Resources for helping youth survive summer’s challenges

Despite its carefree reputation, summer can be a stressful time of year, as anyone with a child in their care knows. While children generally look forward to the return of warm days and the break with school-year routine, the absence of structure and regular activities can present difficult challenges for many families, particularly low-income youth and their caregivers. Once the regular school year ends, children in low-income families often do not have access to the resources that allow academic performance and healthy development to continue flourishing. As a result, they can experience setbacks in their academic skills that are well-documented. Among many factors:

- Children in low-income families are far less likely to participate in summer camps than their higher income counterparts – 4 percent vs. 18 percent, according to a 2006 study. 1
- Children spend more hours in self-care over the summer – 10.3 hours per week vs. 4.8 hours during the school year, according to a 2002 study. 2
- Many families rely on school meal programs during the year to provide regular nutritious meals for their children, but do not – or cannot – access this resource during the summer months. In Maryland, only 17.8 children took part in summer meal programs in 2012 for every 100 who received free or discounted meals during the school year, which is one of the better rates nationally, according to the Food Research and Action Center.

While “summer learning loss” is a phenomenon that affects children in all socioeconomic brackets, it can be especially damaging to those in lower-income brackets. Among key findings on the subject is a study published in 2007 in the American Sociological Review -- the Beginning School Study – that followed the educational progress of a representative random sample of Baltimore school children from first grade through age 22. 3 Monitoring testing data, learning patterns, high school placement, high school completion, and college attendance, the study found that, while children in both low- and higher-income settings make similar progress in learning during the school year, disadvantaged youth fall significantly behind their peers in reading skills over the summer months. By the end of fifth grade, children in low-income families were nearly three grade equivalents behind their higher-income peers, and by ninth grade, two-thirds of the reading gap was attributable to unequal access to summer learning opportunities, according to key findings in the study.

A number of programs throughout the state focus on off-setting summer learning loss, including summer reading challenges and local library programs, resources on accessing subsidized summer camps or starting one in your community, youth jobs programs and summer meal sites. Families and other caregivers are essential for helping prevent summer learning loss, and continuing the learning process at home during the summer is a central part of the effort to prevent summer learning loss. Home and community environments can help children and youth retain and advance their learning by reading with them each day, practicing simple math skills during day-to-day activities, and exploring local parks, cultural centers, and other sites of interest.

Summer Learning Day is Friday, June 20. The national advocacy day is focused on spreading awareness about the importance of summer learning in helping close the achievement gap and support healthy
development in communities all across the country. For information and a list of related activities in and around Maryland, visit summerlearning.org

Resources
Following is a list of resources with information on summer learning loss and on programs available in Maryland and nationally to help engage children and youth during the summer months.

For more information on the summer learning gap, visit the Johns Hopkins School of Education website and read Why Summer Learning Deserves a Front-Row Seat in the Education Reform Arena, an adapted version of an article originally published by Education Commission of the State.

The National Summer Learning Association is a Baltimore-based organization devoted to making summer learning available to all children, especially those living in poverty without access to high quality summer learning resources such as lessons, summer camps, educational vacations, and other enrichment opportunities. Their website features an array of resources available to members, but also includes information like community initiatives for summer programs and best practices on summer learning, which are available to everyone. For summer learning resources, click here.

Read to Succeed is a program for Baltimore students who are in kindergarten to grade 3 in 2013–14, and who need extra support in reading. It includes a week of traditional camp activities followed by four weeks of reading and enrichment activities. For information and an application, click here. For other summer learning programs in Baltimore City schools, click here.

Baltimore County Public Schools’ website has a list of summer learning resources and engagement activities, both for Baltimore County families and in general.

The Scholastic Summer Reading Program is a free summer-long literacy program designed to motivate children to read four or more books. The Summer Challenge site also features resources for educators and parents.

The Maryland State Department of Education website features a list of summer reading programs in local libraries throughout the state; the programs are free and open to all. Click here for more information.

YMCA Camps offers financial assistance for its 20 Y Journeys day camps in Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Carroll County, Harford County, and Howard County, as well as Camp Hashawha. For more information about what each location has to offer, contact your local branch or log onto their website.

YouthWorks is Baltimore City’s jobs program, which matches young people between the ages of 14 and 21 to six-week summer work experiences with private sector, nonprofit, and city and state government employers. Visit their website for information.

Summer Meal Programs

- For information about summer meal programs across Maryland for children and youth, and to find a summer food site near you, visit http://md.nokidhungry.org/summer-meals
• For information on summer food sites in other states, call the National Hunger Hotline at 1-866-3 HUNGRY, or go to http://www.whyhunger.org/findfood. Hablamos español. Or text ‘food’ to 877-877 to find out about summer meals sites near you.

• For general information about summer nutrition programs, including detailed state-by-state information on eligibility, visit the Food Research and Action Center website. Or access Hunger Doesn’t Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report 2013.

