

# Slowing the Academic “Summer Slide”

**T**he average student loses one to three months of learning (depending upon their academic calendar) over the summer break. Corroborating the “use it or lose it” adage, children from every grade level basically stop actively learning and can lose a percentage of what they’ve absorbed during the school year. This phenomenon is often called the “summer slide” or “summer learning loss,” and research indicates that two months of reading skills and two and a half months of math skills can be lost over a single summer stretch. And the slide is cumulative, so those lost months add up over time. Teachers often spend four to six weeks re-teaching material when students return to school in the fall in order to get them caught up.

But there are ways to combat this issue. Learning doesn’t have to come to a halt just because school is not in session—and it may not be as hard as parents think. Students who read or are engaged in another form of learning for just two to three hours per week fare better than those who do not. Finding fun activities to keep your child’s mind engaged is key; this will encourage them to return to the activity and repeat it. Read on for more ideas from local school experts in both the public and private sectors.



gives students the chance to try something new, take a deeper dive into subjects they already love, or simply have fun making new friends as they exercise mind, body and spirit.

Engaging students in these kinds of activities helps them retain knowledge already learned as connections are made between past learning and its application in new contexts. That means less “summer slide” in advance of a new school year, and more excitement about learning in general.

Summer programs are not the only option for keeping students thinking over the summer break. Saint Mary’s director of learning support services, Katherine Reedy, Ed.D., offers several suggestions:

- Have your child set aside 20-30 minutes, three or four times a week for pleasure reading, or have him or her set a goal of reading a certain number of books by the end of the summer.
- Keep math skills sharp by challenging your child to solve practical math problems. Depending on grade level she could calculate how much a full tank of gas will cost when you stop to fill the tank, or figure out how much interest she will pay on a credit card purchase over a period of months.
- Visit Triangle area arts, history, and science museums for special exhibits, films, and interactive activities for all ages. Many offer opportunities for student volunteers, too.
- Check out a local cultural festival and have your child do some pre-festival

## Insight From Private Schools

Summer is here and that means sweet tea, beach breezes, sensational sunsets, and fun with family and friends. It is also a time for school-age children to get some much-needed rest, to relax, and to enjoy new adventures. The laid-back summer season is the perfect time for children to delve into personal pursuits, discover new interests, and apply what they have learned during the school year to different experiences.

Programs designed to engage children over the summer months abound in Wake County. The Summer @ Saint Mary’s program alone has more than 30 offerings, both all-girl and co-educational, for students in grades K-12. Whether it is the Kids with Wings reading and writing camp, the overnight Innovators Hub, an SAT Prep class, the Building a Dream House Architecture Challenge, Candy Chemistry & Creation, or a sports or arts camp experience, Summer @ Saint Mary’s

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- research to share with the rest of the family.
- Have your child read a current event story daily and set aside time to analyze it with her.
  - Get your child going with a new hobby or let her come up with an entrepreneurial project like planting a garden or organizing a community service activity.
  - Ask your child to plan a family meal, including preparing the budget and shopping list, purchasing the groceries, and cooking the meal.
  - Enroll your child in an online class of particular interest to her.

Whatever the activity or program, giving students the opportunity to explore their world in ways that are interesting and relevant to them engages their curiosity, deepens their understanding and encourages a lifelong love of learning. What could be better preparation for a new school year?

### Insight from Public Schools

The summer months can be very exciting for students. The freedom from school commitments and routine is liberating. What adult wouldn't want an entire summer to relax, shop, play golf, or catch up on the latest episodes of their favorite television show? Now imagine you must

go back to work after a two-and-a-half-month break. Will you remember every task or even your own passwords?

For WCPSS students returning to the academic environment, they not only must remember the routines, but likely are relearning the new curriculum they just grasped before the break. Research shows that this temporary halt in learning can generate a disparity, especially with economically disadvantaged youth. Over time, this gap can get more extensive and leave students lagging behind their peers in academic achievement.

Here are some helpful tips to help your child combat the summer slide:

- Start a family book club. This is an excellent opportunity to encourage wholesome family time and model good reading habits with your children. You're developing critical thinking skills through discussions about the story and the characters. You're guiding your children's responses to challenge their opinions and force them to dig deeper. To entice your children to be engaged, have them choose the first couple of books that interest them. Then you can hand select a book based on their reading level and gradually increase the difficulty.
- Let them help with the grocery shopping. This is a lifelong skill necessary for independence and financial stability. Teach your children early by giving

them a calculator, budget, grocery list and collection of coupons, and ask them to put together the grocery shopping plan. The task may seem daunting at first, but you're there to guide them. Not only are they learning how to shop mindfully, but your children learn to work with a budget using math and critical thinking skills.

- Conduct a scavenger hunt at your local museum. This requires a little research on your part, but visit your local museums online to find out what exhibits and displays are currently being shown. Put a list together of eight to ten objects, artwork, and artifacts for your children to find in their very own scavenger hunt. Visit the museum, give kids the list with a time limit in each section to find the listed item. As you know your children best, choose items that will spark discussion. When you get home, ask your children to write down three questions about



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the trip. Then go through the questions while modeling how to use the internet

to find the answers. Another variation of this task would be letterboxing, an outdoor form of treasure hunting that uses clues rather than coordinates. These types of geocaches will contain a stamp that is meant to remain in the box and is used by letterboxers to record their visit. To learn more about location-based searches in your community, check out [www.atlasquest.com](http://www.atlasquest.com).

- Find an enrichment activity that works for your child. Wake County Public School System's Lifelong Learning with Community Schools publishes a directory of enrichment activities in the spring and fall called Summer-shine. Generated by parent request, the directory includes enrichment activities for mastering chess, experiencing the outdoors, performing and creating the arts, computer coding, and much more. Visit [www.wcpss.net/camps](http://www.wcpss.net/camps) to learn more. 🌟

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