

# 'Summer Slide' Solutions Focus on the Wrong Problem

Now that schools are out across the country, headlines abound regarding the seemingly inevitable summer learning loss, or "summer slide."

The National Summer Learning Association, which promotes summer programming, particularly for underprivileged youth, [reports](#) that teachers spend much time re-teaching content in the fall that kids supposedly learned the prior spring. Summer learning loss is estimated to be worse for low-income children, with a Johns Hopkins [study](#) determining that children in Baltimore Public Schools lost two months of reading achievement over summer break.

A recent Rand Corporation [study](#) analyzing various multi-year summer learning programs aimed at disadvantaged youth across the country found that, while some programs show promise in halting summer slide, there was "no causal evidence that two summers of programming provided benefits," and a "modest near-term benefit in mathematics, dissipated by the next fall."

Despite a lack of compelling data that intensive summer learning programs create lasting benefits for children, school districts are ramping up their summer programs. For example, this spring the city of Boston [announced](#) its "Fifth Quarter of Learning" program that uses both public and private funds to run academically-focused summer programs, staffed in part by Boston Public School teachers. The program has received such an enthusiastic response that Massachusetts legislators are trying to expand the program statewide.

The bigger question we should be asking about "summer slide" is: Are these children actually learning, or are they simply being tested on content in the spring that is then quickly

forgotten? And if “summer slide” is real, then what happens after kids graduate? Do we all quickly forget what we allegedly learned once that final bell rings? What does that tell us about the quality and impact of mass schooling?

In the recently re-published 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of his bestselling book, [\*Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling\*](#), former New York State Teacher of the Year, John Taylor Gatto writes:

*“Mass education cannot work to produce a fair society because its daily practice is practice in rigged competition, suppression, and intimidation. The schools we’ve allowed to develop can’t work to teach nonmaterial values, the values which give meaning to everyone’s life, rich or poor, because the structure of schooling is held together by a Byzantine tapestry of reward and threat, of carrots and sticks. Official favor, grades, or other trinkets of subordination have no connection with education; they are the paraphernalia of servitude, not of freedom. Mass schooling damages children. We don’t need any more of it.”*

As efforts to combat alleged summer learning loss accelerate, we should be wary of expanding into summer a teach-and-test schooling approach that may not lead to genuine learning. Educating children, particularly disadvantaged youth, should be a clear priority; but if the way we currently educate most children results in a rapid forgetting of content, should this approach really be replicated?