

Opinion: Parents are the best teachers

By Emily Kirkpatrick

Study after study shows that children suffer from the summer slide when school is not in session. But the answer doesn't have to be – and shouldn't be – contained only within the walls of a school. And, given the severe budget cuts that Bay Area schools are facing, it can't be.

The onus is on parents to keep kids' minds actively engaged – and it doesn't just mean another summer reading program. Children spend five times as much time outside school as they do in the classroom, most heavily concentrated in the summer, so parents are the best ones to prevent summer learning loss.

A study just released by the Rand Corp. found that students experience the most benefits when summer programs include individualized instruction, parental involvement and small class sizes. An earlier study by Harris Cooper, a professor of psychological sciences now with Duke University, estimated that summer loss for all students equals about one month of school. Low-income students experience even higher levels of loss.

The common solution in both studies is parents. Cooper suggests parents work with children during the summer months by engaging in small, individualized programs.

Emily Kirkpatrick is vice president of the National Center for Family Literacy.

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