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Each and Every Child

Quick news for Parents, Teachers and Students

An e-newsletter by the Iowa Department of Education's Bureau of Student and Family Support Services

Keep the slide on the playground

With the end-of-school countdown solidly ticking away, students (and dare we suggest teachers?) eagerly await their summer vacations. And while summer breaks conjure up all sorts of wondrous possibilities, they also steal away a student's education.

Called the "summer slide," a student on average loses one full month of education during the break. That can total a full year over a student's school career! Teachers know this well, because they spend about a month each fall getting their charges back to where they were at the end of the previous school year.

There are proven ways to prevent this. Studies show that simply reading as few as six books during the summer will maintain a child's reading. If they read more, they actually will improve their skills.

Reading is especially important as children around third grade make the transition from learning-to-read to reading-to-learn. Reading crosses all subject matter, from math to science to music. Without strong reading skills, it's easy to understand why a student could face mounting challenges as he or she continues through school.

To encourage reading, it is important to know your child's reading level. For summer reading, you want to choose books that are at their independent level. If you open the book to any page and the child misses three to five words on the page, it is not an independent reading level. It is also important to match books to the child's interests. Set a specific time every day to read, make the area quiet and comfortable. Make this routine.

It is important for parents to encourage reading, listen to their child read, read with their child, and make it an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

Enjoy the summer, and let the slide in your child's break only be on the playground.

Websites with age-appropriate books

Online books for children grades 3 to 5: http://textproject.org/products/summerreads/

A website for reading lists for all ages and book suggestions for parents:
http://www.readingrockets.org/books/

Making summer fun and educational

Learning opportunities abound with virtually anything you do over the summer. In addition to reading, try these suggestions:

- Math should be fun. Measure things in the yard. Add and subtract while shopping or driving. Do fractions while cooking.
- Learning is an adventure. Every outing, from parks to museums, can be places that stimulate critical thinking.
- On a family trip? You can teach math with menus, geography with the route and spelling with names of places along the way.
- Write is right. Writing will help keep their language skills sharp. Have them keep a summer journal.
- Review the previous year. Talk about what he or she learned during school. Why did they like? What caused them to struggle?

A parent's thoughts

By Paul Greene*

Overall, Tyler had a great PreK-12 educational experience, but at each stage of our education there has been someone (a teacher or administrator) that made a premature decision that Tyler did not belong in the setting he was in. These statements were all made based on "paper" and preconceived ideas.

You have to believe in the fact that you can teach *all* children. That is why you became a teacher.

As we prepared for preschool, prior to even meeting Tyler, an administrator said that "kids that look like Tyler on paper, go to special schools."

In middle school, a teacher suggested that Tyler be pulled from class for a resource room before even having him in her class.

In high school, during an IEP meeting, a teacher walked out of the IEP meeting and returned to say “I can *not* do this.”

In all three instances, preconceived ideas and perhaps fear led teachers to make decisions prior to even sharing their concerns. At each level, our request was to try. How would we know what would or would not work until we tried? Communication is the key to success. As our elementary principal always said, "It is not a question of 'if' Tyler will be included, but 'how' Tyler will be included."

Many times decisions are made before anyone has even gotten all the information or met a child. If there is a challenge in front of us, we need to re-look at the supports that are in place and see if we can determine what is missing and what is not working. We may need to change the way we do things.

Many times when a "problem" is identified, teachers move to immediately decide it is not going to work instead of brainstorming ideas to determine what the issues are, making a change and trying something else.

If you think it won't work, you are right, it won't. And vice versa.

One of our favorite quotes:
"I've come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or de-humanized." Dr. Haim Ginott

* Paul Greene’s wife, Gina, and son, Tyler, contributed to this article. Paul is the chairman of Iowa’s Special Education Advisory Panel.

For those coming to the summer conference...

For those attending the June 11-13 special education conference *Pursuing the Promise*, mix some fun with your work. Here are some things you can do with your evenings:

Take in a baseball game. The Triple A Iowa Cubs are playing the Omaha Storm Chasers Monday, June 11, at Principal Park, located just south of downtown's Court Avenue entertainment district. The game starts at 7:05 p.m. with tickets ranging from $7 to $25.

How about some live music along the river? Nitefall on the River is featuring Jimmy Cliff on Tuesday, June 12, at the Simon Estes Riverfront Amphitheater on the east side of the Des Moines River downtown. Admission is $30 to $35; doors open at 6 p.m. and the show starts at 7 p.m.

Live theater, anyone? Billy Elliot: The Musical debuts on Tuesday, June 12, at downtown's Civic Center. Evening shows Tuesday through Thursday begin at 7:30. To order tickets to this award-winning national touring company's show, go to http://www.civiccenter.org.

Dine and drink. Every night is a good night to head down to Court Avenue entertainment district, on the south side of downtown.

Specialty drinks and food of all fares makes this area a must on your trip to Des Moines.