An Important Message for all UPSTART Parents

The following is a **research alert** to the UPSTART parents which offers some fascinating insights about the importance of family summer academic activities. This information is not commonly understood, but we believe you will find it very helpful and interesting. Please let us know if this research interests you, and whether you would like additional reports of other areas of academic research that we think might be helpful to you. You can call a service representative at the UPSTART number, 1-800-669-4533 to register your viewpoint.

The first section summarizes the findings, and for those who are curious about the source of the research, there is also a longer document which offers some additional information.

ABSTRACT

This is an **UPSTART Alert (Number1, the "Summer Effect")** from Dr. Dustin Heuston, chairman of the Waterford Research Institute, who will occasionally send you brief reports on research findings that you might find helpful. Some of the research is quite important and unexpected, but it may be useful for you to understand and act upon it. This is particularly true of what scholars have learned about the importance of summer activities for your children.

(1) Contrary to some public opinion, most children learn at a reasonable pace in schools and improve academically at about the same rate, but this breaks down during the summer months when families determine the academic activities of their children.

(2) Their children's steady academic growth is interrupted by the three summer months where one of three things happens.

- The children without any academic activities in their families begin to forget what they learned during the year. This is called "summer loss," and many children lose up to three months of gains during the summer, or one-third of the 9 month past school year.
- Other children who have parents who provide a stimulating verbal atmosphere in family discussions and encourage their children to have contact with books help them maintain the gains they made during the school year.
- Some fortunate children will have families schedule academic activities for them and will actually gain a number of months academically during the summer.

(3) Thus one child might lose 3 months of gains while another might gain as much as 3 months, so at the end of the 3 months of summer one child might be 6 months ahead of another by the time school picks up in the fall. This 6 months difference is two thirds of a school year. Although both children were at the same level at the end of the previous school year, one child will be two-thirds of a school year ahead of the other when they return to school. This can happen summer after summer during the elementary school years and add up to a number of years of difference by the time the students enter high school, even though both children have continued to learn at the same pace during the school year.

(4) As a result of these findings, experts have concluded that families actually have a much greater impact on their children's education than schools do. While schools provide most of the instruction, almost all children go to school. But since the parents control the summer activities, they actually are the determining factor in their children's academic success.

(5) There are two traditional problems that keep many parents from scheduling academic activities for their children. First, many parents believe their children should enjoy their summers and be free of academic pressure. Second, many parents are too busy to schedule careful academic activities. Here the UPSTART program can solve both problems because it limits the academic activities to a few minutes a day and requires only that the parents make certain that the children's usage stays on schedule. In other words, UPSTART can provide the solution to the "summer effect" with only a little effort from the parents.

The Importance of Using Summers for Children's Academic Success

By Dr. Dustin Heuston, Chairman of the Waterford Institute

As scientists conduct research and report its implications to the public, society benefits a great deal. When I was a child, most of the adults I knew smoked (including my parents and my wife and her parents), but now many **do not** because of the scientific evidence which is strong enough to cause people to begin to change their habits. This is just one example where we can see that although it is not easy to change people's habits, scientific data can provide a motivating force to help us become healthier and more successful in our lives.

Traditionally summers have been viewed as a release from school pressures and a time for children to run free and unfettered avoiding the structure and pressure of academic pursuits. However, research from some of our leading scientists who study the role of reading, math, and science in terms of future educational success for children suggests that this really is not a good strategy. Instead, during the summer the highest educational priority for parents should be to make certain that their children have structured learning opportunities to solidify and advance their academic skills first in reading, and then in math and science. These structured learning opportunities need not take up much of the day, but they must be part of it and should be carefully scheduled and implemented. In this way, the children can still enjoy their summers, but they now will also have the opportunity and responsibility to practice their academic skills daily for a limited time which could become one of their most useful lifetime habits. This will not happen unless parents make this a high priority for their children and learn to hold to this policy until the children's habits firm up and they become used to short periods of daily academic activity. The UPSTART program is an ideal example of a program that has been designed for short, but regular, usage. All it requires is that the children use it for at least 15 minutes a day, five days a week, although, of course, spending more time, more often, is even better.

Researchers agree that the role of parents and other family members in scheduling and motivating the children to use the materials during the summer is a critical key to their children's educational success. One of the important breakthroughs that identified the significance of family efforts in education was the work by sociologists studying differences in children's educational performances related to their family backgrounds. James Coleman, the great sociologist at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, wrote an influential study called the ***Coleman Report*** in 1966 that showed the **family** has a much greater impact on student success than the **school** does. Trying to extend this insight, another sociologist, Barbara Heyns, studied students in Atlanta in the l970s and published a book in l978 called ***Summer Learning*** where she concluded that students without learning opportunities in the summers identified and scheduled by their parents lost ground academically during the summer months while their more fortunate friends who had learning opportunities did not.

She decided that the use of public libraries would be one way for families to provide academic support because most of them lacked the expertise to offer early literacy training to their children. Her research findings about the use of libraries were impressive. Among her findings:

- The number of books read during the summer is consistently related to academic gains.
- Children who read six or more books during the summer gained in reading achievement rather than suffering "summer loss."
- More than any other public institution, including the schools, the public library contributed to the intellectual growth of children during the summer.

Most of the UPSTART children are not yet reading, so unless the local public library has a preschool program, or the parents check out books and take the time to read with their children, the library for the preschool children may be a limited resource.

Here we can see the value of UPSTART because it requires no traveling time or parent time, and unlike the book, the program actually actively instructs the child interactively and adjusts to the child's learning style. Remember, too, that the UPSTART program not only contains instruction, but also a large digital library of hundreds of books that will not have to be checked out and returned. This frees the parents from the responsibility for providing the books or instruction; however, it assumes that the parents will take the time and energy to assure that the children become habitual users of the software. Hopefully, parents will find UPSTART the best of both worlds.

Similarly, two other sociologists from Johns Hopkins University, Doris Entwisle and Karl Alexander, expanded Heyns's and Coleman's research while studying children in Baltimore during the 1980s and ultimately tracked them up through the 9th grade. They reported their findings in the ***Baltimore Beginning School Study*** **in 2007** with a stunning conclusion: "We find that cumulative achievement gains over the first nine years of children's schooling mainly reflect school-year learning, whereas the high-low achievement gap at 9th grade mainly traces to **differential summer learning over the elementary years."** In other words, the use of the summer months was of critical importance to the children. Contrary to what most people thought, all children—rich and poor—grew at about the same pace during the school year, but had huge differences in summer opportunities. Schools were generally doing a good job, but few people paid attention to the importance of family summer efforts. The problems came from the families' misuse of the summer. In the more successful families, the children retained what they had learned (or even improved their learning) over the summer. Conversely, those children where the parents did not offer academic support during the summers lost some of what they had learned during the school year and fell behind. The younger the children, the greater the loss! Many children fell behind 3 more months each summer.

This means that the family's influence during the summer is one of the most critical components in producing academic success for children, and parents should provide academic support during

the summer to their children. The use of the summer is the one variable parents can control to improve their children's academic performance. Rather than relying just on schools to improve their children's performances, parents can use the home to generate real and authentic improvements to learning. What can be either disheartening or exciting is the discovery that as the years go by, the summer's impacts accumulate, and they either compound for, or compound against, successful learning. After a few years, the use of the summers can add up to years of different academic skills for the children. Some will be years ahead, and some will be years behind. Since another scholar found that almost half of the multiyear differences in ability of 12th graders show up at the start of grade 1, scholars want us to understand the incredible importance of getting the children started properly during the preschool years.

UPSTART's greatest contribution is that it provides ideal instruction for families without creating stress and a major time commitment from the parents, nor does it assume that they must provide the instruction in areas they rarely have the time or knowledge to address. All they have to do is make certain that, as one of their core family goals, the children use the materials for at least 15 minutes a day, five days a week—again, **more is even better!** This may not be something families are used to doing, but the scientific data suggest that this should be one of the family's highest priorities. They must schedule specific time, or the summer will fly by, and the child will miss a golden opportunity to help secure his or her educational future.

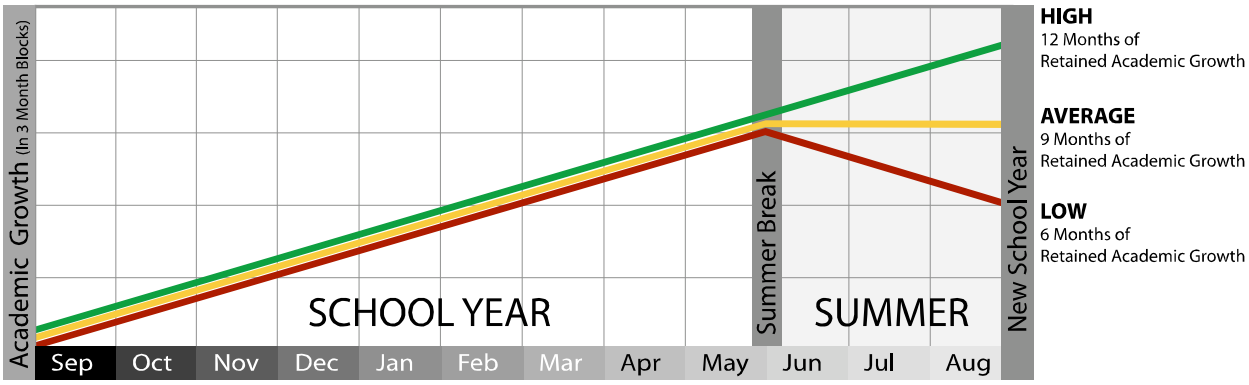
All of these insights can be captured in two simple equations in addition to parental efforts:

Children's Academic Success = School + Summer Academic Activities

Summer Activities = Libraries + UPSTART

Now for those parents who want to check on how good they are as objective scientists concerning their children's summer learning, then they must measure carefully at the end of each week how many minutes the children actually worked on UPSTART or some other academic activity. Please notice that good intentions, guilt, enthusiasm and hope are not hard data. Nor are visits by relatives, family reunions, trips, athletic activities, summer colds, rain, boredom, social disasters, medical emergencies, bee stings, sleep over's, dentist visits, shots, car trouble, Internet or equipment gremlins, or even "the dog ate my mouse" excuse. At the end of the week the only thing that will add to your child's academic potential is the number of minutes they have spent working. We will mail you the data each week and hope that we can help convert you to being real scientists of learning who trust and work carefully with the data. You schedule them to eat, to brush their teeth, and to sleep. Now please schedule them to work on UPSTART and begin to track actual usage time.

The Effect of Summer Efforts on a Typical Child's Academic Growth over One Year



Continual Growth
Students with substantial effort during summer months in a **stimulating verbal** environment

No Learning Decay
Students with modest effort during summer months in a **moderately stimulating verbal** environment

Learning Decay
Students with no additional effort during summer months in an **non stimulating** verbal environment

Although all students continue to grow at a steady rate during the school year, by September, when students enter a new grade, some will have fallen up to six months behind, without parents realizing this has happened.

With very little effort, parents can determine which course of academic growth their children will follow.

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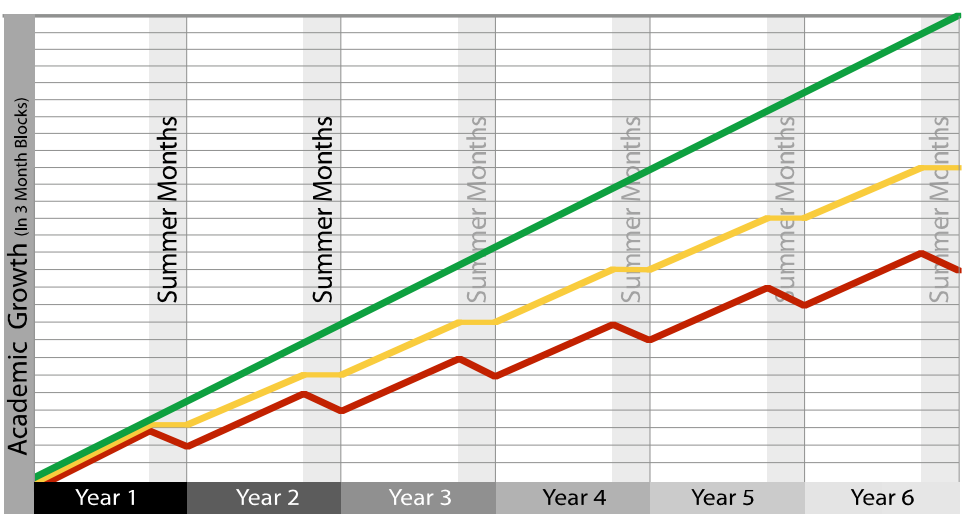
Cumulative Effect of Summer Efforts on a Typical Child's Academic Growth over Six Years



HIGH
81 months (6.75 years) of Retained Academic Growth

AVERAGE
54 months (4.5 years) of Retained Academic Growth

LOW
36 months (3 years) of Retained Academic Growth

Continual Growth
Students with substantial effort during summer months in a **stimulating verbal** environment

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Notice that three children from the same class will learn at the same pace each school year and still have a considerably different long-term outcome when the "Summer learning decay" effect takes place. After six years, the child who has little verbal stimulation during summer months **(red)** will be almost four years behind the child who uses those same months effectively **(green)**. The child who lives in a moderately stimulating verbal environment **(gold)** can avoid summer loss. But this student will still be up to a year and a half behind the student with optimum conditions **(green)** who continues to progress throughout the summer.

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