

## WELCOME

Armed with my roof rake, I set out yesterday to meet the challenge of 44 inches of snow. While the scenery is breathtaking, the task of clearing snow from roofs, paths, and concealed vehicles has been daunting to even the hardest of New Englanders. So I am focusing on summer!

Recent research on the “achievement gap” has shown that, although subsets of students show markedly different achievement outcomes, all students tend to progress at a comparable rate, regardless of factors such as socioeconomic status, race, or gender (McCombs et al., 2011; Miller, 2007). However, three months of unstructured summer vacation corresponds to one month’s loss of math skills, as well as a slight drop in reading. By the time students reach ninth grade, two-thirds of the achievement gap can be explained by summer learning loss (Terzian, Anderson Moore, & Hamilton, 2009).

This research suggests that summertime presents a particularly potent opportunity to help youth learn and develop (McCombs et al., 2011; Miller, 2007). Summer programs—even if they simply stimulate and maintain activity rather than educate—tend to slow or halt summer learning loss.

Researchers agree on the core structural components of an effective summer learning experience (McCombs et al., 2011; McLaughlin & Pitcock, 2009; Terzian et al., 2009). The first is time: five or six weeks of full-day programming with three or four hours of academics each day, structured to ensure maximum time on task. Low student-to-adult ratios and consistent youth attendance are also key.

As summer learning programs continue to mature, more rigorous data will help us understand how a blended academic and enrichment summer learning program can contribute to student achievement.

This issue of *Afterschool Matters* points to the diverse population of children and youth served in summer and school year out-of-school programs. It highlights our collective task of creating challenge, upholding equity, remembering culture, and honoring youth voice and choice in everything we do. Happy reading, happy spring.



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