



Parent & Teacher
RESOURCE GUIDE

The Great Homework Debate

Schools across the country are taking a fresh look at the role of homework in education, and taking steps to ensure that homework is effective.

The National PTA and the National Education Association have long recommended that students be given 10 minutes of homework per grade level. In other words, 10 minutes for first grades, 20 for second grade, and so on. High school students who take rigorous courses may need more homework. It's not uncommon, however, for students to receive more homework.

THE BENEFITS OF HOMEWORK

A 2006 research analysis by Duke University psychology professor Harris Cooper found a positive correlation between homework and student achievement. Cooper found that homework has benefits for improving study habits, attitudes toward school, self-discipline, inquisitiveness and independent problem solving skills.

Many schools have modified their homework policies to address both quality and quantity. Some schools have even adopted no-homework policies. Since the research seems to indicate some benefits of homework for students,



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it's easy to see how some parents would be concerned that their children might be missing out on an educational advantage without it.

In general, research shows a modest benefit for elementary school students, with the benefit increasing in middle and high school.

QUALITY VS. QUANTITY

Given the strain placed on the limited time children have to spend with their families each day during the school year, it's important to be sure any time they spend doing

homework is meaningful.

In an interview with Edutopia.org, veteran middle and high school English teacher Brian Sztabnik recommends that teachers ask themselves the following five questions when assigning homework:

- How long will it take to complete?
- Have all learners been considered?
- Will an assignment encourage future success?
- Will an assignment place material in a context the classroom cannot?

• Does an assignment offer support when a teacher is not there?

Check with your school to see if it has a policy regarding homework. Even when districts do establish policies, they usually include some flexibility. If a student is routinely receiving more homework than district or school policy advises, reach out to the school with your concerns.

MAKE THE MOST OF HOMEWORK

The U.S. Department of

Education offers the following tips for helping your child get the most out of homework:

- Make sure your child has a quiet, well-lit place to do homework.
- Make sure the materials your child needs, such as paper, pencils and a dictionary, are available.
- Help your child with time management. Establish a set time each day for doing homework, and don't leave it until just before bedtime.
- Be positive about homework. Encourage a positive attitude about homework by modeling that attitude.
- When your child does homework, you do homework. This will help your child associate homework with tasks he will need to perform as an adult.
- When your child asks for help, provide guidance, not answers.
- Participate in homework assignments when the teacher requests it.

• If homework is meant to be done by your child alone, don't get involved.

• Talk with your child's teacher so you understand the purpose of homework and any class rules about homework.

• Have your child do the hard work first, then move on to easier tasks.

• Watch your child for signs of failure and frustration. Let her take a short break if needed.

• Reward progress in homework. Go out for pizza or a trip to the park to celebrate hard work.



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THE PROBLEM

The following sobering facts from the National Alliance on Mental Illness put the problem of mental health in among school-aged children into perspective:

- About one in five youth age 13-18 live with mental health conditions and approximately 75 percent of people with mental health issues develop them prior to the age of 24.

- Thirty-seven percent of students age 14 or older with a mental health issue drop out of school.

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death in students aged 10–24. Of those students, 90 percent having an underlying mental illness.

In addition, the Association for Children’s Mental Health cites research showing 1 in 10

young people have a mental health challenge that is severe enough to impair how they function at home, school or in their community.

According to ACMH, mental health disorders can affect two areas critical to students’ success: classroom learning and social interactions.

NEXT STEPS

In recent years, schools seem to have been ratcheting up their response to the need among students, with resources such as therapy dogs, counseling and support groups becoming more commonplace, along with parent education about issues such as anxiety, depression and suicide.

ACMH encourages parents to build strong relationships with their school’s teachers

and administrators to help ensure their child’s needs are met. Even a child who does not have an individualized educational plan (IEP) or 504 plan — tools set out by federal law to help children with disabilities — the school still is likely willing to help parents address their children’s mental health concerns with accommodations such as modifying deadlines, providing services or working to identify and de-escalate anxiety.

In 2018, New York state launched an early intervention program to support the students’ mental health. The program includes comprehensive services at every grade level, mental health assessments and interventions, access to behavioral and mental health services and programs, outreach to the Department of

Student Mental Health

Mental health problems are strikingly common among young people and can affect their ability to learn. Schools are beginning to tackle the problem and assist student in getting the help they need.

REAL ESTATE 101

Resources

Below are some resources to help identify and treat mental health problems among school-aged children.

National Suicide Prevention Line: 800-273-TALK (8255), www.sprc.org

Anxiety and Depression Association of America’s peer-to-peer online support group: adaa.org/adaa-online-support-group

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance online support groups: <https://bit.ly/2p6Y3bl>

ACMH list of possible red flags: <https://bit.ly/2ohE9tJ>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services mental health resources for educators: www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/educators.

Education for support, and efforts to strengthen relationships between schools, families and communities.

Writing for InsideHigherEd.com, college professor John Warner recommended focusing less on achievement and more on student engagement. Students are less engaged in school each year from fifth through 11th grades, he wrote, with 74% of fifth-graders reporting that they’re engaged in school, and only 32% by their senior year. “I’d love to see school reformers attack this problem with the same fervor they’ve directed toward raising test scores,” Warner wrote. “They may even be surprised how test scores go up as school is organized around helping students thrive in all dimensions of the human experience without being con-



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Community Resources

Raising children is hard work. Many parents will take all the help they can get. When it comes to getting the resources you need, look no further than your community. Many valuable resources for parents are right under your nose.

MUSEUMS

Science and history museums, zoos and nature centers allow students to better visualize the concepts they are learning in school. A visit is a great way to reinforce your child's educa-

tion and inspire enthusiasm about learning. Many children are visual-spatial learners, meaning they learn better when they can “see” and “do.”

Visiting museums can get pricey, so keep an eye out for free community days or see if your employer offers discounts or even free tickets. Some libraries offer a passport program that allows patrons to “check out” a limited number of museum and other attraction passes.

HOUSES OF WORSHIP

Some churches offer programs for puberty and sexual education that help students navigate puberty and adolescence. Youth groups also help kids build friendships and strengthen their faith. Look into what your church, temple, mosque or other house of worship has to offer.

HEALTH SERVICES

Children learn best when they are happy and healthy. Making sure they are getting regular checkups and have access to care when it's needed can go a long way toward supporting your child's learning. If your family struggles to afford health or dental services, look for help in your local community. Many counties offer services for free or on a sliding scale to those who can't afford to pay.

SUMMER MEALS

For many children, when the school year ends, so does their access to adequate nutrition every day. In order to keep stomachs full and kids in peak shape for learning all summer long, the federally funded, state-run Summer Food Service Program provides summer meal programs to replace the free and reduced lunches

that keep schoolchildren fed during the school year.

To find a program near you, visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/summer-foodrocks>.

OTHER COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Is there a community garden where your child can satisfy their curiosity about plants, the environment or conservation? What about a civil rights nonprofit where you child can volunteer and learn more about social issues?

Many public libraries, or county or social service agencies, offer workshops and seminars for parents on issues such as public health concerns like substance abuse and mental health. Seek out these valuable resources that are available for free right in your community.

Helping Young Readers

Helping a child learn to read is a unique pleasure. Seeing their eyes light up when they pronounce their first words can be heartwarming and rewarding.

Getting there takes work — and patience. The reading journey begins when children are very young — even in the womb.

PRE-NATAL

Children learn patterns of language even before they are born. Research shows that babies who are read to in the womb have greater brain activity. “Talking and singing with your baby and reading with your baby even before birth can be a way to foster early social interactions and even later learning,” writes Tricia Skoler Ph.D., for Psychology Today. Skoler recommends familiarizing yourself with your local library and even getting your child a library card before he’s born. Children recognize their parents’ voices in the womb, so reading every day to your unborn baby will help form a bond with your child.

THE FIRST YEARS

After baby arrives, you should try to weave reading throughout your day, Skoler writes. Squeeze in 10 minutes here and 20 minutes there,



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working up to 30 to 60 minutes a day by the time baby is 4 months old. Having caregivers read to the baby, as well, will help enhance the experience, as babies need to be exposed to different reading styles. Having extended family members read to the baby when they visit also helps build relationships.

PRESCHOOL

Preschool is an exciting time for young learners, as they begin to make rapid

progress toward reading and writing. By preschool, children need lots of exposure to written and spoken language to advance their reading skills. “Kids need to understand that things you say can be written down,” said Georgia Kent, a reading specialist in Lake Zurich, Ill. Write shopping lists with your child and talk to them about what you’re doing any time you’re writing can help a child form those connections, she said.

Exercises as simple as

pointing out the first letter of a store name on a sign can help children understand phonics, Kent said. For example, point out the T in Target or the M on the McDonald’s sign.

The “language experience approach” is a way of using a child’s own experiences to help them learn about writing. You might ask your child, “What did you do today?” Then record his musings about his day and read them back to him, pointing out

each word as you read. This helps expose children to many aspects of written language, according to Kent, such as the fact that text is read from left to right, there are spaces between words, and the importance of the first sound in each word.

Another useful exercise at this age is to “stretch out” words and point out each individual sound. You can even create a sound box, a visual representation of how a word is put together. Draw each part of the word in a separate box, then move a bead, a bean, a penny or any other small object from box to box as you sound out the word.

A NEW READER

Once your child can read on his own, it’s tempting for parents to stop reading to their child — but don’t. It’s still important for children to have reading modeled for them, and it will increase their enthusiasm for reading.

Knowing your child’s reading level can help you guide your child toward books that are appropriate for her ability. Ask your child’s teacher which reading scale the school uses (there are a handful) and where your child is currently performing on the scale. A librarian at your public library will be able to help you find suitable books. Be sure to let your child be involved in choosing from books at her reading level. This will make her more likely to read for enjoyment.

The Middle School Transition

While the beginning of each school year can bring uncertainty, the transition to middle school can be an especially fraught time for students.

Between changes in their body and emotions, new responsibilities and expectations, and a new environment that can be challenging for some students, beginning middle school can be downright daunting. Helping children navigate this challenging time is critical to their success.

The Jewish Social Service Agency gives parents a heads-up that they might expect to see some unusual behavior from their child as they navigate the change, including hyperactivity, distractibility or agitation.

When parents are prepared for the transition, they can help their child prepare for the transition.

ASK YOUR CHILD HOW HE'S FEELING

Talk frankly with your child about his concerns about the coming year. He may worry about the workload or the teachers; he might be intimidated by the size of the school (they're typically

larger and more difficult to navigate than elementary schools); or he might be apprehensive about making friends. Ask your child what he thinks middle school will be like, and how you might help him feel more comfortable about the change. Assure your child that many students are feeling similar apprehension and that it is normal.

TALK ABOUT HIGHER EXPECTATIONS

From remembering materials to turning in assignments to bringing home gym uniforms to be laundered, middle school students are expected to do more. This is because they are being prepared for high school, where the stakes will be even higher, with students being tasked with choosing classes, managing their study habits and even applying to college and applying for financial aid.

Talk to your child about the fact that the expectations will be higher in middle school. If your student struggles with organization and executive functioning issues such as planning and follow-through, help her identify strategies that might be helpful to put in place from the beginning of the new year. This might include using an organization system such as a zip-up binder, using sticky notes or a smartphone to help remind her to turn in assignments or bring home

homework, or learning to use the school website or app to find necessary information.

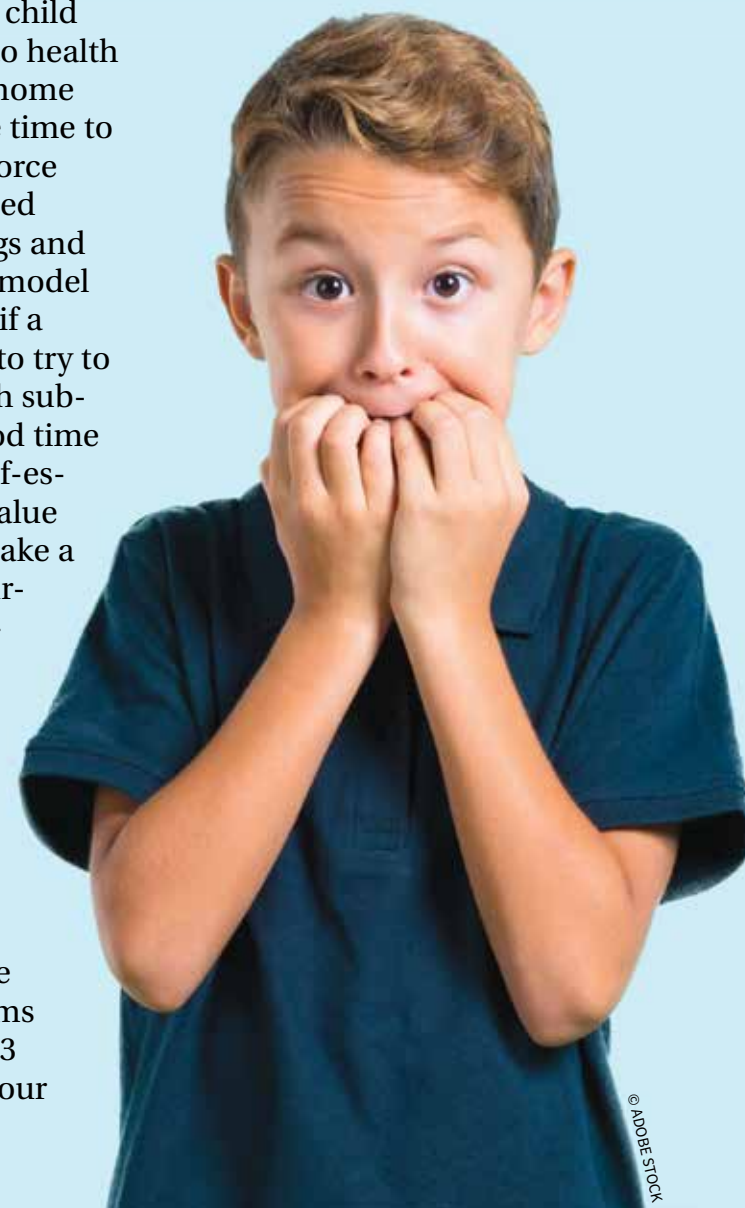
SOCIAL PRESSURE

Your child might feel various social pressures during the first year of middle school. This can include pressure to engage in romantic relationships, pressure to try drugs or alcohol, or pressure to spread rumors or change aspects of his appearance or personality to "fit in." If your child hasn't had any exposure to health classes or discussions at home about puberty, now is the time to broach the subject. Reinforce what your child has learned about the dangers of drugs and alcohol, and ask them to model how they would respond if a friend or classmate were to try to persuade them to try such substances. Now is also a good time to beef up your child's self-esteem. Assure him of his value as a human being, and make a concerted effort to encourage a strong sense of self-worth in your child. Discuss the harm gossip can do and encourage him not to participate.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Given the social upheaval of the tween years, social media can be a landmine. Most platforms have a minimum age of 13 for accounts. Insist that your

child stick to those guidelines. If your child does use social media, educate them about the potential dangers and appropriate use of social media. Remind them to think before they post, and to never post anything they wouldn't say to someone's face. You also should check your child's privacy settings and teach them about the value of their privacy online and otherwise.



Help for Students with Disabilities

Students with medical and learning disabilities are entitled to special protections under the law.

Such laws aim to level the playing field for students, giving them the same opportunities as their peers to get a public education and eliminating discrimination.

THE LAW

Three federal laws do most of the heavy lifting when it comes to eliminating discrimination based on disability.

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act requires public entities to make reasonable modifications in policies, practices or procedures when necessary to avoid discrimination, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive Federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education, enshrining the right to a “free and appropriate public education” (FAPE) as a civil right.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law also includes language about FAPE and ensures special education and related services for children with disabilities.



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IN PRACTICE

In the classroom, a parent of a child with disabilities has two important tools to help their child a “free and appropriate public education.”

A 504 plan. A child with medical or learning disabilities who needs special supports or accommodations to gain a FAPE is entitled to what is known as a “504 plan.” This is a legal document that lays out what the school must do to accommodate the child’s needs. This can include accommodations such as pref-

erential seating, modified textbooks or other learning materials, reduced load of homework or classwork, visits to the nurse’s office for medications or other needs, and services such as occupational or physical therapy.

An IEP. A child who has a disability specified under IDEA is entitled to an individualized educational plan, or IEP. An IEP sets measurable annual goals for a child and outlines any accommodations or services a child needs to be successful in meeting those

goals. This often includes guaranteed weekly minutes for services such as physical, speech or occupational therapy, a list of accommodations and other supports that will be provided, and information about how much time the student will spend in the regular classroom with non-disabled students vs. special ed settings.

HOW TO TAKE ACTION

If your child has been diagnosed with a disability, reach out to your child’s teacher and

any administrators who are charged with helping deliver special education. The law even provides a framework for undiagnosed students to be tested for disabilities within the public school system. This includes assessments for psychological, educational, socio-cultural and developmental concerns, as well as testing by physical, occupational and speech therapists. Getting the right services and supports for a child with disabilities in the classroom can greatly enhance his educational experience and have a profound effect on his enthusiasm about learning. It is important to get started as soon as possible for the best results.

GET HELP

Federal law also provides services to help parents understand what their child is entitled to under the law and access those benefits. Each state has a federally funded Parent Training and Information Center specifically designed to do just that. Find your state’s center at parent-centerhub.org/find-your-center.

If possible, hiring a private special education advocate can make an enormous impact on how effectively you can advocate for your child. The law on special education is complex and can be daunting to the lay person. An educated, experienced advocate knows the ins and outs of the law and can help you access the benefits to which your child is entitled and get results.

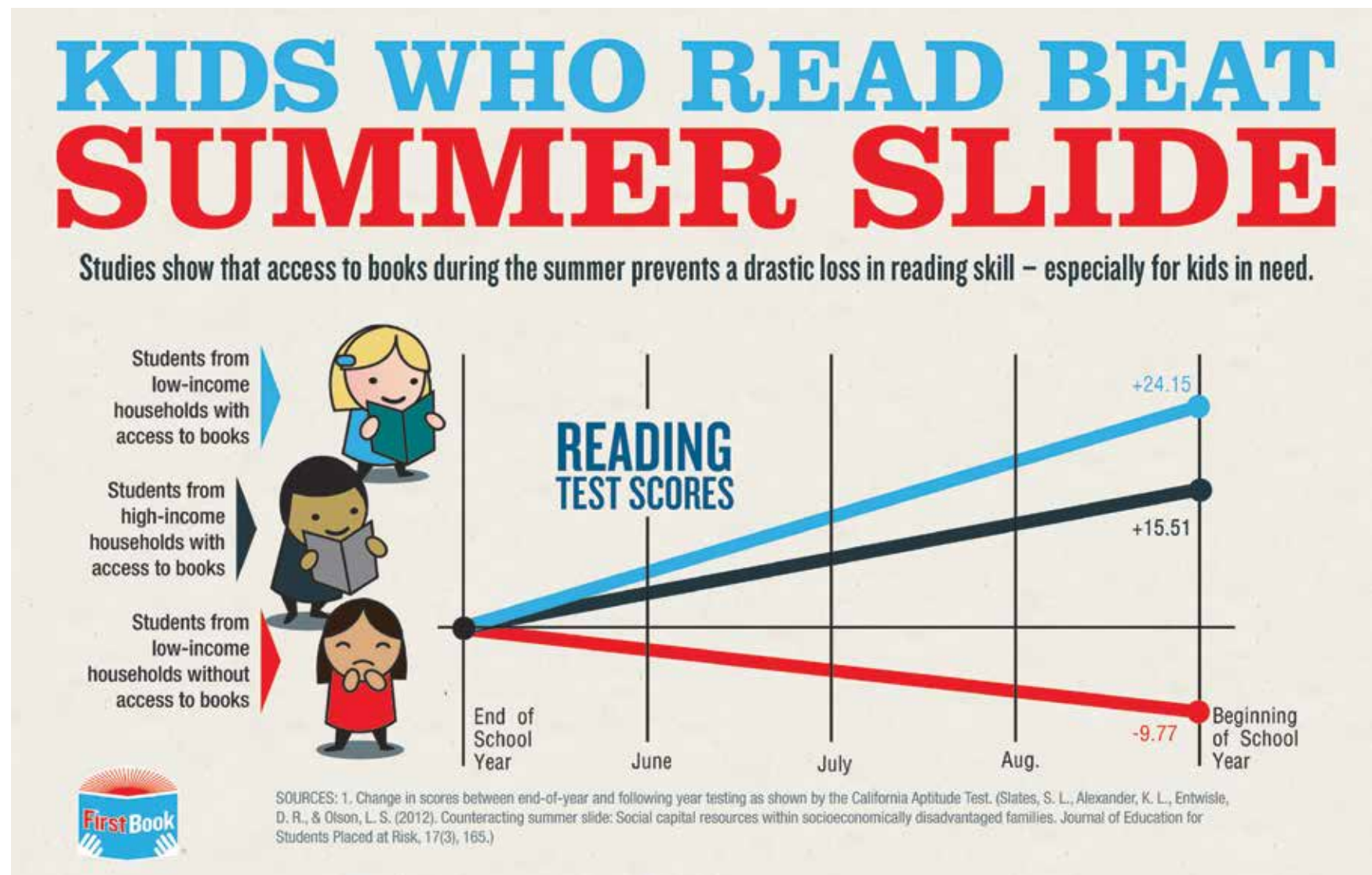
Avoiding the ‘Summer Slide’

Summer learning loss, or “the summer slide,” happens every fall when children return to school. It’s the setback in the progression of their learning that many children experience after returning from three months of summer break.

THE PROBLEM

Grades and test scores can slip as children get out of practice on the concepts they’ve learned. There’s evidence that the summer slide affects low-income children disproportionately compared to their more affluent peers. “Studies show that kids from low-income families fall behind an average of two months in reading while their middle-income peers tend to make slight gains,” said a news release from First Book, a nonprofit that provides books and other literacy resources to children in need. “Those three months off take a disastrous toll. [The summer slide] erases months of hard-earned progress in school, lost ground that kids in need can’t afford.”

It’s a topic of great concern to modern teachers, who often spend the first few weeks of school reviewing last year’s material in hopes of partially combating the summer slide. Researchers have been interested in summer learning loss since 1906, according to the Brookings Institution. But Scholastic reports that only about a third of parents have even heard of the phenomenon. The well informed parent can take steps to help a child start the new year with last year’s learning fresh in their



mind and ready for new learning experiences.

THE SOLUTIONS

According to First Book, access to books over the summer can be something of a panacea for summer reading loss. “Books are the answer,” the organization wrote in a 2013 news release. “Unlike their more affluent peers, most of them don’t spend summer break at the library or reading books in the backseat on family trips. In fact, many of them won’t open a book until school starts up again. ... Studies show that kids from low-income families who have access to books over the summer not only beat the summer slide, but

make even greater gains than kids from wealthy and middle-class families.”

You should take advantage of any materials your child’s school sends home to keep kids learning over the summer. In addition, the Colorado Department of Education offers the following tips to parents on helping keep the summer slide in check:

- Access to books is critical. When it comes to your public library, think more than just the summer reading program. Most libraries offer fun activities, classes and workshops for children during the summer months, providing many opportunities to keep kids learning.
- When a child can choose their own

reading materials and read for enjoyment, they are more likely to improve their reading skills.

- Want to encourage your child to read? Model that behavior by being a frequent reader yourself.
- Your child doesn’t have to read a lot during the summer to prevent the summer slide. Reading just four to six books is beneficial.
- You have the best chance of beating summer slide when your community organizations are involved, such as schools, libraries, community centers, parent groups and social service agencies. Consider reaching out to see which resources they offer and spread the word to others.