



Summer Learning Loss

How Teachers Can Address the
Summer Achievement Gap

Introduction



Each fall, educators return to their classrooms with a new roster of students. But instead of jumping into a new school year, they often spend weeks, sometimes months, reviewing topics that students should have mastered in previous years.

Summer learning loss, or the “summer slide,” is an old and well-researched phenomenon, with research on the topic appearing in [The Elementary School Journal](#) in 1924. According to the current [body of research](#), which has been vastly updated in the past 100 years, learning loss equals about one month on a grade-level equivalent scale or one tenth of a standard deviation for sprint test scores. A recent study from the American Educational Research Journal found that the average student in grades 1-8 loses between [17-34%](#) of the prior year’s learning gains over the summer break.



For low-income students, research suggests summer learning loss can be even more severe. Lower-income students are more likely to lose on-grade-level-equivalent reading recognition tests while higher-income students appear to gain on them. Research from [Leveraging Summer for Student Success](#) also indicates that unequal access to summer learning resources in elementary school accounts for two-thirds of the 9th grade achievement gap between low-income students and their middle-class peers. This is directly correlated to graduation rates and explains, in part, why low-income students are less likely to graduate high school.

Survey Results:

What Learning Loss Really Looks Like

While the summer slide is certainly real, we wanted to understand how these drops in knowledge actually affect classrooms and find out what teachers think schools and parents can do about it. **969 educators answered a 19-question survey by Progress Learning about what post-summer education looks like.** Educators taught all levels from pre-K to grade 12 and were asked a mix of ranked choice, agree or disagree, and open response questions.

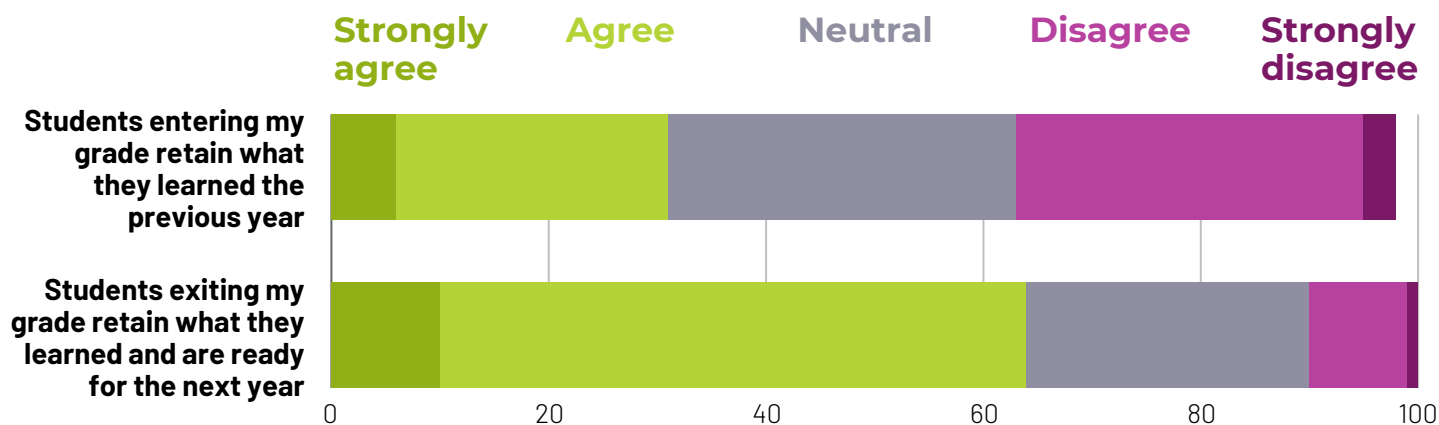
72.9%

of respondents use or have used Progress Learning through their school districts



Setting New Classroom Expectations

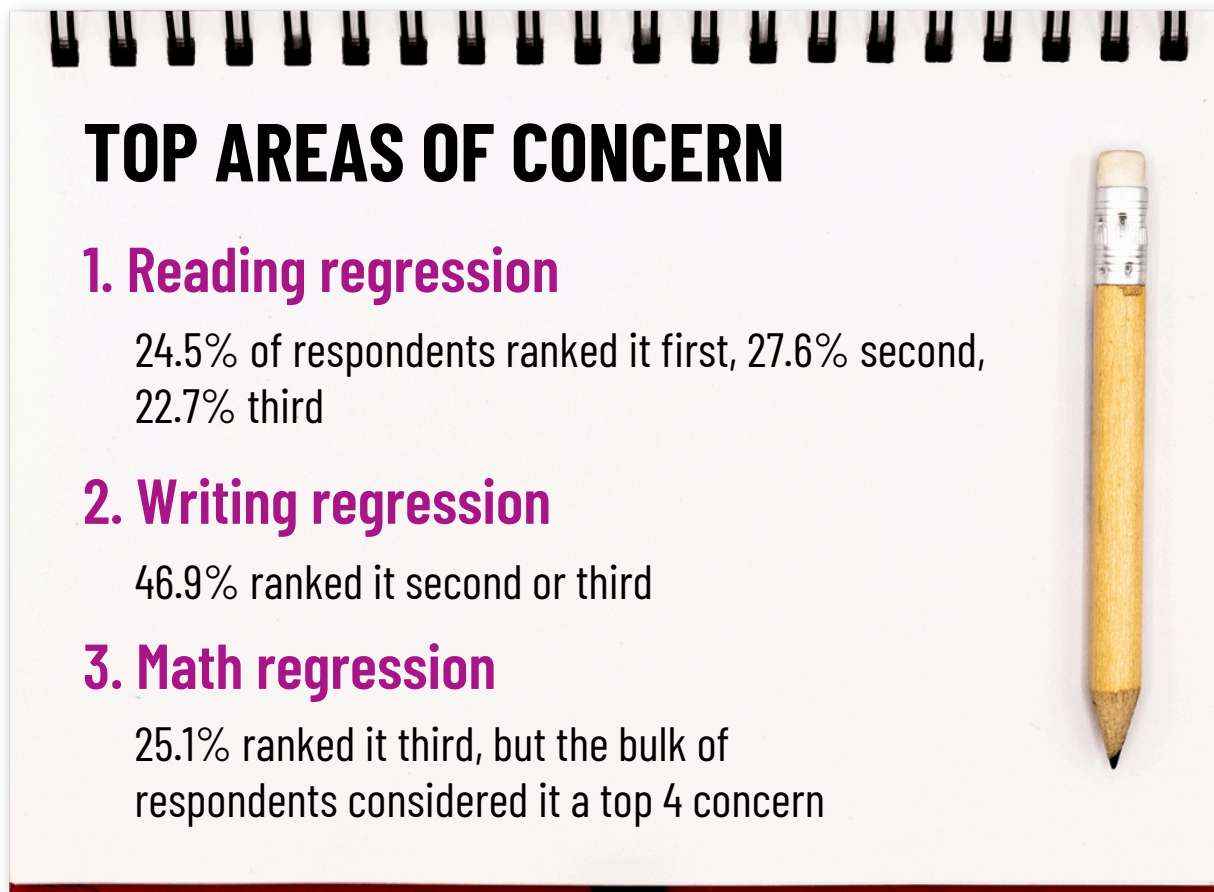
When students return to school in the fall, teachers already know they will need to play catch up. Students may show social and behavioral changes or a loss of skills.



When asked to rank which subjects or areas are most likely to be a problem, results were mixed. This is due, in part, to the nature of the survey – a pre-K teacher wouldn't be worried about science, or a high-school history teacher may not be aware of regressions in science – but it still paints a picture of slipping skills.

Respondents were asked to rank these areas based on how common they are when students return to school in the fall.

- Reading regression
- Writing regression
- Math regression
- Science regression
- Social Studies regression
- Routines and behavior
- Mental well-being



TOP AREAS OF CONCERN

- 1. Reading regression**
24.5% of respondents ranked it first, 27.6% second, 22.7% third
- 2. Writing regression**
46.9% ranked it second or third
- 3. Math regression**
25.1% ranked it third, but the bulk of respondents considered it a top 4 concern

The only clear agreement teachers across areas and grade levels had was a concern about structures and routines over the summer. When asked to rank the above areas based on how common they cause problems in the fall, 34.7% of respondents selected routines and behavior as the number one. The only other clear consensus was what didn't cause concern, with mental well-being garnering 48.8% of seventh-place rankings.

Finding the Cause

There is no singular cause of summer learning loss. Contributing factors include limited access to educational resources, prolonged breaks from structured learning environments, and disparities in learning opportunities.

What Can Be Done?

Learning shouldn't stop once school is out for the summer. Taking simple steps, like establishing consistent routines and incorporating educational activities, can promote continuous learning and development in children all summer long.



Capitalize on simple learning opportunities like playing board games, discussing current events, or journaling.



Work to build a consistent morning routine, with regular wake-up times and meals.



Schedule structured educational activities like reading from an approved summer reading list or engaging in educational apps or online platforms that target specific subjects such as math or science.



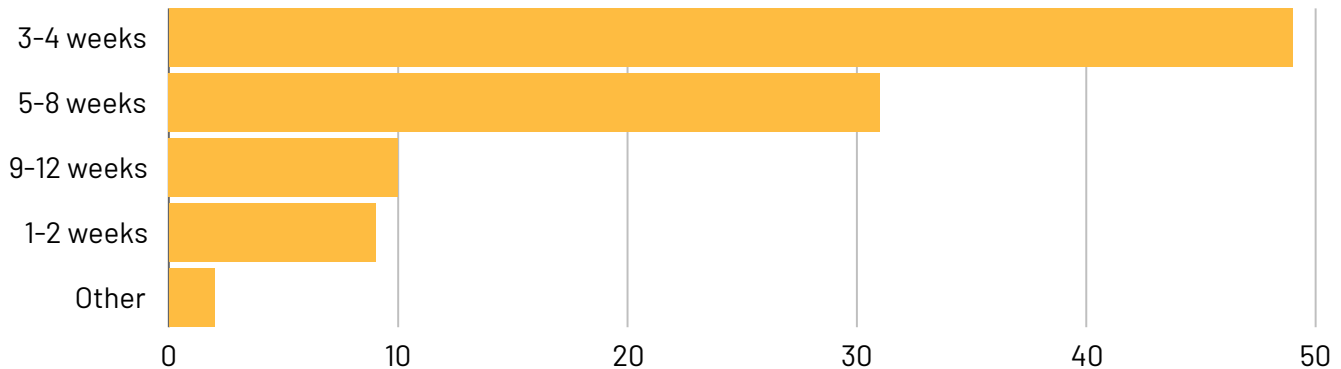
Consider screen time limits to encourage children to pursue more engaging activities.



Encourage responsibility with chores or weekly tasks.

Next Steps: Finding What's Been Lost

The majority of teachers surveyed said it takes more than 3 weeks to help students recover from summer learning loss, with three respondents stating it can take a whole school year.



Recovery efforts often face uphill battles with no clear winner.

Major Obstacles to Overcoming Summer Learning Loss



Time and resources



Lack of family support



Student engagement



Staffing



Demand of students
and teachers



Language and
cultural barriers

Most respondents said they found small-group instruction to be an effective strategy to combat learning loss at the beginning of the year.

One-on-one instruction, remediation, and interventions were also popular options.



Steps to Take: Before, During, and After Summer

The first month back after summer break is critical. There's no time to waste if educators want to be able to move on to grade-appropriate lessons. However, treating summer learning loss should start even before summer begins.



Before Summer

Teachers need to be able to identify problem areas immediately to address specific issues for each student. This can be done through diagnostic tools and progress monitoring reports to see where students stand in comparison to state standards. When used before summer break, they serve as benchmarks to quickly identify how to get a student back on track next fall.



During Summer

Teachers can send students home with engaging summer assignments for review, remediation, and acceleration based on their benchmarking tests. These could be as simple as engaging, grade-appropriate reading lists, but ideally would require consistent slow work throughout the summer, like worksheets or long-term projects.

Parents can work to maintain a routine that somewhat mirrors the academic year. Students should have planned activities and set bedtimes and wake-up times. Creating a sense of consistency and normalcy ensures that returning to the classroom isn't a complete shock to the system.



In the Fall

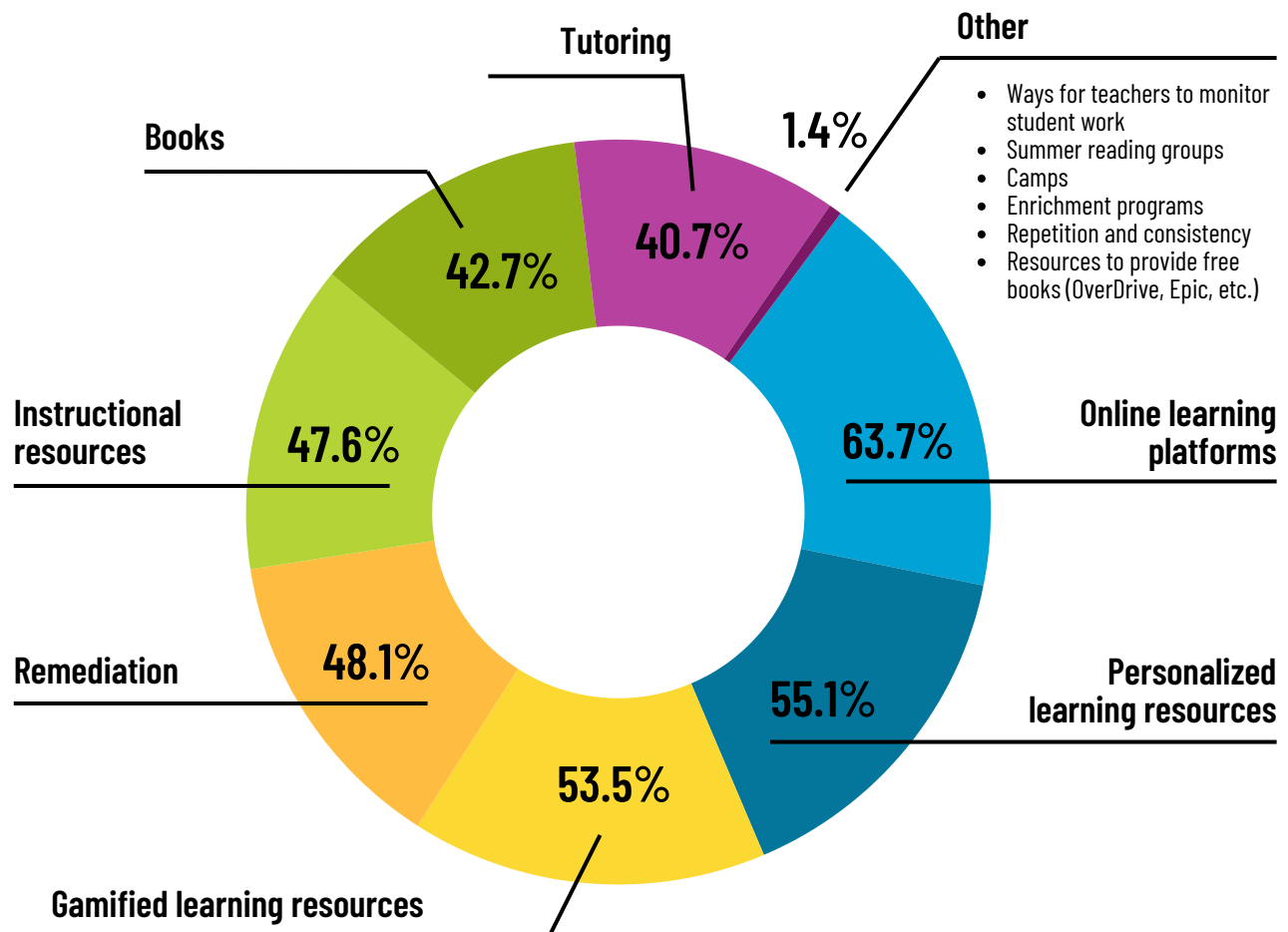
Once students are back in the fall, teachers should optimize their time recovering any topics that were lost. State standard-aligned tests can be used to identify problem areas, especially if they can be compared to results from before the break.

Looking For a Solution

Preventing summer learning loss in its entirety is likely impossible. Research into learning and cognition has found that skills involving a number of steps tend to rapidly deteriorate without practice or reinforcement. But more importantly, it's considered normal and healthy to forget learning and experiences.

Still, slowing summer learning loss is critical. Research has shown that the effects of summer learning loss may not be as evident in the younger grades, but that the losses accumulate over each year, adding up to substantial learning deficits by the time a student enters high school.

Educators are asking for tools to help combat this issue. In our survey, respondents said they wish students had access to:

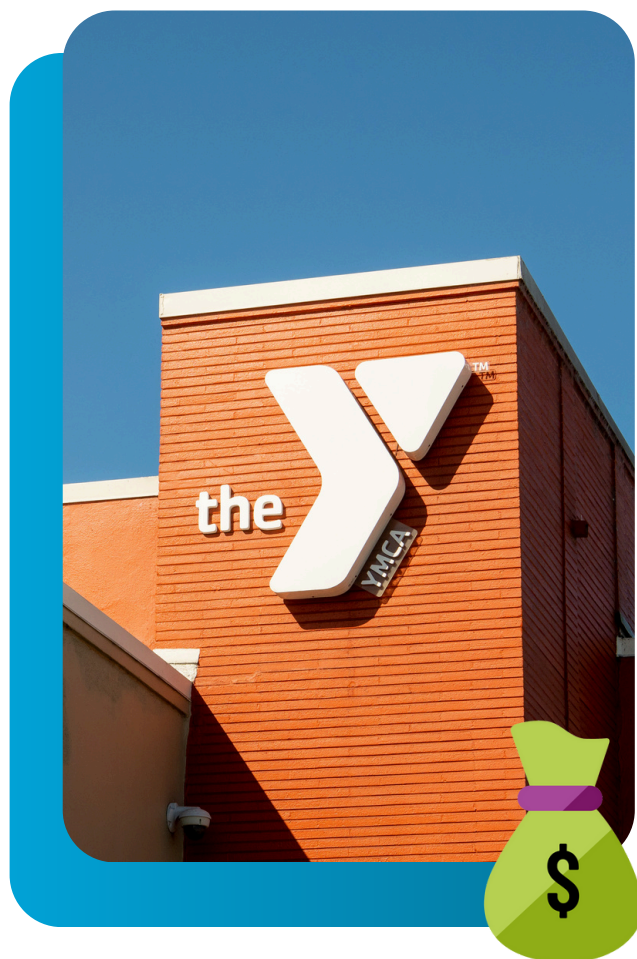


Summer Learning Access

Some parents may try to curtail summer learning loss with structured learning or educational activities that establish a fun routine. This helps kids both enjoy summer and keep their brains engaged so they are prepared to hit the ground running when school starts. These activities could be as simple as watching educational media, visiting libraries or museums, or rewarding reading accomplishments. Some families also send their children to camps, which include structure, routine, and mild education built in. These learning opportunities expand a child's knowledge base and provide opportunities to practice school skills. However, they are often not accessible to students from low-income families.

The American Camp Association [CampCounts 2022 Report](#) found that the median cost per day was \$65 for a day camp and \$121.50 for an overnight camp. Even free or low-cost options like Boys & Girls Club programming or YMCA classes can be challenging for lower-income families due to transportation and hours.

This inequality in access to programs can put students even further behind. For students from low-income families who already entered the summer with knowledge gaps behind their peers, the summer only adds to the achievement gap. Then, when school resumes, those students will be starting the next school year even further behind their higher-income peers.



Accessible Learning Tools

Most districts offer summer school opportunities, but they may be invitation-only for students who need immediate remediation. These opportunities may also be unattainable for the same financial or time constraints that limit access to other programs. Additionally, summer worksheets or homework can be hard to enforce, add extra work for teachers, or fail to provide individual attention where students need it most. Accessible learning tools like Progress Learning can help bridge the gap by offering affordable, flexible, and personalized summer learning experiences that cater to students' specific needs and schedules.

Progress Learning Solutions

We're not just interested in researching summer learning loss, [we're committed to combating the problem.](#)

Before summer starts, educators can use our reporting from the year to see where students stand in comparison to state standards. These tools help benchmark student progress before the break and allow the next year's teacher to immediately see a student's problem areas. Before vacation starts, Progress Learning can help provide summer assignments for review, remediation, and acceleration where students need them most.



Progress Learning works as a supplemental summer program because it's not only aligned with state standards, it's fun and accessible from home. With Galaxy Stars, students will be motivated through gamification. Completing assignments allows them to rack up Galaxy Stars, move their rocket to their current level, and unlock new games.



For at-risk students in elementary and middle school, the Liftoff system uses adaptive intervention, as well as instant and long-term rewards, to motivate students. When students complete their diagnostics, they receive an individualized learning plan that recovers learning gaps in vertical alignment. The system also integrates English and Spanish language support, as well as text-to-speech support, to better meet a diverse set of learning needs.