June 2016:
The Summer Slide

Background

For many of us, some of our sweetest childhood memories are of summertime-- going to camp, swimming in pools, or turning a garden hose on siblings or friends. But for many of our Head Start children, summer poses a threat. The effects of less class time, fewer books, and limited opportunities for social skill growth can have detrimental effects known as "summer learning loss." The academic and social gains made during a school year can be compromised or lost if children don't continue to use and improve on these new and developing skills.

Some families can't afford summer. Summer learning loss can happen to all students, but losses in reading and math skills are especially common in children in low-income families, who may also be experiencing additional family stress because of having to arrange for child care. Just last month, the New York Times wrote about "The Families That Can't Afford Summer." But there's good news, too! Summertime can be a great opportunity for children to improve in exactly these areas and others through cost-effective measures, and summer learning can happen anywhere!

Different communities have adopted different approaches to eliminating or reducing the learning loss that occurs during summertime. Some programs have adjusted their calendars, spreading class hours and breaks across the calendar year more evenly. Others supplement regular programming with a summer program. Summer learning programs mean that children continue to have access to educational resources and opportunities to improve social and academic skills. One Head Start program, Utah CAP (formerly Salt Lake CAP) has created a program that extends into the summer for children who enrolled late in the year -- a prime opportunity for "catch up." With thoughtful models like these, the summer months can be a time of growth and progress.

Head Start programs and staff are always looking for the best ways to meet the needs of their children and families, but with many competing needs funding a summer program or extending the school year can pose a major challenge. City governments and community foundations can be much needed sources of funding, and libraries and other community organizations may offer other programming that Head Start can connect families with.

New federal duration funds can also be used to extend the school year. Whether through longer days or longer school years, this new infusion of $294 million more dollars will help programs serve their children and families better and longer. In addition, the Office of Child Care has funded a new National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment that should have resources available soon!
The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading
The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading has a comprehensive approach to the challenge of increasing the number of children reading at grade level by grade three. One of the challenges they've identified is summer learning loss. They have identified eight benefits of summer programming and they link to helpful resources and research. Trying to explain to seriousness of summer learning loss to parents or colleagues? Share their video clip of Brian Williams sharing what summer learning loss means.

The National Summer Learning Association
Visit this webpage for a list of summer events in your area, or add your own event to the map! There’s also a thorough guide to funding resources and program models, tip sheets for families, and a video from Michelle Obama!

RAND Summer Learning Resources
RAND, a research institution that works on a wide range of issues, has focused on summer learning loss for several years. In addition to their reports and research briefs, blogs from their research team and even a Reddit "Ask Me Anything" can help you find the right materials to explain summer learning to anyone in your community!

Oxford Learning: Summer Learning Loss Statistics (and Tips to Promote Learning All Summer Long)
Oxford Learning wrote this article that provides quick tips and easy-to-read graphics all about summer learning.

Research

Schools, Achievement, and Inequality: A Seasonal Perspective
Karl Alexander, Doris Entwisle, Linda Olson

This study asks whether children's family income is related to the times of year when they learn the most (or don't). Other research has shown that out-of-school environments, in homes and communities, can contribute to the achievement gap across social lines. It could be that home environments offer more or less exposure to language, that some parents just can't spend as much time focused on children's learning, or that community violence and injustice becomes a source of stress that affects children's development. While children of wealthier families show gains in skills during summer, children from poorer homes often don't show gains. This study reports both descriptive and analytic results of the Beginning School Study, which tracked a random sample of 790 children in Baltimore public schools over a period of five years. They find that children learn more while in school, verbal gains are greater than math gains over summer, and school-year gains are larger in the earlier years.

Comparing high and low income children, the researchers find that the two groups learn about the same during the year, but high income children continue to learn during the summer while low income children hold steady. It's clear that time in school is contributes to children's achievement regardless of socioeconomic status. Yet progress during the school year can be
stiffled by the opportunity gap both before first grade and during summer months. The researchers conclude by highlighting the importance of quality preschool as a means of minimizing the achievement gap by the start of school and stating their support for enrichment through summer school or extended year programs.

**Literacy Growth in the Academic Year versus Summer from Preschool through Second Grade: Differential Effects of Schooling across Four Skills**

Lori Skibbe, Kevin Grimm, Ryan Bowles, and Frederick Morrison

This study examined how four literacy skills - phonological awareness, decoding, reading comprehension, and vocabulary - develop over the four years from preschool through second grade, particularly which skills rise dramatically only during the school year or at particular points in child development. Not surprisingly, the research team found that school did have an impact on all skills, but with variation among skills. Decoding and reading comprehension skills grew mostly during the school year, whereas vocabulary grew year-round with peaks related to age more than the school calendar. Most of the children in the study were white and medium to high income, so some of these findings may not apply to children of color and low income children. However, the authors do conclude that schooling has notable impacts across all skills that were measured and that the greatest growth in reading skills happened between preschool and first grade.

For Head Start programs and families, these findings highlight the importance of focusing on all the different skills involved in early literacy during the summer. While three and four-year-old children usually aren't decoding yet, parents can work on recognizing letters and their sounds, reading and talking about books, and using rich vocabulary -- regardless of their income.

**An Intergenerational Summer Program Involving Persons with Dementia and Preschool Children**

Christina Gigliotti, Matt Morris, Sara Smock, et al.

This study was done to evaluate the cost-effectiveness and the results of an intergenerational summer program. Generally, when programs involve retired adults over age 65 and youth under age 21 in activities together, studies have found that older participants show an increase in mood, engagement, and generational empathy, and younger participants benefit both socially and cognitively. Successful intergenerational programs must be thoughtfully and intentionally designed.

For this program, participants of an adult day service and children were offered an intergenerational summer program. The program lasted 13 weeks and built on a program that had existed at a lesser extent throughout the year. During the year, the two groups had met twice per week; for the summer program, the meetings were scheduled four times per week for 10 weeks with a few breaks over the course of 13 weeks. The program was free, the activities were preplanned, and children ranged from 2-10 years old. Through interviews, evaluation forms, and parents surveys, the researchers found that the program helped foster relationships between participants and created continuity of those relationships over the summer break between school years. Importantly, the program created opportunities for participants and family members to reach out to one another. Parents reported children's social emotional development was strengthened as they interacted with a wide range of people of all ages.
Discussion Questions

1. What does your program do to encourage and increase access to summer learning? Do any of your partners offer summer learning experiences that you connect families with?

2. What does your program do to educate parents about the importance of summer learning?

3. What more can your program do to increase the gains that children make over summer?