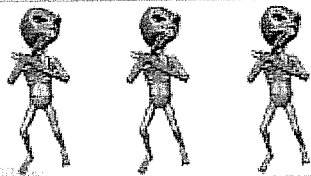


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## Stemming the Summer Slide

### Area Schools Find That a July Start Gives Poorer Kids an Edge

By [Daniel de Vise](#)  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
Sunday, July 29, 2007; Page C01

Summer can be the enemy of the schoolteacher: Students forget their math. They stop reading. And in the case of those with limited English skills, they lose their newly acquired words.

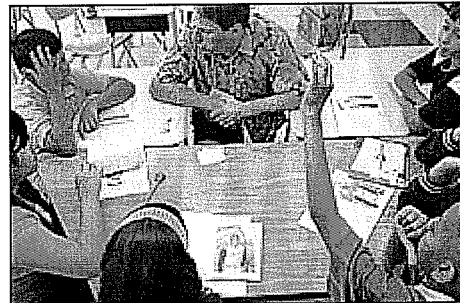
So at 22 elementary schools in the poorest enclaves of Montgomery County, summer ended early.

One recent morning, Jennifer Barrett, a kindergarten teacher at Sargent Shriver Elementary School in Silver Spring, handed out sandwich bags containing random numbers of classroom knickknacks: four glue sticks, five pencil sharpeners, six dominoes.

"All right, we are going to be doing some counting. Are you ready?" she asked the students. "Now remember, put them in a line so you're ready to count them."

A boy counted his glue sticks -- "I've got one, two, three, four!" -- and smiled.

Classes don't officially start until Aug. 27, but in each of the



**Photos**  
[Giving a New Meaning to Summer School](#)  
While summer school has traditionally been considered a way for struggling students to catch up, a growing number of school systems are looking at summer programs as a way to close the achievement gap before it opens.

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past six years, elementary schools serving Montgomery's high-poverty neighborhoods have opened in July to give students an early start: free breakfast and lunch and three hours of academics every weekday for four weeks, supplemented by afternoon arts, physical education and all the activities other children are getting at summer camps and on family vacations.



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"We re-create the school system for four weeks," said Chrisandra Richardson, director of academic support initiatives for Montgomery schools.

The effort, which research shows has helped improve test scores, reflects changing attitudes about the role of summer school. Most of the nation's schools still operate, researchers say, under a tradition-bound view of summer as catch-up time for students at risk of repeating a grade. But a growing number of school systems are embracing a new approach to summer study -- as an opportunity to close the achievement gap before it opens.

A recent study by Johns Hopkins University adds to mounting evidence of the "summer slide": Poor students start out behind their more affluent peers and fall further behind each year -- and most of the loss occurs when school is out. By the end of elementary school, Hopkins researchers found, poor children trail middle-income classmates by three grade levels.

The Montgomery program, called Extended Learning Opportunities - Summer Adventures in Learning, is considered a national model for stemming the summer brain drain. Students who faithfully attended the first summer session in 2002 tested better in reading and math after summer school than before, according to research.

Among 12 schools that participated in the program continuously from 2002 to 2005, second-grade reading scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills rose an average of 12 points, from the 44th to the 56th percentile. The school system as a whole showed a nine-point gain, from the 64th to the 73rd percentile.

Other Washington area school systems have launched similar programs.

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