OUR LOVE AFFAIR WITH SUMMER VACATION HAS ITS COSTS

Our country is in love with summer vacation. As educators, we all know about the countdown. It will be starting soon, hey for some it may have already started. Ticking off each day as we dream about our summer adventures. We look forward to that glorious day when we pack our car with all of our supplies and materials and say goodbye to our schools until late August. Some say, two reasons teachers chose this profession is July and August.

Unfortunately the joy of summer for many kids doesn’t always equate to summer camp, trips across country or overseas, visits to museums and the theater and opportunities for summer learning. In fact, for far too many of our city kids, summer often equates to learning loss. The summer memories many of us create for our own children are often the stuff dreams are made for kids from inner cities across our country.

Research on the effect of summer vacation on learning points to the notion that much of the achievement gap can be attributed to the multi year impact of summer learning loss. African-American and Hispanic students and White and Asian students generally start from the same place but the achievement gap begins to appear in the early grades and continues to amplify over a student’s school career with the gap being the most pronounced during secondary school years.

Our love of summer has its costs and they are troublesome. We need to revisit how we look at the school year, after all how many of us need to harvest the crops in July and August? Students spend too much time away from school as it is and the summer has too many negative effects on the students that need so many of the benefits that school provides throughout the school year.

School districts are starting to realize that summer presents an excellent opportunity to help inner city families fight the achievement gap. Exciting enrichment learning tied in with necessary remedial work is a recipe for success. Giving students the chance to work in exciting learning spaces that include 21st century skill building along with field trips that connect classroom learning with real world applications. The opportunity to learn exciting concepts related to STEAM can provide engaging and meaningful learning making an academic impact on students across our country.

If we as a nation are serious about becoming truly intellectually competitive globally, what are we willing to sacrifice? We need to be prepared both philosophically and fiscally by providing our young with the tools to be equipped in our information driven society. September to June is not enough and if we are truly serious about closing the achievement gap than we need to revisit how we look at July and August in city schools across the country.

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