

the Summer Slide

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What is the Summer Slide?

The terms *Summer Slide*, *Summer Setback*, and *Summer Slump* are all used to describe the loss of academic skills that some students experience over the summer break when school is not in session.

Studies have found varying degrees of loss:

A typical child loses a little more than one month of skill or knowledge in math and reading/language arts combined. This effect is more pronounced for low-income children whose reading scores fall approximately three months behind their peers when they return to school in the Fall.¹

Studies have found a cumulative effect:

Low-income students in the United States lose an average of more than two months in reading achievement each summer from kindergarten to grade 3. By the end of fifth grade, disadvantaged students are nearly three grade equivalents behind their more affluent peers in reading.²

The *Summer Slide* accumulates over the elementary years³ and has been found to play a significant role in children's placement in secondary school, rate of high school dropout, and college attendance.⁴

The summer slide is a major contributor to the existing reading achievement gap between more and less economically disadvantaged children.^{5,6}





The achievement gap grows faster during the summer than during the school year.^{7 8}

Possible Explanations

Is the achievement gap due to schooling experience?

Children from low and middle-income backgrounds show similar achievement growth while in school; therefore, it is the summer losses that are responsible for the growing summer achievement gap and not a child's schooling experience.⁹

The *Faucet Theory*¹⁰ posits that through the school year the resource faucet is turned on and all children gain equally as a result of exposure to the same resources provided by the school. When school is not in session, the faucet is turned off which can result in some children experiencing a significant decrease in available resources.

Lower-income families simply cannot match the resources supplied by the school. Middle-income families, on the other hand, can compensate to a certain extent and their child's achievement remains stable or continues to grow over the summer.¹¹

What role does home environment play in the achievement gap?

Studies have found that differences in summer learning loss for reading were related to resources in the home.¹²

Children from low-income families do not read [in the summer] because they have much more restricted access to books at home and in their communities.¹³

Overall, socio-economic status, access to learning materials, and children's home environments may all be possible contributors to the widening summer achievement gap.^{14 15 16}



What can we do to limit the slide?

Provide access to books...

The number of books a child reads over the summer is positively related to their achievement.^{19 20 21 22}

Some studies have shown that simply ensuring access to books for summer reading can stem summer setback among economically disadvantaged children.^{23 24 25 26 27}

Providing access to self-selected books can be problematic for struggling readers who select books that are too difficult for them.²⁸ More intensive approaches that incorporate a more structured and scaffolded focus with parental involvement have shown greater effects.²⁹

Public library summer reading programs are beneficial as they improve accessibility to books and help children maintain or improve their reading skills.³⁰

Summer Programming...

Cost is the major barrier to summer programming; partnerships among districts, community-based organizations, government agencies, local founders, and others can strengthen summer learning programs.³¹

Remedial summer school programs reveal conflicting results in improving children's reading skills and are hampered by:

Punitive perceptions	Low academic expectations
Poor attendance rates	Teacher fatigue
Short duration	High cost



Summer programming has the ability to address the issues of academic loss, nutritional loss, and lack of safe, constructive activities.³²

Recommendations

For Parents:

Weekly trips to the library
Select books to read together and make reading fun
Encourage your child to read

For a Summer Books Program:

- Target younger students (Kindergarten & Grade 1)
- Encourage self-selection of books at child's reading level
- Provide a variety of interesting reading materials
- Acknowledge children's book interests and preferences
- Involve parents in the process

Summer Programs should:

- Have reading activities
- Provide different activities (e.g., day camps, swimming lessons, trips, visit parks/zoos, play sports)
- Use positive reinforcement
- Teach problem-solving strategies
- Encourage children to enjoy themselves to increase engagement
- Have high expectations and a way for children to meet them
- Have "coaches" not "teachers"

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