

Learning in the summer

While school provides a significant opportunity for learning, all children learn in other contexts and the upcoming summer is a time when those other contexts are important. Summer is a time to participate in enrichment activities, to learn new things, and to maintain knowledge and skills learned during the school year. Summer learning occurs in summer school, but also at camp, in sports, by visiting museums and parks, by taking a family holiday, and in individual activities like reading.

Planned summer learning activities provide a number of potential benefits including providing childcare for working families; maintaining what has been learned (especially in skills like arithmetic or spelling); focusing on fitness and health; decreasing the likelihood of adolescents engaging in risky behaviours; and providing opportunities for children with special needs. Some reasons summer learning activities have positive outcomes is that class size is smaller, there is more individualized attention, and there is often a more relaxed learning environment. Young children seem to benefit the most academically, but research does not support the expectation that really dramatic changes in achievement occur as a result of summer school participation. Programs that combine academics and enrichment seem to have the most long-term benefits.

Reading is a learning activity in which everyone can participate. Kids who read at least six books over the summer show increases in academic achievement, and summer is a time for them to do what researchers call “free voluntary reading.” More time spent free reading is the best predictor of being a good writer, and increased comprehension and vocabulary.

School is only one place that learning occurs and only certain kinds of learning occur in schools. Summer is an opportunity for other kinds of learning in different places that are necessary in the education of the whole child.

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