

From: **National Summer Learning Association**

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10 Things Parents Can Do to Help Their Child Start the School Year Strong

National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) and Learning Heroes Offer a Mid-Summer Primer for School Success

(Baltimore, MD, July 25, 2018) – Summertime in America means baseball, barbecues, amusement park rides, bubbles, and fireflies. The summer months or the “offseason,” for students also present a classic case of the *Summer Slide*, a well-documented phenomenon where kids can lose up to three months of progress in reading and math skills learned during the previous school year. These losses add up, particularly for low income students, and can leave vulnerable students treading water or falling behind their higher income peers. (See the National Summer Learning Association’s Infographic: [Summer by the Numbers](#)). The good news is there are many free and fun ways all parents can help prevent the Summer Slide, without missing all of the joys of summertime.

“Coaches don’t tell their players to quit training during the off-season. The off-season presents a special opportunity for athletes to develop strength, skills, and stamina in training programs that may differ from their workouts during the regular season,” said Matthew Boulay PhD, Founder and CEO of the National Summer Learning Association. “In the same way, our goals and plans for summer learning for our children can be different than what happens during the school year.”

Summers are a particularly good opportunity for parents to tap into their child’s interests, build on the skills learned, and prepare for a successful school year ahead. In August, Learning Heroes will launch the Readiness Check, an interactive tool that gives parents a gut check of whether their child has mastered the foundational skills needed for their next grade, and provides them with instant insights, videos, and activities to support their child’s specific needs.

“With the Readiness Check, parents can help their children stride forward over the summer by knowing where their children excel and where they may need additional support,” said Bibb Hubbard, Founder and President of Learning Heroes. “This knowledge can help parents fill their children’s time over the summer with fun and engaging learning activities that focus on the areas where they need additional support, practice, and time to set them up for success in their next grade.”

Summer learning can be grouped into three broad categories: enrollment-based programs such as camps, drop-in programs like the public library, and at-home learning that can take place anytime and anywhere. NSLA worked with Learning Heroes – a nonprofit that equips parents with information and tools to help their child succeed academically and developmentally – to create a Top 10 list of things parents can do to make learning fun during the summer, and to ensure their kids start the new school year strong.

- 1) **Make a simple plan.** Look at your child's grades, pay attention to how easy or hard it is for them to do grade-level activities, and look out for the state test results you've received from school. Go to www.bealearninghero.org for a simple 3-step plan to help set your child up for success in the new school year.
- 2) **Promote real-world skills.** Encourage life-skills that help your child in and out of the classroom. Show your child how to problem-solve, learn from mistakes, and how to communicate effectively with others, especially in tough situations.
- 3) **Let them show what they know!** Summer is about having fun and exploring your child's interests. As your child reads, plays an educational app, or during everyday moments at home, ask them to teach what they've learned and what they enjoyed or didn't. This will help them review important skills and help build their confidence!
- 4) **Find the fun (and free) in your community.** There are places and spaces to learn all around you. Check out recreation and parks or library programs that have academic support and activities for children. Visit a zoo or museum to explore new interests. Plan a day trip—find a nearby park or historical place you've never been to and talk about what you want to learn during your visit. Be sure to ask about local discounts for admission or scholarships for their summer program.
- 5) **Read every day.** Whether doing it at home, at a library, or even while visiting a beach or park, reading can be a joyful escape. Many schools use Lexile levels to measure your child's reading ability. Parents can help children pick books that interest them and are suited to their Lexile reading level. Check your child's prior year school assessments for the Lexile level or visit the MetaMetrics, Find a Book site at: www.fab.lexile.com/. The Scholastic Summer Reading Challenge is another free, online reading program where students can unlock digital rewards as they complete weekly reading challenges. Visit <https://www.scholastic.com/summer/home/>
- 6) **Have fun with numbers and science:** Add a little math to summer reading fun. Asking your child to help tally a grocery bill, follow a cupcake recipe, or calculate how much time it will take to get to the beach are creative ways to practice math skills. Kids are naturally inquisitive – from collecting rocks or rose petals; making ice cubes and then watching them melt, making volcanoes out of clay, or making a sound sandwich using ice pop sticks, rubber bands, and piece of a straw, science fun is everywhere.
- 7) **Make art...and music:** Whether it's painting a picture, composing a song or constructing musical instruments out of cardboard, let the summer months be the time when your child discovers a joy of creative expression. Children ages 4-18 can enter the Lands' End Love Learning Art Contest from now through August 12 for a chance to win a cash prize at www.landsend.com/lovelearning.
- 8) **Get Moving and Eat Healthy!** Many children experience unhealthy levels of weight gain during the summer months because they get less exercise when schools are closed. So kids need to take a hike, learn to swim, play in the sun, and go for a bike ride, run or walk. Start simple with a tomato container garden or fresh herbs grown on your kitchen window sill. It's a great way to encourage healthy eating with your child.

- 9) **Manage Screen Time:** Experts generally say that it's ok for children to use screen time in a limited way as long as they are supervised. There are many self-paced and free online learning programs that support skill development in many subjects from pre-k through twelfth grade. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the quality of content is more important than the platform or time spent with media. Prioritize how your child spends his time rather than just setting a timer.
- 10) **Finally...keep good habits!** Keep a bedtime routine. It's ok for your child to stay up a bit later in the summer but it's still very important to maintain a regular bedtime and routine. For example, if you read a bedtime story to your child during the school year, then read a bedtime story during the summer. And remember most children need a good eight hours of sleep a night.

For more information on these and other summer learning ideas, visit summerlearning.org and bealearninghero.org. (For interviews with Matthew Boulay PhD, email tsachs@summerlearning.org. For interviews with Bibb Hubbard, email dpark@learningheroes.org)

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About the National Summer Learning Association

The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) is the only national nonprofit exclusively focused on closing the achievement gap by increasing access to high-quality summer learning opportunities. NSLA recognizes and disseminates what works in summer learning, develops and delivers community capacity-building offerings and convenes and empowers key actors to embrace summer learning as a solution for equity and excellence in education. For more information, visit www.summerlearning.org