

LEARNING DOESN'T TAKE A SUMMER VACATION.



What Parents Are Saying About Summer Learning...

Through the efforts of the Lehigh Valley Summer Learning Coalition (LVSLC), over 1,700 parents and caregivers of elementary aged children in Bethlehem, Allentown and Easton School Districts were surveyed to better understand their knowledge of the “summer slide” – where students can lose up to 3 months of learning – and their interest in and access to summer learning programs.

Despite only 1 in 3 families reporting that their child is engaged in summer programs - either through their school (12.8%) or a community based program (24.7%) - 8 in 10 parents want their children engaged in high quality summer learning opportunities. Significant challenges exist in being able to connect their children with summer programs. Over 6 in 10 (61.8%) say that the cost of summer programming is a big barrier and they would need scholarships to participate; almost 4 in 10 (37.2%) report needing help with transportation to get their child to where the available summer programs are located. Over 4 in 10 report needing assistance to provide their children with lunch (41.2%) and information on available resources (43.9%) for their children to engage in summer programs. Nationally, of the students who receive free or reduced school breakfast and lunch during the academic year, only 15% of these same students are being fed over the long summer months.

Parents are looking for extra academic help for their children, particularly math (71.2%) and reading (76%), but also want the program to be fun for the kids and offer sports (45%), arts (44.4%) or science (41.8%) experiences. This models the national research on most effective ways to turn the academic summer slide into a summer jump – it actually takes 120 hours of both academic and fun enrichment programs (arts, sports, STEM) to see positive growth in summer learning.

Many low income families work and need their children to be in programs full day (8:30am-3:30pm) or half day hours creates another barrier to engagement. Families also prefer programs that run for multiple weeks instead of a one week only camp opportunity. Over a third (35%) would prefer 2-3 week programs, another third would prefer 3-6 week programs (37.5%), 1 in 5 (21.7%) would prefer 7-8 week programs. Only 6% preferred a one week only summer program option.

Only half of the families were aware of the summer slide. Roughly the same percentage (52.5%) also make sure their child reads at home at least 20 minutes per day. Over two-thirds of families report that their child reads 3-7 days per week at home. Families are trying to make sure their children continue to read over the long summer months, but many low income families lack children’s reading materials at home or transportation to the local library.

Survey results show that classroom teachers play a critical role in spreading the summer learning message. Parents who reported that their child’s school teacher recommended summer learning programs during the school year were twice as likely to register their child for summer programming. With this data, LVSLC will develop Summer Learning Teacher Toolkits, with key talking points on summer learning and local information on summer learning programs and available scholarships, and share with partnering school districts.

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