



CLOSING THE
ACHIEVEMENT GAP
BY ATTACKING
SUMMER LEARNING
LOSS

Patricia Nicolas-Nader



“The direction in which education starts a man (person), will determine his future life” -Plato

The achievement gap between high- and low-income students is a topic that receives much attention but remains unsolved. After reading Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Outliers: The Story of Success*, I became more interested in this topic. The book recounts the stories of successful individuals to prove that success is not an individual accomplishment, but a result of many factors in one’s environment. Specifically, Gladwell studied how the achievement gap between students of different socio-economic backgrounds can be attributed to difference in their education – but more remarkably to summer vacation. Summer vacation, he asserts, is only hurting students – regardless of their family’s income – but especially those who cannot afford summer enrichment programs. This led me to explore other rather covert factors that are not so often discussed that may also be causing this achievement gap. Summer learning loss is one of the principle elements that are deepening this gap, along with other aspects such as childhood nutrition, parental involvement, and child motivation.

Claims of Fact

I. Summer Learning Loss

“(There) is the pretense that because yesterday’s calendar was good enough for us, it should be good enough for our children – despite major changes in the larger society.”

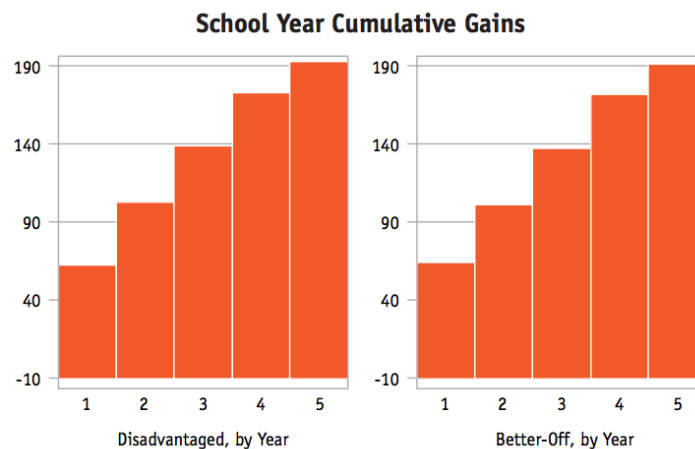
Although summer vacation has become so embedded in the United States’ educational system – so much so that reforming it is nearly taboo – its effects on childhood learning are rather destructive. Historically, summer vacation was incorporated into the school calendar because of the need to standardize the system, the lack of air-conditioning, and the largely agricultural population of the 1900s (Cooper).

The “summer learning loss,” as many educators refer to it, is when students lose or forget learned academic skills over the course of the summer (National Summer Learning Association). This is mainly because long summer vacations “break the rhythm of continuous instruction” and in turn lead to forgetting what was learned in the previous academic school year. As a result, when the new school year commences, teachers cannot start teaching new material, but rather need to review and even re-teach old material.

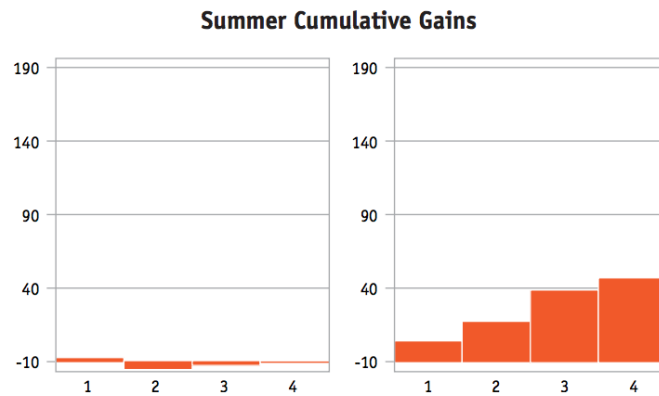
Although the word “vacation” has a connotation of relaxing and enjoying, for many low-income families, it means a struggle to find food to eat and a safe place to be. For many dual-income families in which both parents have to work all-day, they are faced with a challenge of finding a place to leave their kids during the work-day. While high-income families can more easily put their children in a variety of summer programs and activities, low-income children are often physically and mentally unstimulated during this time. Thus, the summer learning loss is one of the most significant causes of the achievement gap between high-income and low-income children in the United States (Strauss). Also known as the “summer opportunity gap,” high-income children can get ahead while those at the bottom fall further behind.

Long summer vacations “break the rhythm of continuous instruction” and in turn lead to forgetting what was learned in the previous academic school year. According to the National Summer Learning Association, “every summer, low-income youth lose two to three months in reading while their higher-income peers make slight gains” (National Summer Learning Association). These losses over the summer add up: by fifth grade, low-income students can be up to three years behind their higher-income peers because of the summer learning loss. And studies show that while gaps between low- and high-income students is constant throughout the year, they largely widen during the summer (National Summer Learning Association).

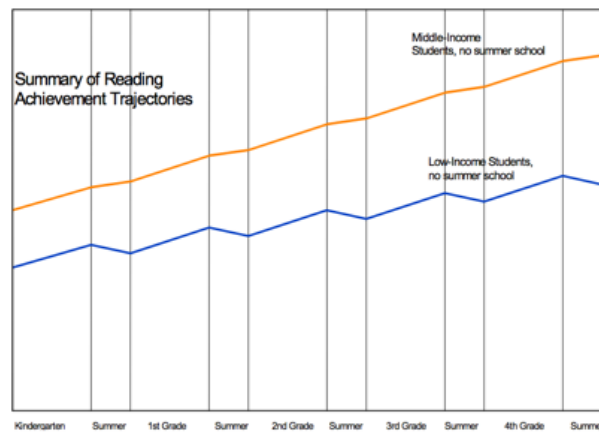
The subject in which low-income children mostly fall behind is in reading. Studies show that regardless of economic status, students lose roughly equal amounts of math skills over summer. Reading skills, however, vastly differ between high- and low-income children after vacation. While some middle-class children even improve their reading skills during the summer, low-income children incur a loss in their reading skills (Cooper). The graph below shows how during the school year, students academically progress at similar rates, regardless of whether they are “disadvantaged” or “better-off”:



In contrast, during the summer months, we can see how disadvantaged students have negative cumulative gains, indicating this “summer learning loss.” High-income children, on the other hand, have small gains that are significantly greater than their low-income peers (The Journal of Politics).



Further research parallels these findings. “Research identifies the cumulative effect of summer learning differences as a primary cause of widening in-school achievement gaps between students by family income” (Fairchild). This is likely because “80 percent of children from low-income backgrounds spend their time at home in the summer, not at a community program” (Quinlan). During this three-month vacation period, high-income children have the opportunity and privilege to attend summer enrichment programs which lower-income children usually cannot afford. The chart below shows the reading achievement trajectory differences between middle- and low-income children, both without summer school.

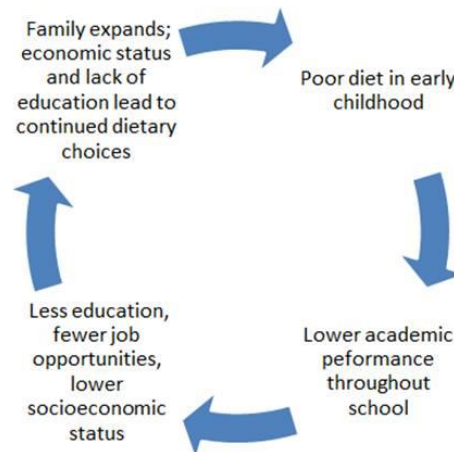


This graph proves that both students are at a loss in terms of their reading skills after summer vacation. However, as seen by the steeper negative slopes with low-income students, this loss is much greater with them.

II. Childhood Access to Nutrition

“Investing in early childhood nutrition is a surefire strategy. The returns are incredibly high.”
-Anne M. Mulcahy

Childhood nutrition is another significant factor that is both affected by socioeconomic status and contributes to child academic success. Nutrition can directly and indirectly affect student performance. Nutritional deficiencies and poor diets have a direct effect on cognitive development, which in turn has an effect on learning, memory, concentration, and energy levels. The indirect consequence of this is that “poor nutrition can leave students susceptible to illness or lead to headaches and stomachaches, resulting in school absences” (Wilder Research).



The chart above shows how nutrition, poverty, and academic performance are cyclical, and each affect one another. According to this chart, a poor diet causes lowered academic success, which lead to a low socioeconomic status, which then causes unhealthy dietary choices from lack of education. Throughout this paper, I intend to figure out where in this cycle we can help bring children out of nutritional poverty – whether it is by better educating them or better feeding them.

Breakfast especially has a significant role in child behavior; “several studies have shown that student attendance improves in schools that implement universal-free school breakfast programs” (Wilder Research). We’ve all heard the saying that “breakfast is the most important meal of the day,” but many of us – including myself – do not eat breakfast and rather dismiss this old saying as a myth. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day “because it influences practically every dimension of our being during the course of the day, including how we perform physically and mentally” (Ivy). Breakfast is especially significant for children undergoing cognitive development as “breakfast consumption has been shown to enhance academic performance by improving cognitive functions such as memory and neural efficiency” (Carroll).

If breakfast is crucial to child cognitive growth, and schools that have implemented breakfast programs have demonstrated an improvement in childhood behavior, why aren't all schools - especially those in low-socioeconomic areas - implementing them? Children participating in such programs have shown to have less absences and tardiness, better disciplinary conduct, and even greater increases in standardized test scores (Carroll). To gain a better understanding of how breakfast programs operate, I researched some existing programs.

The School Breakfast Program is a "federally-funded meal program that provides free and reduced-price meals to low-income students" (Hermes). It is operated at more than 89,000 institutions and subsidized by the United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service. Schools participating in the program offer eligible students free or reduced meals, which comply with federal regulations (United States Department of Agriculture). According to the Economic Research Service of the USDA, the program is utilized mostly by "children from low-income households or with parents leaving for work in the morning" (Hermes). The program feeds almost 13 million children, 10 million of which receive their meals at a reduced price or for free (United States Department of Agriculture).

Although New York City offers free or reduced breakfast to nearly 75% of public school children, the participation rate in the breakfast program is one of the lowest in the nation (CCC New York). New York City public schools participating in the program offer free breakfast to all students, regardless of their income eligibility (CCC New York). In addition, out of over one million public school students, over 700,000 are eligible for free or reduced-priced meals. The participation rate in New York City, however, is lower than 34%. According to the Citizens' Committee for Children, participation rates will increase if the Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) program expands. They claim that "the BIC method of in classroom breakfast distribution is the best strategy to increase children's participation in SBP, because it helps to reduce the barriers that otherwise prevent students from eating breakfast at school" (CCC New York York).

III. Lack of Parental Involvement

“Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them”
-William Shakespeare

The path to success, or “greatness” as Shakespeare refers to it, is affected by so many circumstances that it is difficult to determine what makes people succeed. Most, however, will agree that parenting is a key determinant of child achievement. Regardless of socio-economic status, parental involvement is essential to child development. Specifically, parental involvement in regards to education, that is when “parents participate in the life of the school [and] attend to the learning of their children at home” (Smith) is a crucial element when examining child success.

Another way in which lower-income children are at a disadvantage is with education at home, or the “alterable curriculum of the home” (Redding). Studies show that “the extent of parent involvement is often linked to a family's socio-economic status” (Miedel): middle- and higher-income parents tend to devote more time to their children's upbringing while low-income children do not have the time and flexibility to do so (Drummond). For example, “parents in the low-income community were less familiar with school curriculum, engaged less in teaching at home, and were less likely to attend school events” (Drummond). Thus, “children of higher income families are receiving more of the academic and attitudinal benefits of parental involvement than low-income children” (Smith).

In addition, studies have shown that “low-income parents value education as a route to economic and social mobility, but their actual involvement often falls short of school expectations” (Drummond). Low-income parents not only have less time to contribute to their children's education, but also lack the confidence needed. This is because they may feel that they are not intellectually adequate to participate in their children's schooling. Also, many low-income parents deem that “their role should be differentiated from the role of teachers and they believe that they are most helpful when they urge their children to be autonomous in doing their schoolwork” (Drummond). For this reason, low-income parents often prefer to take a *laissez-faire* approach, being more “hands-off” and letting their children figure it out for themselves.

However, parental involvement in child education is very important and “researchers continue to find evidence that higher levels of involvement by parents are related to academic success for students” (Smith) and that the “meaningful involvement of parents in children's schooling can enhance the educational process” (Comer). In order to better determine ways to increase parental involvement, it is imperative to first define what parental involvement is. According to Joyce Epstein of the Johns Hopkins University, Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships, one of the nation's leading experts on parent involvement, there are six categories of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration.

Through these different methods of parental involvement, an integration between the school and the home is more achievable and can make it easier for a child to experience a more seamless adaptation to the school environment (Smith). In addition, parents who are more

involved are more likely to keep up with their children's attendance, therefore ensuring more learning time than those parents who are not as involved.

As Malcolm Gladwell states in *The Outliers: The Story of Success*, "it is those who are successful who are most likely to be given the kinds of special opportunities that lead to further success." The path to success, or "greatness" as Shakespeare refers to it, is affected by so many circumstances that it is difficult to determine what makes people succeed. Most, however, will agree that parenting is a key determinant of child achievement. Regardless of socio-economic status, parental involvement is essential to child development. Specifically, parental involvement in regards to education, that is when "parents participate in the life of the school [and] attend to the learning of their children at home" (Smith) is a crucial element when examining child success.

Claims of Policy (Existing Solutions)

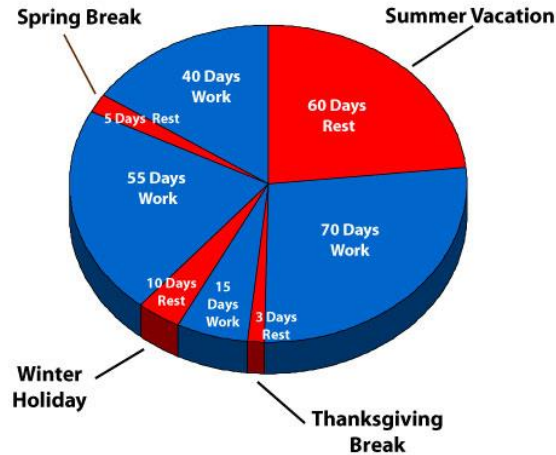
I. The Balanced Calendar

Although summer vacation has become so embedded in the United States' educational system – so much so that reforming it is nearly taboo – its effects on childhood learning are rather destructive. Historically, summer vacation was incorporated into the school calendar because of the need to standardize the system, the lack of air-conditioning, and the largely agricultural population of the 1900s (Cooper).

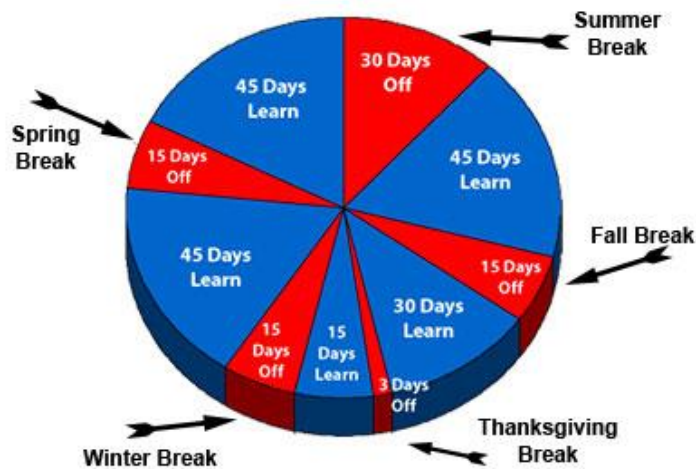
The "summer learning loss," as many educators refer to it, is when students lose or forget learned academic skills over the course of the summer (National Summer Learning Association). This is mainly because long summer vacations "break the rhythm of continuous instruction" and in turn lead to forgetting what was learned in the previous academic school year. As a result, when the new school year commences, teachers cannot start teaching new material, but rather need to review and even re-teach old material.

"Our current school schedule has a negative impact on all kids, but it's most devastating to the economically disadvantaged," said David Hornak, executive director for the National Association for Year-Round Education, an organization advocating for shorter summer breaks (Strauss). This organization wants to combat the summer learning loss through a "balanced calendar," which keeps the school year at 180 days and spreads vacation throughout the year; instead of one big six-week gap, summer would be reduced into two-week breaks in the fall, winter, and spring.

Below is the traditional calendar, which was designed to fit the needs of children and their families in the nineteenth century. In the traditional calendar, summer is 6-weeks long and other breaks range from three to ten days.



The National Association for Year-Round Education suggests that the following “balanced” school calendar would limit the learning loss and allow educators to maximize their teaching time during the academic year.



Specifically, in New York City, schools currently have a 10-week summer vacation. A variety of summer enrichment programs and summer camps keep those who can afford it occupied and stimulated. But what about low-income children whose families cannot afford it? Day camp, on average, costs \$271 a week, and sleep-away camp costs around \$700 a week. Going to camp, for many children, is “just another luxury their parents can’t afford” (Strauss).

New York City supports summer programming for more than 100,000 children between the ages five and thirteen years old. However, according to the American Camp Association, more than seventy percent of their campers come from middle- and upper-income households (Strauss). The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) is a national non-profit attempting to close the achievement gap by targeting low-income children specifically during the summer. The NSLA is using three methods to achieve this goal:

1. *Expanding access*: The NSLA is working with communities and summer enrichment programs to expand their offerings
2. *Building awareness*: The NSLA is building awareness by partnering with organizations and spreading awareness of the need to keep children safe and busy during summer
3. *Strengthening*: The NSLA is working at the local, state, and national level to show how summer learning can narrow the achievement gap

II. Year-Round Education

“Year-round learning is one of the most promising approaches to addressing the full range of youth’s educational needs”

Year-round education is when schools operate on a 180-day system and spread out breaks throughout the year, thus eliminating the long summer break (Kelly). There are different ways to go about this system, the most popular being the 45-15 calendar – that is 45 days of school followed by 15 days of break or the 60-20 calendar – 60 days of classes followed by 20 days of vacation (Kelly). In addition, schools can implement this either through single-tracking or multi-tracking. Single-tracking is when the whole school follows the same calendar; multi-tracking has groups of students attending the same school on distinct schedules or “tracks” (Kelly). There are pros and cons to both options.

The principal advantage of multi-track scheduling is that it increases the seating capacity of the school anywhere from 25 to 33 percent (Yeager). In addition, multi-tracking allows for better maximizing of the school’s facilities, on a year round basis. Because more students can be accommodated this way, it prevents overcrowding in schools (Illinois State University). However, a major con is that it may be difficult for the school to provide staffing with this system (Illinois State University). Moreover, parents with students in different “tracks” can face complications with child care and vacation planning (Kelly).

“Yet there are, in fact, compelling reasons year-round education should be considered in its single-track form simply for its educational benefits, especially for at-risk students” (Yeager). The main benefit of year-round education is the prevention of summer learning loss. This is because since vacations are shorter and divided throughout the year, there is an enhancement of continuity and a better pacing of instruction (Yeager).

According to Harvard Family Research Project’s research report, *Year-Round Learning: Linking School, Afterschool, and Summer Learning to Support Student Success*, there are a number of programs and initiatives that promote Year Round Education:

- Organizations that operate summer and afterschool programs with links to the school day
- Community-based programs that work with the same cohort of participants over multiple years
- School-led programs that partner with afterschool and summer programs to increase learning time

- District- and community-wide initiatives that link school and out-of-school activities (Deschenes)

In this report, the authors argue that learning about “where, when, and how learning happens” can help educators better allocate resources to help youth gain the skills necessary for a healthy adulthood, offer a seamless learning environment that can help stem summer learning loss, and tap resources outside of schools for additional opportunities to help close the achievement gap (Duschenes).

Year-round education is best achieved through a combination of school, after-school, and summer programs when they are linked together (Duschenes). A necessary component of successfully implementing year-round education is to ensure accessibility. One way to do this is to expose students to new learning environments through initiatives such as field trips or cultural activities (Duschenes). In order to maintain continuity, it is imperative for community programs to be aligned with the school district standards and curriculum. Since the execution of Year-Round Education must be a community effort, it should also be “student-centered and family-centered” (Duschenes). This means that students’ families must take an active role in engaging their children and “reinforcing academic messages at home” (Duschenes). In addition, all stakeholders, from schools to parent groups, must share responsibilities for learning outcomes and help each other through partnerships that will promote the success of the children. Only this way will we be able to “design a seamless learning pathway that connects opportunities across developmental stages, calendar time, and learning environments” (Duschenes).

Summer learning loss is prevented by Year-Round Education, especially when there is a link or connection between school-year and summer learning experiences (ELO Research, Policy and Practice). These year-round initiatives provide students with high-quality educational experiences throughout the year, despite their families’ socioeconomic background (ELO Research, Policy and Practice).

In order to limit the scope of my research, I want to investigate deeper the situation in New York City. The After-School Corporation’s ExpandedED Schools Program is a network of New York City public elementary and middle schools that partner with community organizations to expand the schools’ learning time (ELO Research, Policy and Practice).

ExpandedED Schools first recognizes and explains the “learning gap” between high- and low-income students.



According to Expanded Schools, the learning gap quantifies to 6,000 hours by sixth grade. This is because “by the time they reach sixth grade, middle class kids have likely spent 6,000 more hours learning than kids that are born into poverty” (Expanded Schools). Well-off parents are more likely to read to their children, a total of 220 hours by the time sixth grade comes along. Lower-income parents, on the other hand, either cannot read themselves, do not have the time because they both have full-time jobs, or do not have the resources. Pre-school education gives higher-income students nearly 1,400 hours more of schooling than their lower-income peers that cannot afford this. After-school enrichment programs, extra-curriculars, and summer camps also give higher-income children a great advantage of over 4,000 hours of learning (Expanded Schools). So, by the time they arrive at middle school, low-income children are already 6,000 hours behind.

Expanded Schools is a nonprofit organization that works with various organizations to close the learning gap by providing learning through school, afterschool, and summer programs (Expanded Schools). They also work to change public policy by collaborating with school leaders and policy-makers (Expanded Schools). Expanded Schools follows three goals in their attempts to close the learning gap:



The nonprofit seeks to expand the school day by helping schools partner with other organizations, thus providing 35% more learning time at only 10% more cost (ExpandedED Schools). In New York City, 83% of the cost of expanded learning is publically funded. Through this model above, ExpandedED hopes to provide “more time, more role models, and more opportunities” in order to have “more kids discovering their talents and developing their full potential (ExpandedED Schools).

III. Increasing Parental Involvement

The main benefits of parental involvement, as concluded from research by the Center for Public Education are a higher likelihood to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs
- Be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits
- Attend school regularly
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school
- Graduate and go on to post-secondary education (Center for Public Education).

How, then, can schools increase parental involvement? Generally, “the current parental involvement policies, built on the accepted definition, disregard the needs of low-income children and their families which further burdens children who are already falling behind academically” (Smith). And although the United States Department of Education stated in their Goals 2000 that “every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children,” this goal is not entirely being executed (Smith).

Schools must work to “engage families in ways that improve learning and support parent involvement at home and school” (National Education Association). By building partnerships with families, schools can “sustain connections that are aimed at improving student achievement (National Education Association). An example of this family-and-school interaction is if a teacher were to meet face to face with parents and keep in touch about the child’s progress. Parental involvement is another way to combat income inequality and “supporting more involvement at school from all parents may be an important strategy for addressing the achievement gap” (Henderson).

IV. Internship and Job Placement

Success is not a destination, but the road that you're on. Being successful means that you're working hard and walking your walk every day. You can only live your dream by working hard towards it. That's living your dream.

–Marlon Wayans

Since a summer enrichment program may be challenging to execute and difficult to ensure accessibility, a more feasible solution to summer learning loss would be to place students in sort of “internship” or job programs. This would allow them to begin to explore career paths while keeping them occupied during the summer months.

Currently, the Department of Youth and Community Development runs different programs to assist New York City youth in attaining jobs and internships.

The *Summer Youth Employment Program* in New York City, which helps students between the age of fourteen and twenty-four find paid employment in a variety of entry-level jobs in various industries such as Arts and Recreation, Retail, Real Estate, Educational Services, Hospitality and Tourism, and Media and Entertainment. The program also provides career workshops and operates on a lottery basis in the five boroughs. Students that are chosen are placed into a 6-week paid job, usually in the non-profit sector (The Department of Youth and Community Development).

Ladders for Leaders is another program run by the Department of Youth and Community Development with the support of NYC Center for Youth Employment. This nationally-recognized program offers high school and college students professional paid summer internships in leading corporations, non-profits, and government agencies in New York City (The Department of Youth and Community Development). Participants of the program benefit from pre-employment training, the paid internship, and the opportunity to join the program’s Alumni Network.

The *Out-Of-School Youth Program* targets low-income youth who are not working or in school through a year-long program to help them find permanent work. The program also assists with college placement, GED preparation, and career planning. Participants benefit from these

services as well as additional help after their 12-month job ends (The Department of Youth and Community Development).

The *In-School Youth programs* “help participants graduate from high school, pursue college education, and develop career goals” (The Department of Youth and Community Development). Year-round services provided by the program include guidance and counseling, tutoring, paid internship opportunities, project-based leadership opportunities, recreational activities, college preparation, and career planning assistance

The *Young Adult Internship Program* provides short-term internship opportunities to youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four who are not currently enrolled in school. Participants benefit from fourteen weeks of paid internships followed by services to help them find permanent jobs or more educational opportunities (The Department of Youth and Community Development).

Although all of these programs have benefitted some students, they mostly work on a lottery basis, limiting accessibility to the masses. In addition, students are restricted to remaining in their normal environments, within the five boroughs. For my claim of policy, I want to propose a similar solution but one that would not choose applicants through a lottery, but rather through a standard application process. In addition, the program would help students find jobs not restricted to New York City, so that they can be exposed to different environments and expand their horizons from a young age. Students would be encouraged to participate in the program every year so that they could move up in their career paths. For example, a sixteen-year old may begin the program as a busser, and then move up to waiter, and eventually a management position through the program’s career workshops and services.

Counterclaims:

I. Accessibility is Not the Issue

“You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink”

If accessibility to books accounts for the lower literacy rate of lower-income children, then how do you explain public libraries? Can’t all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, pick up a book at their local library? The obvious answer to this is yes, but the old English proverb, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink” perfectly applies to this scenario. Low-income children do indeed have access to books, but accessibility is not enough and does not mean that they will read. In their article, “Summer Reading and the Potential Contribution of the Public Library in Improving Reading for Children of Poverty,” authors Stephen Krashen and Faye Shin conclude that merely providing access to book is not enough. After conducting research, the authors found that “when youth can choose their own reading materials, they are inclined to read more” (Fifles). Free reading for students who are “at-risk” can be a motivational tool. Thus, instead of sending a list of required summer reading,

educators should encourage students to read more – but be more flexible in the selection of books.

I tend to agree with this argument – that students should have more freedom in choosing what book they want to pick up. Throughout my middle school and high school years, I remember disliking most of the books assigned by teachers. Only recently have I discovered my preferred genre – I can read a nonfiction about psychology or business much faster than a sci-fi novel. It is unquestionable that when the reading material personally interests you, you are more compelled to read it. I also remember many of my teachers encouraging us to “read anything” – whether it was a magazine or an encyclopedia, reading increases your literacy rate. Better to read anything than to read nothing at all.

On another hand, however, I appreciate these required readings that I found on Book Rags or Spark Notes more often than not. The classics are of course important, but will students actually read them if they are so uninterested? There needs to be a happy medium between assigning Orwell and allowing students to choose what they want to read. In addition, schools should collaborate with public libraries to further encourage their students to read. During the summer, instead of forcing children to pick up books that they will not even end up reading, it is wiser to point them towards the library and incentivize them to “read anything”.

“According to the National Reading Panel, giving students books and encouraging them to read doesn’t result in literacy gains” (Blake). Instead, the National Reading Panel identifies two strategies to improve literacy rates: guided oral reading and reading comprehension. By making reading interactive and engaging, reading can be both a “leisure and academic activity” (Blake). Allowing students to choose their own books is the greatest way to incentivize them to actually read.

The counterclaim that accessibility is not the issue really shed some light on my topic. After conducting more research on the causes of lower literacy rates, I agree that simply giving children books is not enough. Children need to be incentivized to read – and allowing them to actually decide what to read on their own may be the first step in motivating them.

II. Summer vacation is necessary

The main counterargument to the claim that summer vacation is detrimental to students and their academic performance is that “particularly when it comes to younger students, time off in the summer months is a vital component of healthy development” (Lynch). Proponents of this argument contend that summer vacation is necessary and that “too much learning” is harmful.

In his book “School’s In: The History of Summer Education in American Public Schools,” historian Ken Gold “debunks the idea that we got summers off only to placate big industry or agriculture” (Westneat). He argues that the real reason summer vacation was created in the nineteenth century was that “too much schooling impaired a child’s and a teacher’s health” (Gold). Supporters of this counterclaim contend that instead of giving up on summer vacation, we should find ways to make all students benefit from it.

My Original Solution

My original claim of policy is a summer enrichment program that tackles the problems of summer learning loss, childhood access to nutrition, and lack of parental involvement. By assessing existing solutions such as the balanced calendar, Year-Round Education, and programs for internship and job placement, I have attempted to invent a solution that encompasses these claims of policy along with other elements that will help solve these issues. In addition, I will address the counterarguments: that accessibility is not the issue, and that some sort of summer break is necessary.

Because changing the entire academic calendar is more challenging, my solution will instead try to enhance the summer experience so that is both recreational and enriching, and can benefit students regardless of their socioeconomic background. The program will have both educational and recreational activities. In order to ensure accessibility, the program will cooperate with public schools and seek out donations from relevant corporations for funding, so that that it does not exclude low-income students like other summer programs do.

In order to combat summer learning loss, which is the worst in the subject of reading, students will participate in reading throughout the course of the program. After considering the counterclaim that accessibility is not the issue, I have concluded that students must be incentivized to read, not just simply handed a novel. Thus, in the program, students will form reading groups based on their own interests, such as science-fiction, history, or nonfiction. In this way, students will be more motivated to read because they will be more interested in the reading material. Students will be able to choose what books they want to read, and discuss their readings with their interest groups. This will be sort of like a “book club” and will be the best way to engage students in summer reading. In addition, students will be incentivized through a prize-system: those who read the most books throughout the summer will be awarded. To increase parental involvement in this area, parents will be encouraged to check upon their child’s reading progress and even read the same books as them and discuss them.

To attack the issue of access to nutrition, the program will not only provide meals, but incorporate family cooking lessons that will teach students basic skills. This will be both a recreational and educational activity that can include family members to help increase parental involvement. Other recreational activities that will be integrated into the summer program are visits to museums, theaters, zoos, and more, which will also be curated to the students’ particular interests.

Another component of the summer program is mentorship and job placement, as examined in an existing claim of policy. Ideally, students will start attending the summer program at a young age and continue to attend every summer. Every year, they will be progressing towards a certain goal, whether it is getting a certain job, learning a new skill, or getting into college. With the help of mentors, the students will be provided with guidance towards this ambition. Students will begin to explore career paths throughout high school through reading material and job or internship experiences. By the time they reach the end of high school, they will have a better idea of their future goals and how to attain them.

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