

Family Scene: Keeping kids off the 'Summer Slide'

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Gini McFarland (top) and her children Parker McFarland (left), 6, and Presley McFarland, 7, check in with Peres Kereotubo (right), a summer reading program volunteer, at the Peggy Helmerich Library in Tulsa. The youngsters are taking part in the library's summer programs during their school vacation.
MATT BARNARD/Tulsa World

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10 Tips to avoid the 'Summer Slide'

- Read every day. Read non-fiction, fiction, eBooks, poetry, newspapers and read out loud. For an independent reader, 20 minutes is usually a good amount of time to

By RITA SHERROW | World Scene Writer |
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Summer is no time for kids to put their brains on pause.

The summer slide, aka what happens when kids stop reading and learning during vacation, is a real issue, and parents need to be concerned, according to teachers like Jenks East Elementary's Melissa Morrow.

Like most teachers, Morrow sends home educational materials that can be used during the summer to make sure kids don't fall behind. But it's up to parents to work with their children to stop them from losing valuable skills they learned during the school year.

"It's a real issue," said Morrow, a Nebraska native who has taught second grade in Jenks for the last two years and will be teaching special education classes in the fall.

"They come from a structured environment where they know that at school they have reading at 8 a.m. and then math at 9. A lot of what they have learned during the year is lost in the summertime because everyone is on vacation. A lot of times parents don't realize this is an issue or that learning can be an enjoyable time with their kids and not so much of a task."

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- Cook with your kids. It's one of the best ways to integrate math, reading and following directions. Let your child design the menu, too. Help your child put together their favorite recipes in a cookbook.
 - Plant a garden. Let them read the labels of plants or seeds before planting and then they can watch their plants grow and thrive.
 - Take a field trip. Go to a museum, zoo or local park with walking trails. Keep a journal about your travels.
 - Learn a new word each week. Hang it on the fridge and see who can use it the most times throughout the week.
 - Enroll in a quality summer program that will provide your child with opportunities to build their critical thinking skills like asking why and how.
 - Play quick games with flashcards like Math War or Concentration to keep math skills sharp.
 - Listen to audio books during a summer road trip.
 - Take pictures and make a summer scrapbook. Encourage kids to write little stories to accompany the pictures.
 - Make time to read. It can't be said enough; if your child does nothing else this summer make sure he or she is reading!
- Source: Stephanie Jefferson, founder of Little Scholars (www.littlescholars.com).

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Practice math and reading skills for

Reading is the building block that everything falls into, including math, science, social studies, etc., she said.

And doing it with your kids every day can be fun.

“Read to your kids, read a chapter nightly, let them read to you, look at picture books together or read a story like a play with both of you reading different parts,” she suggested.

“Parents being the role model for reading is really key. Take 30 minutes to sit down and read a book with or at the same time as your kids. Kids need to see that you enjoy it and they will to.”

For Gini McFarland, the mother of 7-year-old Presley and 6-year-old Parker, the summer reading program at the Peggy Helmerich library is a huge help.

“I grew up going to the library,” said McFarland, whose children will both be students at Jenks East this fall. “My mom would take us when we were little to the library, and it was something fun to do. It wasn't super expensive, you could go with your siblings and everyone got to pick out a book.”

She said her children like to “get” something, read it and then return it. It also teaches them responsibility because they “have to keep up with their books,” she said.

She considers reading really important because, in addition to being fun, it improves their comprehension.

“Comprehension is super important when you get to the big subjects in school,” said McFarland, who is a book club member and who grew up with parents who were readers.

“They need to be able to comprehend math, science, history and all that stuff.”

Besides having a 20-minute reading time right before bed, she said her kids like to read recipes and cook and read labels in the grocery store, and her youngest likes to read to her out loud.

Her kids also keep learning in the summer by doing chores and earning money.

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"They have learned to count money and learned the value of a dollar," McFarland said. "They will say "oh I only have \$5, and I need \$7 to buy something I want so I guess I will have to save up my money.' They have literally put it together."

There are a multitude of ways to keep your kids learning in the summer, said Morrow, who is expecting her first child in December.

Play hopscotch or tick tac toe by using new words in the squares. Or play "I Spy" using letters of the alphabet and putting those letters together to make words. On a road trip, use window markers so kids can write on glass as they "spy" a letter or write out a word. It wipes off with a sponge and water.

Families can also play car bingo and search for colors, types of vehicles, windmills, birds on a wire, road signs, etc. Go online and print out the cards and see who gets five across or down the fastest.

Or, play a board game and ask questions about the characters. If you're reading the "Magic Treehouse" series, ask children to tell you what they would do if they were stuck in a magic treehouse.

"Make it like a conversation, not like you are quizzing them," Morrow said.

If your kids are phone-oriented, have them research some of their favorite things and then call another relative like their grandmother to tell them what they learned.

Whatever you do, keep it fun, and keep them learning, she said.

"Life gets so busy, and it's important to have that block of time where you sit down with your kids and enjoy being with them while they are learning something."

Rita Sherrow 918-581-8360

rita.sherrow@tulsaworld.com

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