
THE KANSAS CITY KANSAN

School's Out, But Learning is Still In

By the time you read this, most students should be out of school for the summer.

Children will enjoy it, but there's also a cost to summer vacation, and teachers even have a name for it: the summer slide. Kids lose an edge over the summer, and need to spend the first month in the new school year recovering lost ground.

How can your children make the best use of summer? The answer isn't to replicate the school day. Even they need a break. But use the summer to expand on their knowledge and skills.

Keeping in mind that learning should be a lifetime experience, here are some ideas for making the most of summer. None are new, and not all will fit with every child or family. Tailor them as you see fit, or use them as a springboard to something else.

Help them explore entrepreneurship. The 1950s were the time of "organizational man" and lifetime employment. That world may return someday. But today, entrepreneurship is key. It takes several forms, including self-employment, starting a business, and even leading changes within existing businesses.

Entrepreneurship requires both skills and knowledge. It requires creativity, the ability to size up a business opportunity, find a market, and figure out the best way to serve that need or opportunity.

Childhood entrepreneurship isn't just setting up a lemonade stand (though if you've got the right location, give it a go). Troy Dunn, author of the book "Young Bucks," gives children plenty of ideas on how to go into business.

Often it's just a matter of your child latching onto something she already knows. One mother complained to Dunn that her daughter spent too much time visiting her MySpace page. Soon her daughter was managing MySpace accounts for a dozen local small businesses who saw the online service as a way of reaching out to customers. The young teenager learned how to respond to clients and communicate with the public.

Head for a community college. During two summers of my high-school years, my mother dropped me off at a community college on her way to work. Twice a week, I took a class in history, psychology, or another subject. After class, I would head to the library for some pleasure reading.

Students who take enough classes this way could, in theory, graduate from high school early. That would save taxpayer dollars. Unfortunately, the law required that I get my school district's permission—and agree that the classes I took at the college would not count for my high school graduation requirements.

Take an online class. For today's children, taking a college class doesn't have to

mean spending all day in a library. Thanks to the explosion of online classes, they can take a class through the Internet at home.

Travel to interesting places. Soaring prices for gasoline have put the crimp on the summer road trip. But if you're willing to economize on food or lodging, you might still be able to visit sites of historic, scientific, or other significance. A trip to the Kansas City Board of Trade, for example, can prompt a person to learn about business risks and even the workings of the economy. Go to Topeka and visit the capitol building and the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site to understand how our laws are made, and how America has a self-correcting government. Visit a national park and learn about geology, biology, botany, and other fields of science.

Hit the bookstore or library. Time off school is a good opportunity for your children to explore new subjects or look at a favorite one in depth. You're already paying for the local library with your tax dollars; make use of it. Seek out bookstores that specialize in books that didn't sell as well as publishers expected (called "remainders") as well as second-hand bookstores. Online retailers can also help you save money.

Ask your child's teacher for suggestions. If your child needs some extra work in, say, math, it may be worthwhile to him to hone those skills with some practice each week. Ask the teacher for some suggestions.

Try a different skill. If your child is a bookworm, maybe it's time to try some art. Painting, drawing, and other forms of art can foster creativity and lead to new interests.

Opportunities for learning abound—even during summer vacation.

John R. LaPlante is an Education Policy fellow with the Kansas-based Flint Hills Center for Public Policy. A complete bio on Mr. LaPlante can be found at <http://www.flinthills.org/content/view/24/39/>, and he can be reached at john.laplante@flinthills.org. To learn more about the Flint Hills Center, please visit www.flinthills.org.