

# Helping Parents to Keep Their Children Motivated to Learn During the Break

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It happens every school year. Students return to school in the fall or after the winter break eager to see their friends, to wear the latest fashions, and to learn - not necessarily in that order.

Unfortunately, after several weeks or months of playing video games, vegetating on the couch, babysitting younger siblings, or working outside of the home many students have unintentionally shifted the lessons from the previous semester or school year to another part of their brains.

It is not their fault. If information is not used on a regular basis, it is forgotten. If a student has not factored a quadratic equation in 3 months, chances are that skill will take several minutes and several examples to recall.

The impact of this lapse in memory is problematic for the teacher who must invest time in review instead of introducing new material. In a global economy that requires a global work force, there is simply no time to waste.

In Japan, South Korea, Israel, and the Netherlands, students spend at least 200 days in school. Students in Japan spend 243 days in class, while Americans are only in class for 180 days with the traditional school calendar. [1]

In order to make the most effective use of class room time to prepare our students to compete in a global work force, they must invest more time engaged in proactive learning outside of the classroom and beyond the school year.

What can be done to inspire learning, to minimize memory loss over the summer or winter break, and to reduce the time it takes to regenerate the brain for a successful academic school year? Daily injections of knowledge are the answer.

Here are a few ideas. Use the break to determine the student's areas of strength and improvement. Unfortunately, there are many students in high school that cannot successfully do arithmetic with decimals and fractions. Quite often this deficiency is

hidden by use of a calculator. Parents can give the child an evaluation of math skills to determine the areas of strength and areas of improvement. One hour of study per day focused on correcting these deficiencies can substantially improve academic performance for the coming school year and potentially improve chances of receiving an academic scholarship.

Another idea is to empower the students to make decisions concerning their own academic future by assigning them the task of searching the Internet for enrichment courses and SAT Math Boot Camps in areas that the student knows help is needed. If the student is required to pick three classes, they will probably choose one that the parent will find worthy of attendance.

A very effective method to keep the mind challenged during the break is for the parent to assign realistic math problems. If the student has a job, the student should be required to prepare a budget and maintain it on a spreadsheet.

Younger children accompanying parents to the store can be challenged by manually calculating change returned when shopping or manually calculating percentage discount on an item that is on sale. This is a very effective method of gaining the child's interest if the item purchased is for the child.

The final idea is to assign the student one chapter to read per day over the winter break or per week over the summer break. To insure the reading was done, assign math problems to complete or questions to answer. Use the self-empowerment principle. Let the student choose three books for review by the parent. The parent approves one of the three books.

In summation, everyone needs a mental break. After several months of intensive study, students need time to relax, to rejuvenate, and to retool. The concept is to spend at least 5 hours per week engaged in learning. These 5 hours of proactive prevention are worth more than summer school or remedial classes required as a cure for failing. Our children can achieve if we challenge them, give them resources to excel, and raise their standards for excellence.

[1] "Back to School Already? Year-Round Programs in Full Swing" ABC Nightly News <http://abcnews.go.com/US/Story?id=8289808&page=1>

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She is the author of "How to Help Parents and Kids Get Over the Fear of Math". This book contains a math evaluation and answer key that will empower parents to determine their children's areas of strength and improvement in under 30 minutes.

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