

## Worried your child might lose reading and math skills? Here are tips for combating the ‘summer slide’

**JULIE WOOTTON-GREENER** [jwootton@magicvalley.com](mailto:jwootton@magicvalley.com) - Jun 2, 2018

TWIN FALLS — It’s a balancing act: You want your children to have fun during summer break, but you don’t want them to forget what they learned in school all year.

Misty Lynn Peterson has experience with this both as an educator and a parent. She’s a special education teacher at Dworshak Elementary School in Burley and has a 7-year-old son who’s going into second grade next school year.

Her son loves Star Wars, so she got him a Star Wars-themed math workbook for this summer. And he’ll read a collection of Minecraft books, too. Peterson recommends finding something that interests your child, “something that keeps their attention,” she said.

If children aren’t mentally active during the summer, they’ll often lose some of their academic skills and knowledge. It’s a phenomenon known as the “summer slide.”

Studies often show students’ test scores drop by the equivalent of one month’s worth of learning, they lose more skills in math than reading, and older students tend to see larger academic declines, according to the nonprofit Brookings Institution. There’s also a gap based on



Tessa Kolva and her 18-month-old cousin, Robert Allred, play with straws and connectors Wednesday during the 'All Day Build Day' at the Twin Falls Public Library in Twin Falls.

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socioeconomics: Middle-class students tend to make gains in reading over the summer, while low-income students' skills are more likely to decline.

The good news: As little as 15 to 20 minutes each day of reading or other mental stimulation is enough to prevent or combat the summer slide, said Erica Littlefield, youth services department head at the Twin Falls Public Library.

Schools see evidence of summer learning loss on standardized tests, said Eva Craner, spokeswoman for the Twin Falls School District. But parents are becoming more aware of the issue.

Teenagers have a bingo board to complete, with challenges such as reading a book, writing a book review and talking with a librarian about their favorite band or singer.

The first 500 participants who turn in a complete reading log this summer will receive a book bag stuffed with goodies and a free book. Plus, there will be grand prize drawings later this summer.

The library will also host once-a-week free events for three different age levels — preschoolers, elementary schoolers and teens — this summer.

A goal of preschool events is to help install a love of the library in children in a fun way, Allen said. For elementary schoolers, it's: "Look at how fun the library can be. Don't you want to be here all the time?"

### **Tips for parents**

Here are a few tips from Twin Falls and Jerome educators and librarians about how to combat the summer slide:

#### **Read and make it fun**

School principals often recommend children read 20 minutes each day. "If they don't like to read, read with them," Craner said.

It doesn't matter as much what children are reading. "Just encourage them to read whatever interests them," Craner said.

Librarians can help children find a book or series they're interested in, Littlefield said. "Obviously, they're going to be more inclined to read and enjoy that."

"There are a lot of opportunities out there to help with that so we're not re-teaching in the fall," she said.

But generally, the first six weeks of a new school year are spent reviewing what students learned the previous year, revisiting topics they don't remember and building upon them, said Diana Wright, an English language learner interventionist at Summit Elementary School in Jerome.

Some children are excited to be back in school in the fall, while some are in a summer fun-induced coma and “it just takes a little while to wake them back up,” said Scott Grisso, a reading and math intervention teacher at Summit Elementary.

The summer slide affects children from elementary through high school. If students get out of the habit of reading and exercising their brain, Craner said, they can lose agility.

Educators often recommend families visit a public library to get books and participate in a summer reading program.

### **What libraries offer**

The Twin Falls Public Library — and many others across south-central Idaho — offer a summer reading program for children. In Twin Falls, the program — which is free to the community — has been running since at least the 1980s and has grown steadily, especially over the last three years.

“This is definitely the biggest thing we do every year,” Littlefield said, adding the library loves the program and wants to make summer reading fun for children.

The Twin Falls library gets much busier during the summertime, youth services librarian Kasi Allen said, but that’s not the case in all communities. Factors here in Twin Falls could be an interest in the summer reading program, she said, or because school libraries are closed during the summer.

The theme of this year’s summer reading program — which kicks off June 1 for children and June 4 for adults — is “Libraries Rock!” with options for preschoolers, elementary schools, teenagers and adults.

Last year, about 1,000 children participated and nearly 500 completed the program. There’s no required reading list, so participants choose their own books. Children can even read graphic novels and magazines, or listen to audiobooks.

As children complete different steps in a reading log — based on how many books or minutes they read — they earn prizes such as toys and food coupons from local businesses.

“It can help parents provide incentives for their kids to read,” Littlefield said.

But children are also going to want to play outside and enjoy the summer, educators say. Make educational activities like reading fun and not a chore.

### **Make reading a family activity**

Take time out of your hectic schedule to devote 15 minutes to sitting down and reading, with everyone in the family participating, Littlefield said. “We know when kids see their parents reading, that’s huge for them.”

### **Find online resources and ask your school for ideas**

Many schools send home ideas with report cards about ways students can work on skills they're struggling with, Craner said. Many also allow students to access online Istation resources during the summer.

**Istation — a Dallas-based educational technology company selected in April to provide a reading assessment for all of Idaho's public schools — also has a free e-book for parents about how to prevent the summer slide. "Stopping the Summer Slide" is available in English and Spanish.**

There are also many game-like educational programs children can use, include Prodigy Math Game.

"If (parents are) going to allow screen time during summer, pick a program that has a learning and educational element behind it," Craner said.

If you have questions about online resources, Craner suggests calling Morningside Elementary School, where the Twin Falls School District's elementary summer school is based.

Summit Elementary in Jerome plans to post tips soon on its Facebook page on how to combat the summer slide.

### **Make everyday activities more engaging**

Wright recommends turning on subtitles while children are watching television shows or movies. It allows them to read along.

Other tips from Summit Elementary educators: Have your child use simple math while buying ice cream. Have them read the menu at a restaurant. If you're visiting a national park, get them involved in a junior ranger program.

While at the grocery store, have your children do a budgeting activity, Craner said, such as estimating what you're spending while picking food off the shelves.

If there's a food your child asks about, learn more about it together, she said. "You kind of have to turn your teacher brain on."