**Year-Round School Is What’s Needed, Not Camp**

[LZ Granderson](http://search.espn.go.com/lz-granderson/) is a senior writer for ESPN and a CNN contributor. He is on [Twitter](https://en.twitter.com/Locs_n_Laughs).

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Back in 2011 my friend and CNN colleague Christine Romans jokingly called me a “Tiger Dad” when she learned I had enrolled my son in multiple academic camps over summer vacation.

My goal? To limit the “vacation” part.

Instead of asking “What should we do with the kids during summer vacation?” we should be asking “why do we still have summer vacation?”

After charting more than a century’s worth of the country’s scholastic data, Harris Cooper, an education professor and chairman of the psychology and neuroscience department at Duke University, [discovered](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0%2C9171%2C2005863%2C00.html) that during summer vacation kids can forget anywhere from one to three months worth of the math and reading skills they acquired during the school year.

This is why I equate summer vacations with putting change in a pocket that has a small hole in it. The longer the problem is ignored, the bigger the problem becomes. Summer camps, particularly those that are not academically driven, are like paying to have a hole in your pocket.

I get it -- working parents have to enroll kids in something structured during the summer.

The thing is, we have something already -- it’s called school. Instead of treating June, July and August like sacred cows that can’t be sullied by academics, reconfigure the school schedule so that vacation days are evenly dispersed throughout the year. Over the past two summers, my son, who is 16 now, has been attending community college. Summer camps, even academic ones, can still have too much emphasis on “fun” for me. I want my son’s brain to remain active, sharp not turned into goo because he’s playing basketball for five hours every day in a rec center.

No offense to the parents whose kids are playing basketball in a rec center right now. But we’re in a global economy.

And the hunting grounds for a talented workforce are not restricted by our country’s border. You don’t have to be a professor at Duke to read story after story about U.S. students being surpassed by their counterparts in other nations. It’s disturbing to know 15-year-olds in countries like [Canada](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/10/education/10educ.html) are on average a full school year ahead of ours.

So I ask you: if the data show academic atrophy occurs during summer’s three months of vacation -- requiring teachers to spend a portion of their time re-teaching what students learned the year before -- then why aren’t we responding intelligently to the research?

My son used to do the camp thing, and I have found them to be a touchy-feely answer to the wrong question. Instead of asking “what should we do with the kids during summer vacation?” we should be asking “why do we still have summer vacation?”

If asking that question makes me a Tiger Dad, then “roar”. <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/07/14/should-kids-go-to-sleepaway-camp/year-round-school-is-whats-needed-not-camp?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3As>

**Eliminate Summer Vacation**

[**Kathleen Porter-Magee**](http://www.edexcellence.net/about-us/people/kathleen-porter-magee.html) is the senior director of the High Quality Standards Project at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Previously, she was a middle and high school teacher and the senior curriculum and professional development director for [Achievement First](http://www.achievementfirst.org/), a network of urban charter schools.

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Summer school is a relic of the past. It’s a stopgap measure used to try to help students master the essential content they missed during the academic year. Unfortunately, any educator can tell you that it’s nearly impossible in four to six weeks to make up for instruction lost during the 180 days that preceded them. And, while many summer school programs have been shown to help lessen the effects of summer loss, there is a more straightforward and less costly solution to that problem: eliminate summer vacation altogether.

Spread out the 180 school days so that no student is away from the classroom for more than four weeks at a time.

Teachers are typically contracted to work just slightly more than 180 days each year (including teacher training and professional development days). To be sure, efforts to eliminate summer vacation by increasing the number of days above 180 would likely result in costly contract renegotiations. But why concentrate those 180 days between September and June? Why not shrink summer vacation, so that no student is away from the classroom for more than four weeks at a time, and spread out the extra vacation days by giving slightly longer breaks between terms?

Some school districts have already begun experimenting with this kind of “year round schooling,” though more typically to reduce overcrowding. And research has shown modest achievement gains — particularly in reading — for the most disadvantaged students. Given that the biggest value add of summer school is its ability to combat summer loss, and that it is our most struggling students who need that summer-school boost, these findings are heartening.

What’s more, by spreading vacation out across the school year, rather than concentrating it in the summer months, teachers can maximize vacation time by assigning targeted extra practice, enrichment and even tutoring earlier in the year, before students have fallen too far behind. And, because most vacations will take place during the academic year, before students are changing classrooms and teachers, teachers can more directly hold students accountable for completing the extra work they need to catch up.

Like a lot of our education programs, summer school exists today not because it’s the most efficient way to help our most struggling students, but rather because it’s the way schools have done things for many years. This year’s budget crisis is an opportunity to finally assign this relic to the history books.

<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/07/10/how-to-improve-summer-school/eliminate-summer-vacation?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3As>