Welcome

Summertime provides a great opportunity for children to strengthen their learning skills while having fun and relaxing. In this issue of Bridges, we explore some of the ways in which parents can help their youngsters have a summer that is both educational and entertaining.

About Bridges

Bridges is a business and parent newsletter sponsored by the SouthCoast Education Compact. The Compact is a school, business, and higher education partnership among business leaders, area school superintendents, UMass Dartmouth, and Bristol Community College. The Compact creates a forum for the exchange of ideas among these groups, and works to collectively address and support issues of education reform in the South Coast region.

Feedback

We would like to hear your opinion of Bridges. Did you find the information in the newsletter helpful? Are there areas you would like us to cover?

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Summer is time for learning fun

“No more classes, no more books...” so begins the song of summer vacation. It celebrates those three months when students can focus on the diameter of their favorite Ferris wheel rather than the circumference of their textbooks. For most students, summer is a time filled with entertainment and relaxation, not learning. The result is that nearly every child suffers from what is called “summer learning loss.” Students forget important skills and knowledge that they gained during the school year because they do not actively use them. Simply put, it is a case of “use it or lose it.”

Matthew Boulay of Teachers College and Ronald Fairchild of Teach Baltimore report that “while losing a few months’ worth of achievement on one summer might not seem important, summer learning losses add up over many years and have a large impact on children’s performance.” They explain that elementary school students who do not read during summer tend to perform worse at the end of the summer than at the beginning on the same reading test. As a result, teachers must spend four to eight weeks at the beginning of each school year re-teaching material that students have forgotten over the summer. And the effect can be cumulative. On average, students who experience learning loss every year do not perform as well on standardized tests as students who experience summer learning gains.

Gains instead of losses

While summer vacation should be a time of rest and relaxation, there are a number of creative, easy ways to help students experience summer learning gains instead of losses. In fact, Boulay and Fairchild explain that the best ways to support learning during the summer do not involve any of the traditional tools of education such as tutoring, textbooks, worksheets, or quizzes. Instead, learning within their daily environment and through fun summer projects represent the best ways to help students maintain and improve their skills and knowledge. More importantly, helping students find exciting ways to learn will give them an invaluable resource for success—the joy of learning.

The idea is to allow the student to drive the course of his or her summer learning so that it is part of vacation fun, not a chore that takes away from the enjoyment. For example, if a student is interested in skateboarding, he or she can research the origin of the raw materials used to construct skateboards and create a map of the production process. If a student is planning a trip to the amusement park, he or she can design a roller coaster on the web at www.learner.org/interactives, which explains the physics involved in the design process. A student interested in animals can create a reading list of children’s novels about animals to fill up the summer months.

These are just a few examples of the countless possibilities for creative summer learning. With a little encouragement, all students can make the most of their summer vacations and return in the fall ready to hit the books and be successful students.

* Reported in “Making the most of Summer Vacation for Elementary School Children,” ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education.
Suggestions for a summer of fun and learning

Comic strip writing
What child doesn’t love the comics? Why not use the comic strips to help improve writing and reading skills? Take the comics in the daily paper; cut apart the segments of each strip and then ask your child to arrange them in order. You can also ask your child to write or imagine new lines for each character in the comics.

TV and the world
Sharpen geography skills by connecting current events to TV viewing. Post a world or United States map next to the television set. Have your child locate world news spots as you watch the news. If you have reference books such as encyclopedias in your home, have the children look up information on the foreign countries or states mentioned in the news reports.

Picture stories
Have your child create his or her own stories by using pictures from magazines. Have children select four or five pictures from magazines and newspapers, and put them together to tell a story. Ask children to first number the pictures 1, 2, 3, etc. Ask them to arrange the pictures in numerical order and then have them write the story on paper. You can also ask them to re-arrange the pictures to tell a different story. This exercise helps your children to develop imagination and creativity.

Supermarket math
Ask your child to choose a dish to prepare for a meal—a pudding, a salad, a sandwich. Have your child check to see what food supplies are on hand and make a shopping list for what is needed. At the supermarket, let the child select the food on the list. Help them decide what is the best buy. You can also have the child write the price of each item and total the cost for the purchases and compare them on the sales slip.

Household communication
Maintaining regular communication in the household is not an easy task for most families who have busy schedules during the summer. Writing notes to one another is a great way to communicate and to strengthen writing skills. To make this even more interesting, create a simple code (A=1, B=2, etc.) to send a message to your siblings and parents. Have them decode the message and write back. As the summer progresses, take turns creating more complex codes and messages.

Reading to save money
From groceries to household appliances to summer outings, running a household can be expensive. Your child can read the local newspapers to identify ways in which to save money, including clipping coupons, tracking sales on items your family plans to purchase, and identifying free or low-cost summer events for the whole family.

Summer reading programs at SouthCoast libraries
Many local libraries offer summer reading programs for children, giving them the opportunity to gather together and share the experience of reading while they are out of school.

The Fall River Public Library’s Annual Summer Reading Club kicks off with a celebration on July 7. Mikey Maestro’s Musical Extravaganza will have you tapping your toes and singing along to some of your favorite old and brand new favorite tunes! For more information, contact David R. Mello at 508.324.2700 or dmello@sailsinc.org.

At the New Bedford Free Public Library, sign-up for this year’s summer reading program, “Wild Reads at Your Library,” begins on June 23. The program offers story hours and events for children ages 3-18 from July 7 – August 16.

Read books to win prizes! More information about the programs is available at your local branch, and at www.ci.new-bedford.ma.us/Library/library.html

Check your local library’s web site, or stop by in person, for more information about summer reading programs.

Ten websites that can add to a summer of fun and learning

1. phoenix.lpl.arizona.edu/kids.php This page on the official Mars Phoenix website has been designed with content by kids and for kids, including music, artwork and projects by kids involved or interested in the mission.
2. phoenix.lpl.arizona.edu/classroom.php Here you can download activities and materials to facilitate student understanding of fundamental concepts related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.
3. www.nasa.gov/ NASA Home page
5. www.nwf.org/kids/ National Wildlife Center for kids
7. www.sailsinc.org/ SouthCoast Public Libraries home
8. www.readingrockets.org/ Reading Rockets
10. www.chem4kids.com/ Chemistry for Kids

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela,
first black president of South Africa and
Nobel Peace Prize winner