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# Educators call for more summer programs

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PROVIDENCE — Most American schoolchildren lose at least two months worth of math skills during summer vacation.

Low-income students also lose more than two months of reading achievement.

Children at risk for obesity gain weight more rapidly in the summer.

Working parents worry about their children having something productive to do when they're not in school, especially in families that cannot afford vacations, camps and academic enrichment programs.

One influential study found that by the time low-income students reach ninth grade, the lost knowledge during summer accounts for two-thirds of their gaps in achievement, compared with higher-income students. The lost time also affects whether they graduate from high school or attend college.

In a state with "unacceptably low" math scores and wide gaps in the achievement levels of minority and low-income students, this learning erosion must be addressed, said speakers at a symposium on summer learning opportunities at Providence College on Wednesday.

Forty-four percent of Rhode Island's 140,000 public school students come from families with low enough incomes to make the children eligible for free or reduced lunch.

"This is something that is on my mind constantly," said Providence Mayor Angel Taveras, who worked at after-school and summer programs in Boston when he was a student at Harvard University.

"We have in Rhode Island, with our Latino students, the widest achievement gap in the country ... and disparities in summer-learning opportunities are responsible for at least half of that," Taveras said.

About 125 educators, lawmakers and child advocates, including Education Commissioner [Deborah A. Gist](#), attended the symposium, organized by the Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance.

Woonsocket's six-week summer program for at-risk elementary students, "Chillin & Skillin," was highlighted for its collaboration between the city School Department and a local nonprofit organization, Connecting for Children and Families. The roughly 50 third through sixth graders who participated in

classes and field trips last summer made gains, with more than half improving in math and reading, said Linda Filomeno, grant director for the Woonsocket School Department.

“The students went out on a schooner in Newport,” Filomeno said. “Some of our students had never seen the ocean before.”

“Summers are an essential part of school reform,” said Matthew Boulay, interim CEO of the National Summer Learning Association. “Of course, people need a break in the summer. We are not the ‘Grinch Who Stole Summer Vacation.’ But you don’t need to take three months off.”

A joint legislative task force on summer-learning programs released its report last May, urging the state and communities to beef up their efforts in this area.

But given the state’s fiscal crisis, more money is unlikely. The state already receives millions of dollars in federal “21st Century” funding to help pay for after-school and summer programs.

“Even without extra funding,” said Sen. Frank A. DeVal Jr., D-East Providence, an assistant high school principal who co-chaired the task force, “we want each community to expand on what already exists, from public libraries to parks and rec departments to Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA.”

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