



TODAY'S TOPIC

Here Comes Summer

A Teacher's View

- When the school year comes to an end, I often take a second to look at the empty seats in the classroom. While it has been a rewarding year, full of questions and outstanding student work, I am troubled by the fact that many students returning from the break will require extensive review of material and skills training that I just spent the year teaching. Even though learning is often put on the back burner during the summer months, there must be a way to incorporate learning into these activities. How can I instruct my students to use the time away as an opportunity to increase their knowledge and understanding, which will prepare them for next year?
- So many of my students will be travelling during the summer, either to distant lands or to a camp in town. Many have told me about possible museum visits, concerts, and special classes offered at local colleges and universities. How can they incorporate these activities into a summer project?

A Parent's View

- Entering the last couple weeks of school, I feel like I'm nearing the finish line in a marathon race. All the homework and extracurricular commitments are exhausting for our family. I'm looking forward to enjoying a lazy couple of months, without having to plan activities or race around driving here and there.
- My kids are tired! I feel summer break should be just that—a break. Don't gifted kids deserve some time off to rest, too?
- I'm worried that my child will fall behind her peers, so I've enrolled her in an accelerated, compacted Math course this summer so she will be well-prepared and ahead of the game in the fall. Is this the right thing to do?

Summer vacation is right around the corner! However, just as quickly as summer approaches, it also passes in the blink of an eye. This time of year, both parents and teachers face the same dilemma: Should high-ability kids stay busy with summer projects, courses, sports, camps, and travel...or should they be allowed to completely unplug with no schedule, commitments, or plans?

While there's no magic combination, the answer is a bit of both. While rest and relaxation are certainly important, research suggests that students who participate in summer learning activities score higher on their fall achievement tests versus those left to their own devices: http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Parent%20CK/Summer_Enrichment_or_Just_Hanging_Out_2014.pdf However, this doesn't mean that gifted kids must enroll in pressure cooker courses or hire tutors to prevent slips and dips. Effective summer programs for gifted students combine content with creativity, critical thinking, real-world experiences, and the ability to connect with like-minded peers. They can include games, self-expression, field trips, travel, exploration, and fun.



When planning summer pastimes, it's important for parents and teachers to consider a child's intellectual, social, and emotional needs, along with their interests and passions. If possible, before the final school bell rings, teachers and parents should connect to share ideas on summer strategies for their high-ability students. Teachers can suggest projects or assignments that focus on one particular area of growth to prepare for the coming year; parents can plan activities and adventures that will support their child at school and home. This type of end-of-year collaboration helps ensure the right blend of summer activities will meet the child's needs, support the retention of skills and knowledge, and increase overall enjoyment.

SUMMER VACATION OFFERS THE EXCITING PROSPECT OF ENGAGING CHILDREN, AT A MORE RELAXED PACE, WITH A GREATER DIVERSITY OF OFFERINGS OR DEPTH THAN THE SCHOOL YEAR USUALLY ALLOWS. What's the right mix of rest and activity for the high-ability children in your life?

1. MAKING THE MOST OF SUMMER

AT SCHOOL

Teachers can work with students to create summer assignments or projects that will prepare children for the curriculum of the new grade, not just to "keep them busy." Planning a summer assignment should include specific directions that will be understood by the student and parent. Ideally, teachers will meet with students and parents before the end of the school year to review expectations. If a meeting is not an option, setting up a "class" website with FAQs and supportive links provides a great alternative. The Teacher's Corner in May's **Teaching for High Potential** (http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Publication%20THP/Misc_PDFs/May%202015%20TC%20Summer%20Work.pdf) highlights some great summer assignments to consider.

Offering print and web resources to parents provides another way of maintaining a presence during the time away. A simple handout given at the end of the school year may be all that a parent needs to get them started in suggesting ideas to their children. *The Best Summer Programs for Teens 2014-2015: America's Top Classes, Camps, and Courses for College-Bound Students* (<http://www.prufrock.com/The-Best-Summer-Programs-for-Teens-2014-2015-Americas-Top-Classes-Camps-and-Courses-for-College-Bound-Students-P1890.aspx>) is highly recommended.

Preparing students for the vacation should also include a review of what is to come. During faculty meetings, try to open up a dialogue about how to connect curriculum from year to year by introducing some future material through summer assignments.

AT HOME

More than ever, there are a multitude of ways parents can help their gifted children plan their time away from school in every shape, size, and special interest.

NAGC has compiled a one-stop summer shop for parents to help navigate finding, evaluating, and selecting options: <http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources-parents/planning-summer>.

If a summer assignment comes home, review it together. Create a plan with your child for gathering the necessary resources and completing the assignment in a timely manner. Parents can work with their child to plan out a reasonable schedule, reducing the stress of the workload as much as possible.

Summer reading for skill retention and growth should be a part of everyone's summer plans. Look for a mix of fiction and non-fiction that encompasses both classic and contemporary works. Parents can support the selection of readings that are at a just-right level and provide appropriate opportunity for growth by visiting Scholastic's website for parents: <http://www.scholastic.com/parents>.

Make a list of things to do. Visiting libraries and museums, accessing websites, joining clubs, and attending demonstrations are all ways to allow your child to explore. For older students, summer can afford a time for mentorships and volunteer work.

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2. REFLECTIONS AND GOALS

AT SCHOOL

Practicing goal-setting as a part of a summer assignment—whether academic, social, or organizational—provides a great opportunity for students, parents, and teachers to further involve themselves in the learning process with increased self-reflection and self-regulation. Reflecting on the year, the good and the bad, can provide a strong foundation for goal-setting, and in turn, help develop a student's self-efficacy. The National Research Center on The Gifted and Talented has an outstanding webpage related to setting goals: <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/Siegle/SelfEfficacy/section8.html>

In just one class period, educators can help their students understand the importance of this crucial skill. Journaling is also a great activity for students to participate in during the summer months, not only as documentation of their experience, but for use as a reflection for goal setting during the upcoming year. Journal Buddies has some great suggestions for writing prompts for any age: <http://journalbuddies.com/pre-teen/journal-writing-can-increase-a-pre-teen%E2%80%99s-self-confidence>.

AT HOME

At the start of summer, it's important for parents to sit down with their child and have a conversation about how both parents and child envision the summer break. This provides an opportunity for the child to have a voice in his schedule, feel included in the planning process, and create a positive vehicle for incorporating teacher and parent preferences.

If your child is the type who wants to be busy 24/7, it's important to help her understand the benefits of downtime, self-reflection, and relaxation. Or, if the child prefers summer as a time to unplug and sleep in every day, perhaps you can encourage him or her to find one activity related to their passions or interests. KidsGoals has some great suggestions for goal setting: <http://kidsgoals.com/goal-settings-for-children/summer-goal-setting>

In addition to summer planning, this respite from the daily grind offers an opportunity to talk about longer-term goals during a time when your child is more relaxed. The Googol learning website is a great place to start: <http://www.googolpower.com/content/guides/goal-setting-for-kids>

3. LOOKING AHEAD TO THE COMING SCHOOL YEAR

The downtime of summer also provides a useful opportunity to look ahead to the coming school year, while setting the stage for a successful back-to-school transition:

SCHOOL CALENDAR. In order to maximize learning time, take note of specific programs, days off, vacations, and testing to use as a blueprint for setting your class or family schedule for the fall.

EXTRACURRICULARS. Discuss areas of interest and talk about extracurricular activities and clubs. Parents can see what is offered and will fit the family's schedule. Educators may want to suggest a before or after school club based upon student interest.

STANDARDS. Educational standards define the content and skills students should acquire in a given school year. NAGC provides national standards for what constitutes an exemplary gifted program in grades PK-12: <http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/national-standards-gifted-and-talented-education/pre-k-grade-12>. Parents can also preview the curriculum standards for the coming year through their school, district, or state department of education website.

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Whatever the plans, and despite the obvious seasonal temptations, it's important for parents and educators to help children keep an eye on the future, as before they know it, the summer will be over and a new school year will begin. As with any transition, the smoother it can be the better. Make this year's summer vacation one of exploration and excitement, with a bit of education thrown in.

“There is a temperate zone in the mind, between luxurious indolence and exacting work; and it is to this region, just between laziness and labor, that summer reading belongs.”

—Henry Ward Beecher

Read more at
<http://www.quotegarden.com/books.html>

About CHP

NAGC often receives similar questions from teachers and parents, so *Connecting for High Potential* offers an important forum for exploring how “the other side” might be facing the same issue. Both groups can benefit from the same information even if perhaps seen through a slightly different lens. Feel free to email, copy, print, or post to share with a favorite teacher or parent in your community.

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