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School's Out, but Learning is "In" for Summer

Published on Tue, Jun 21, 2011 by **Soundbite Services**

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BALTIMORE - Summer is as eagerly anticipated as Santa for many children, but education experts emphasize that summer break should not be a break from learning. Today is National Summer Learning Day, with events nationwide to educate parents, children and communities about the importance of summer learning programs.

Research shows that during summer vacations, most pupils fall two months behind in math, and lower-income children fall between two and three months behind in reading. Summer learning programs can change that, says Matthew Boulay, interim CEO of the *National Summer Learning Association*.

"Children don't need a break from learning. Kids are naturally curious; they crave the attention of an adult who's engaged in learning with them. While we don't have to have kids in school all summer, there are lots of opportunities for informal learning."

For Summer Learning Day, which coincides with the first day of summer, there are all sorts of "learning opportunities" planned across the country, including summer learning fairs, volunteer events, museum visits and nature walks.

In Sacramento, 200 middle-school students will visit the California State Capitol to interview officials and community leaders about their favorite summer learning experiences. The event is being coordinated by the *Partnership for Children and Youth* in Oakland, whose executive director, Jennifer Peck, explains why funding summer learning programs is key to education.

"Summer learning is an incredibly essential part of the overall educational experience for kids. It's been a big missing piece in the policy and funding conversation about public education."

New research from the Rand Corporation has found that summer learning programs help prevent the learning loss seen in children who otherwise go without educational support during these months.

Matthew Boulay explains that, without that support, it's two steps forward, one step back for many pupils.

"What we know from the research, that virtually every kid in this country experiences summer slowdown, or summer learning loss, which means that many students know less in September than they knew in the previous June."

The Rand study also found that low-income pupils are most affected by a lack of summer learning, compared to those whose families can afford to send them to private camps or plan educational vacations.

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