June

Summer and the Living Ain’t Easy

Whether on year round schedules or offering summer school, school staff must deal with summer-minded students

# Year round schools
# Summer school
# Full year employment

For many students, teachers, support staff, and administrators, summer vacations are a thing of the past. Given that reality, it is essential to recognize what that means and to look for the opportunities that are present. For example, during the summer months, sometimes the number of students are fewer and the opportunities for innovation greater. Teachers and learning support staff may have more time to attend to students at risk.

Here are some ideas to add to your thinking about helping students during the summer months.

# Learning loss and increases in risky behavior are major worries related to students who aren’t in school during the summer. As the Johns Hopkins University’s Center for Summer Learning reports in their document Primer on Summer Learning Loss:

Low-income children and youth experience greater summer learning losses than their higher income peers. On average, middle-income students experience slight gains in reading performance over the summer months. Low-income students experience an average summer learning loss in reading achievement of over two months.


Studies show that out-of-school time is a dangerous time for unsupervised children and teens. They are more likely to use alcohol, drugs, and tobacco; engage in criminal and other high-risk behaviors; receive poor grades; and drop out of school than those who have the opportunity to benefit from constructive activities supervised by responsible adults.

Using the Summer Productively

Schools (especially support staff), working with the community, need to help develop summer month programs that help address barriers to learning, promote healthy development, and enhance equity of opportunity. As stressed in Primer on Summer Learning Loss: If policymakers are serious about improving excellence and equity in public education, social science research suggests that high-quality summer programs must become a significant and central component in school reform efforts.

Below are a few excerpts from the Primer on Summer Learning Loss:

C All young people should have consistent access to high-quality summer enrichment programs throughout their educational careers. Programs should be proactive and offered for multiple summers.

C Elementary schools and youth development organizations should form partnerships to prevent summer loss in reading among low-income students. ... Teachers and youth development professionals should use the summers to collaborate and bridge gaps between schools and youth programs. Summer programs should incorporate research-based practices for improving cognitive development from high-quality after-school enrichment programs. ... Summer learning should be a community-wide, inter-agency priority. There are a wide variety of roles that public agencies, community-based organizations, cultural institutions, and colleges and universities can play in improving the quality and quantity of summer learning opportunities for all young people. Improved collaboration and leveraging of funds from multiple sources will help ensure greater levels of access to programs.

C Program models should maintain a strong academic focus, but also acknowledge the unique role that summers play within American culture. Summer programs can demonstrate the power of informal learning experiences such as reading and discussing books for pleasure and gaining exposure to new cultures and ideas.

C Summer programs should be used to support the recruitment, professional development, and retention of teachers and youth program staff. ... Summers should be used to encourage teachers to try new techniques, teach different subjects or grades, acquire new skills and mentor new colleagues. Simultaneously, summers could be used to attract current college students or recent graduates to internship experiences in public school classrooms and with non-profit youth development organizations.

Are Remedial Summer School Programs Effective?

[Research suggests:] Whether teachers knew their students before summer school was an important predictor of test-score increases and teacher practice. ... The quality of interactions between teachers and students was a distinguishing factor between the most effective and the average classrooms. Students whose teachers spent more time individualizing the curriculum and working with students outside of class had greater learning gains than students in classrooms where teachers spent less time adapting the curriculum and providing individualized attention. ...
Making Teaching More Effective

“...It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of innovation and creativity in meeting the needs of struggling student. Summer school involves intensive reteaching of materials that students did not master during the school year, but those students need help that goes beyond simply reteaching the same materials in the same way...

What is the “something different” that summer schools need to do? Doing “something different” often means connecting subject matter to real-life situations that are relevant to students. It might mean finding books about baseball to read and using baseball statistics in math instruction for a student who lives and breathes the sport. It could involve using musical themes to engage a student who constantly drums on his desk or incorporating a lot of physical movement to reach the aspiring dancer. It might mean using technology that presents materials in a game-like format. It might mean simply giving a student the opportunity to discuss the material with teachers and peers to an extent not possible in the regular classroom...”


Also, see G.D. Borman (2001). Summers are for learning. Principal, 80(3), 26-29.

Of course, summer provides an opportunity to introduce many ideas for making both the content and the process of teaching and learning more relevant to students. As suggested above, active learning is especially important. There are many ways to promote active learning at all grade levels. It can take the form of class discussions, problem based and discovery learning, a project approach, involvement in learning centers, experiences outside the classroom, and independent learning in or out of school. Students may become involved in classroom, school-wide, or community service or action projects. Older students may be involved in “internships” or service learning. Service learning involves students in identifying a real community need, ties the community work with academic goals, encourages the students to reflect on and evaluate their learning, and strengthens the relationship between community and school.

For more on active learning, see our Center resources entitled:

> Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning: Classroom Focused Enabling (a set of Continuing Education Modules)

> Re-engaging Students in Learning (a Quick Training Aid)

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu

(For more information on service learning see “Building Community Through Service Learning” at http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/44/03/4403.pdf)
For more about engaging students in learning during summer and all year round, see the following Center Materials and Resources at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu

>>Quick Finds:
   *After School Programs
   *Classroom Focused Enabling
   *Environments that support learning
   *Mentoring
   *Motivation
   *Youth Development

>>After School Programs and Addressing Barriers to Learning
   (a Technical Aid Packet)

>>Enabling Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning: Classroom Focused Enabling (Continuing Education Modules)

>>Classroom Changes to Enhance and Re-engage Students in Learning
   (A Training Tutorial)

>>Re-engaging Students in Learning
   (A Quick Training Aid)