Sorry build on skills like counting, categorizing and money handling. For students who prefer digital gaming, there are numerous educational apps like Starfall, ABC Mouse, IXL, Math Kids and Kids Math that focus on building math skills.

Reading

Daily reading is crucial. Reading six books over the duration of the summer has been found to prevent “summer slide”.

Children should read age-appropriate books about topics they are highly interested in. It’s important the books they select are a good fit, meaning your child is able to comprehend what they’re reading. If your child struggles or misses four words on one page, it is an indication the book is too advanced and they should select a new one.

Studies also show children who read for one minute per day develop an 8,000-word vocabulary by sixth grade, but students who read for 20 minutes per day develop vocabularies that include nearly two million words.

Language Building

Conversations with adults are extremely beneficial in helping young children (especially children in kindergarten through second grade) learn the phrasing necessary to adequately conduct conversations with people of all ages. Much like with reading on their own, young children also benefit from being read to. Reading to your children teaches them to understand common expressions, proper conversational rhythm and fluency.

Taking day trips to local museums, parks, petting zoos – things that allow them to have hands-on experiences - offer opportunities to grow your child’s communications skills. Curiosity is a major driver of learning for children. So, in these last few weeks before school starts, I encourage you to take your child to do something they enjoy and use it as an opportunity to engage them in conversation about their experience.

I hope you find the ideas presented here helpful and use them to prevent “summer slide” during the last few weeks of summer vacation.

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