

Weekly Column: Ed Talk
Superintendent of Schools: Dr. David Leach
August 2, 2023

Many students return to school each fall without opening a book during the summer. It's unfortunate. When students spend sunny days without intellectual stimulation, they risk losing valuable academic skills and the knowledge they've gained. The valuable opportunities they missed could have engaged and sharpened them for the coming school year.

Students who read during the summer maintain their academic progress and prevent the summer slide. The study "*Summer Reading: A Meta-Analysis of the Impact of Summer Reading on Children's Reading Performance*" by Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen, revealed that reading during the summer break not only prevents learning loss, but boosts literacy abilities. That's right, kids who embark on reading adventures during the summer are more likely to maintain and even improve their academic performance.

What can parents and caregivers do to encourage young people to delve into literature during summer vacation? Here are some reading strategies to encourage a child to read throughout the summer.

- The American Library Association promotes summer reading initiatives that positively impact reading skills, fluency, and overall literacy development. Joining a summer reading club creates interactive and engaging environments where a love for reading can flourish. Locally, the Albert Wisner Public Library offers a full schedule of summer reading programs and other group activities.
- Going on vacation? When hitting the road, encourage children to pack books and not just screens. On long drives and flights, there is plenty of uninterrupted reading time to be enjoyed. Keep boredom at bay and instill the habit of reading anywhere, any time.
- Develop a reading routine. Consistent summer reading routines not only feed a student's mind, they help them stay in practice. Set aside a specific time each day for reading – morning, afternoon or evening will work – and then be consistent.
- Create a conducive reading environment. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, children should not spend more than one to two hours a day watching screens. And a study in the JAMA Pediatrics medical journal says children between the ages of 2 and 5 who spend more time watching screens exhibit poorer expressive language skills. Besides its negative effect on language learning, the consumption of passive media (particularly excessive screen time) has been linked to a number of negative effects on child development.
- Choose a book series. Introducing children to series that contain multiple books, helps pique and hold their interest with captivating storylines and engaging characters. There are some great book series out there for readers of all ages, like Harry Potter by J.K.

Rowling, Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson books, Diary of a Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney, Tui Sutherland's Wings of Fire titles, the Magic Tree House Series by Mary Pope Osborne, Dave Pilkey's Dog Man, and so many more. Visit the library or a bookseller for more recommendations.

And finally, contrary to conventional thinking, getting a child to read may not be as difficult as you think. The findings of the *Kids & Family Reading Report* suggest that most children do not view summer reading as a chore. Rather, more than 59% of kids ages 6 to 17 say "[they] really enjoy reading books over the summer." The top reasons the students enjoy summer reading are:

- The power to choose their books and read whatever/whenever they want (70%)
- Having an enjoyable way to pass the time (53%)
- They want to keep their brains active (52%)

We look forward to September and hearing about all of the exciting reading adventures our students are taking this summer. Every turn of a page leads to new learning and a lifelong love of books, words, communication, and so much more. As you look for a book (or, better yet, books) to fill your student's summer, encourage them to ask their friends what they're reading; maybe facilitate a peer book swap or even organize a book club. And, don't forget about the Little Free Library at Park Avenue.

Happy reading!

Here are some highlights from our schools this week:

Park Avenue & Sanfordville Elementary Schools: Park Avenue is the host school for this year's Summer Academy. Students from both Park and Sanfordville are working hard and having fun this summer! Ms. McPherson's second-grade class practiced adding and subtracting by drawing chalk number lines on the sidewalk. They jumped along the number lines, engaging in kinesthetic learning to strengthen their math knowledge. Ms. Disy and Ms. Steinberg's third graders have been building math and English language arts skills this summer, and just completed a unit on money. They practiced identifying coins and bills, counting, adding and subtracting money, and comparing different amounts. Some students got their creative juices flowing by creating their own geometric designs, while others did an author study on Kevin Henkes' *Sheila Rae the Brave*. They worked on ordering events, retelling the story, creating and drawing mental images of the setting and characters. They also compare the book to other Henkes titles they have read. Students wrote opinion paragraphs on why they love to swim and how they have shown bravery similar to the character in *Sheila Rae the Brave*. Ms. Anderson's physical education classes fine tune their sport-specific skills by throwing baseballs and footballs, handling a puck in hockey, juggling, learning tennis, tossing a frisbee, and more!

Warwick Valley Middle School: With Summer Academy halfway through there has been a tremendous amount of fun and enriching work that has occurred. Our rising fourth-and-fifth graders learned about all different types of figurative language, such as similes, metaphors, and idioms during English language arts. On the physical fitness side of things, our summer physical education classes have been busy learning, practicing, and playing pickleball. Additionally, students have engaged in non-traditional, fun skills-based games such as “noodle hockey.” “Noodle hockey” is similar to traditional floor hockey except it is played with a pool noodle instead of a hockey stick. Our grades 7-9 civics classes discuss governments' history and how and why our founding fathers created the government we enjoy today. In our grades 5-9 art classes students have been using model magic to sculpt mini birds. Students have experimented using markers, kneaded into the clay, to make various colors of birds.

Wellness classes across the Summer Academy are ongoing. Students have been engaging in lessons on making healthy choices, including their diets, the importance of sleep, and the importance of exercise. They explored environmental relaxation strategies, such as lighting, music, aromatherapy and movement. Additionally, students have engaged in stretching, yoga, deep breathing, and meditation techniques. Students have also been led on guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation (virtual hikes and beach visits). Lastly, students have done some art therapy, featuring giant coloring posters, origami, Zen-doodles, and do-it-yourself stress balls. We can't wait to see how the last few weeks of our Summer Academy positively impact our students.

Warwick Valley High School: It's difficult to believe there are only five weeks before we welcome students back to school and the Class of 2024 begins its senior year! Our awesome Guidance Department has been busy at work this summer, preparing workshops that will guide the seniors through their big year and decisions ahead. The first of these helpful programs – the College Application Workshop Series – kicked off this week. Each workshop takes place on a Wednesday morning (every Wednesday in August), during which counselors help students get a head start on their college applications. There will be additional workshops this summer, as well as college and career-related guidance events throughout the school year.

We also have the classes of 2025 and 2026 in mind. August marks the first of our Digital PSAT/NMSQT Digital Practice Summer Workshops (Aug. 8, 15 and 22). The PSAT helps students prepare for the SAT, and the PSAT/NMSQT (National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test), and helps eligible juniors find scholarship providers. The PSAT/NMSQT will be administered digitally this fall, with the SAT following in spring 2024. Tenth and 11th grade students are encouraged to sign up for the PSAT/NMSQT, whether their plans are undecided. This is to head off to college or jump into their career of choice. The PSAT/NMSQT will be here before we know it, on October 14, so visit the district website to register.