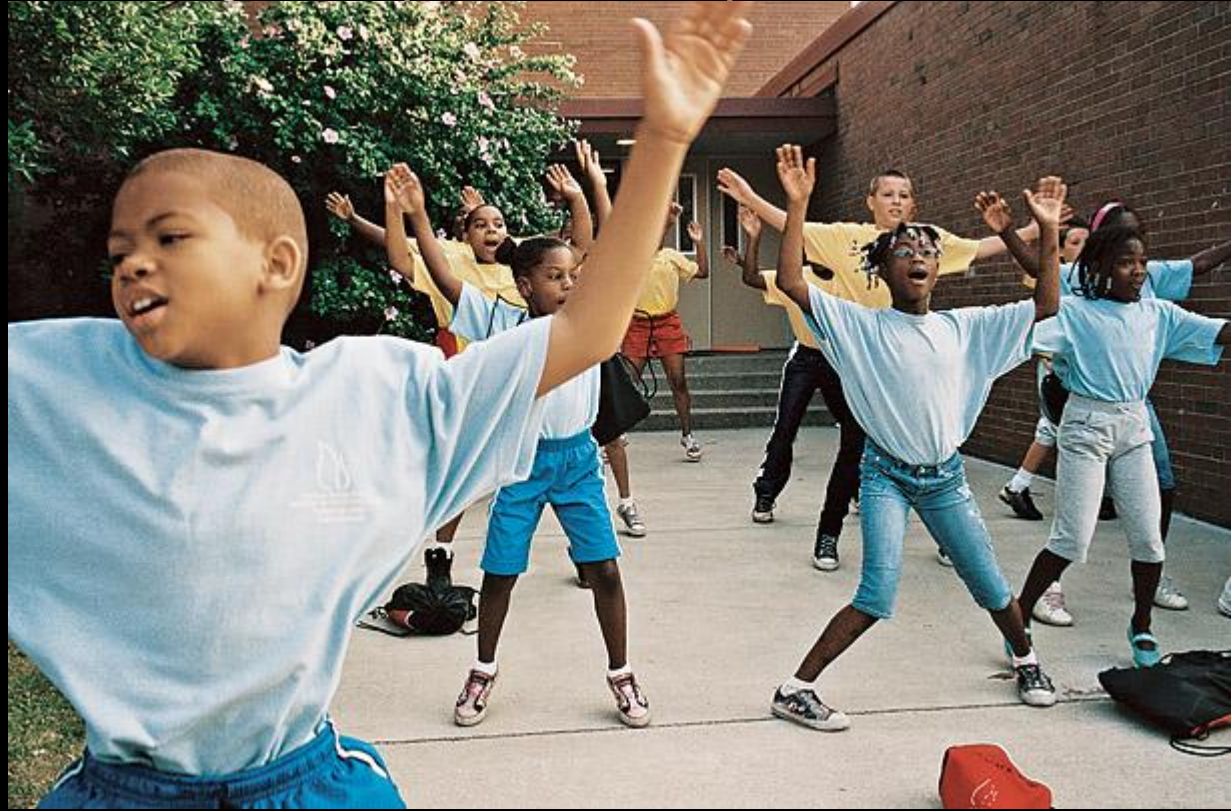


TIME

Summer Programs Keep Kids' Minds Sharp



More than Fun and Games

In the past several years, a number of programs have sprouted to help children enjoy summer without losing the skills they gained during the academic year. At the St. Florian Center, above, a program in Indianapolis, kids begin the day with calisthenics before moving on to pursuits like math, science, sports and field trips.

Read more: http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2005874_2168436,00.html#ixzz0uYGRXyqJ

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Out in Front

The eight-week St. Florian Center program was developed by local firefighters in 1992. The curriculum includes a lesson from the firemen on how to rappel from a building.

Read more: http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2005874_2168442,00.html#ixzz0uYGCnGK0

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Motto

The kids at St. Florian wear shirts that read, "Do Something Positive — Be Someone Positive — Have Something Positive."

Read more: http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2005874_2168471,00.html#ixzz0uYG1Qa9F

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Set for Success

Isaiah Quarles, 12, center, and other students at St. Florian learn about making a television commercial. Senior cadets — high schoolers — also learn about important job-preparation skills like writing résumés, impressing interviewers and dressing for success.

Read more: http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2005874_2168470,00.html#ixzz0uYFpmWSY

The following is an abridged version of an article that appears in the August 2, print and iPad editions of TIME magazine.

Blame Tom Sawyer: Americans have a skewed view of childhood and summertime. We associate the school year with oppression and the summer months with liberty. School is regimen; summer is creativity. School is work and summer is play. But when American students are competing with children around the globe who may be spending four weeks longer in school each year, larking through summer is a luxury we can't afford. What's more, for many children — especially children of low-income families — summer is a season of boredom, inactivity and isolation.

Deprived of healthy stimulation, millions of low-income kids lose a significant amount of what they learn during the school year. Call it "summer learning loss," as the academics do, or "the summer slide," but by any name summer is among the most pernicious — if least acknowledged — causes of achievement gaps in America's schools. Children with access to high-quality experiences can exercise their minds and bodies at sleep-away camp, on family vacations, in museums and libraries and enrichment classes. Meanwhile, children without resources languish on street corners or in front of glowing screens. By the time the bell rings on a new school year, the poorer kids have fallen weeks, if not months, behind. And even well-off American students may be falling behind their peers around the world. **(See pictures of summer programs designed to keep kids' minds sharp.)**

And what starts as a hiccup in a 6-year-old's education can be a crisis by the time that child reaches high school. A major study by researchers at Johns Hopkins University concluded that while students made similar progress during the school year, regardless of economic status, the better-off kids held steady or continued to advance during the summer — while disadvantaged students fell back. By the end of grammar school, low-income students had fallen nearly three grade levels behind. By ninth grade, roughly two-thirds of the learning gap separating income groups could be blamed on summer learning loss. **(See pictures of boys at summer camp.)**

"There is an idyllic view of summer, but we've known for decades that the reality is very different for a lot of underprivileged kids," says Ron Fairchild, CEO of a non-profit organization in Baltimore called the National Summer Learning Association.

Fairchild and his organization are part of a growing movement to stop the summer slide by coordinating, expanding, and improving summer enrichment programs — especially for low-income children. Supporters include some of the nation's largest private foundations. But as reformers strive to redeem summer as an educational resource, the trick is to seize the opportunity without destroying what's best about the season: the possibility of fun and freedom and play. **(Comment on this story.)**

In Indianapolis a group of local philanthropies, led by the Lilly Endowment, decided in the 1990s to coordinate their efforts to provide safe places for children when they weren't in school. In recent years, says Lilly's Willis Bright, the focus has increasingly been on "the learning element" — a critical need, given that the Indianapolis Public Schools graduate fewer than half of their students. "But that doesn't mean you make it just another classroom," Bright adds. "You can teach physics with a basketball."

Grants from the group support everything from field trips to teacher salaries. Third and fourth graders at the Hawthorne Community Center in West Indianapolis learn pre-algebra thanks to the local donors, while other students explore plant science at an urban garden created by retired biochemist Aster Bekele. The strategy is to build on the city's existing patchwork of day camps, community centers, sports camps and summer jobs programs. Improve quality while keeping costs low. **(See pictures of a diverse group of American teens.)**

But demand outstrips supply. Experts believe that a majority of the 30 million American kids poor enough to qualify for free or reduced-price school lunches do not attend any kind of summer enrichment program.

The obvious way to reach a much larger group is through the public schools. And indeed, education reformers have been talking about lengthening the school year to make America's students more competitive for at least a generation. Long summer holidays are the legacy of our vanished agrarian past, when kids were needed in the fields during the growing season.

Cincinnati's public schools are tackling the problem of summer learning loss through a program called "Fifth Quarter," offering an additional month of classes in 16 schools serving low-income students. Houston schools offer four weeks of math and science education for at-risk students. **(See pictures of a summer camp for autistic kids.)**

In the Appalachian town of Corbin, Kentucky, public school administrator Karen West has built a 10-week operation, running 10 hours per day, from the day after school lets out until the day before classes resume.

For Ron Fairchild, successes like these show the possibilities in a new approach to summer school. "That phrase has such a bad ring to it," he notes. "We need to push school districts to frame summer school as a good thing, something extra — not a punishment. There is a cultural barrier that we have to overcome. We're not The Grinch That Stole Summer Vacation."

See pictures of a public boarding school.

See pictures of the college dorm's evolution.

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