Talking Points
SPRING INTO ACTION
…and stop the leaks

For use and sharing by educational leaders of Minnesota

Key Message:
There is a leak in the system—summer learning loss.
Creative repairs can reduce loss and increase student and school success.

Most Minnesotans celebrate the end of the academic year and cherish the freedom of the summer months. Longer days and late nights, getting outdoors, jumping in the lake, throwing a ball, feeling the sun, smelling the flowers, or just hanging out with friends, are all important parts of Minnesota’s summer culture. For some, however, the summer break means more daycare, less supervision, more screen time, and more isolation.

Learning loss exists

For students, summer break also means a time of learning loss. What was so carefully taught and consciously learned months before begins to leak. Summer learning loss for all students is estimated to be equal to about one month’s worth of school-year learning (Cooper, 1996). In mathematics, the loss is closer to 2.6 months of grade-level equivalency. Summer is also a time when the learning gap grows, especially in reading. Middle income kids may actually gain in reading, while low-income or disadvantaged kids tend to lose about two months of grade-level equivalency. In fact, about two-thirds of the achievement gap in reading and language among high school students has been attributed to the learning loss that occurs during the summer months of the primary school years (Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson, 2000).

“Educators and parents often voice three concerns about the possible negative impact of summer vacation on student learning. One concern is that children learn best when instruction is continuous. The long summer vacation breaks the rhythm of instruction, leads to forgetting, and requires a significant amount of review of material when students return to school in the fall.” – Harris Cooper

While it can be argued that this loss could be alleviated by a twelve-month calendar—and while that may be correct—we don’t have and aren’t likely to have such a calendar in the near future. Minnesota currently has an academic calendar with a lengthy summer break. It isn’t enough to say “if only” the calendar were different, our kids could do better. As educational leaders, lawmakers, parents and communities we need to create ways to improve academic retention and growth in the conditions that exist.

There is little disagreement that learning loss exists, but minimal attention is paid to creating solutions besides a longer calendar or summer school.

This is an issue over which educational leaders have some control
Educational leaders may not be able to achieve the solution they prefer, but they can contribute to solutions in creative ways. If, as John C. Maxwell, author and founder of EQUIP, says, “A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way,” then educational leaders have the responsibility to do the following in relation to summer learning loss:

1) Identify the problem.
2) Create a vision for solving the problem.
3) Provide the information, and facilitate knowledge and methods to realize that vision.
4) Balance the conflicting interests of stakeholders.
5) Evaluate the outcomes.

Often, public educators today must deal with mandates for solutions without problems and challenges of problems without solutions. The critical issue of summer learning loss is neither. It is a problem with solutions. The solutions for schools/districts just need to be discovered and anchored by commitment. Following are some key questions for educational leaders to ask themselves and their staffs.

- In what ways can we connect with parents and pre-k through grade 12 learners prior to and during the summer months to encourage ongoing learning?
- How can we impart the importance of summer learning and experiences to students and parents prior to and during the summer months?
- What expectations can we, as educational leaders, place upon staff members to inspire and prepare learners and materials for summer learning prior to the end of the school year?
- How can we leverage all media, including social media, to advance these messages and materials?
- What on-line learning opportunities are or can be made available for summer learning?
- What is the most effective scheduling and curriculum for summer school opportunities? Some examples: Is one morning a week throughout the summer or three weeks in June most effective? Can summer school curriculum be more closely correlated to grade level expectations?
- What materials might we provide to learners and parents at the end of the school year for parents’ and students’ use during the summer months?
- What incentives might be attached to summer learning opportunities?
- How might businesses and communities support the vision for summer learning?

The need and the potential are far too great for educators to ignore. Spring into action—and stop the leaks. Creative repairs can reduce loss and increase student and school success.

References:
1. Cooper, H., Nye, B., Charlton, K., Lindsay, & Greathouse, S. 1996”The effects of summer vacation on achievement test scores: A narrative and metaanalytic review.”

These materials are provided by
The Minnesota Association of School Administrators
The Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals
The Minnesota Elementary School Principals’ Association