



Books help kids avoid the summer slide

By Adam Brooks, Guest columnist

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Summer is a positive word. Summer means sunshine and swimming, family and friends. Perhaps most importantly, to children, it means no school.

But having no formal education during the summer months can lead to unfortunate consequences. It's called the "summer slump" or the "summer slide" and, despite the catchy title, this is no laughing matter.

Summer slide occurs when students are out of school and suffer from learning loss. The data is disheartening. Research shows that children lose reading and math skills while on summer break, sometimes losing two to three months' worth of educational abilities.

Summer learning loss is not something easily remedied when school starts back up in the fall. In fact, it has a cumulative effect and can set the struggling reader back exponentially over the course of multiple years. It is not uncommon for an incoming middle school student to experience up to a two-year lag in reading achievement due to the summer slide. Those are two years that won't be made up if the student simply continues the cycle, falling further behind.

There is no question about it: If children aren't mentally stimulated while they are out of school, they will not achieve to their highest abilities. What can be done to alleviate this problem? Have books available for your children to read. Studies have proved that reading even four or five books can help to reverse the summer slide. Visit your local public library and check out as many books as you and your children can carry. By offering them unlimited access to resources, one major barrier is removed in the fight against the summer slide.

At the Hernando County Public Library, we offer multiple opportunities to avoid the summer slide. Children are encouraged to read throughout the summer thanks to our partnership with the Tampa Bay Rays, *Tampa Bay Times* Newspapers in Education and the "Reading with the Rays" program.

We're also featuring educational programs from Weeki Wachee Springs State Park, Homosassa Springs State Park and the County Extension Service, among other community partners, to keep children excited about learning after the school year ends.

All children deserve a summer education. This year, let's work together to stop the summer slide before it even starts.

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