

Published March 17, 2005

Summer can be a time for learning

by Dr. Debra Bowers

As we enter the last quarter of our school year, thoughts turn to the warm days of summer, getting up late, going to the lake, and just having fun. But that doesn't mean learning stops in the summer. The St. Louis Park public school district offers an array of programs designed to support student achievement during the summer and throughout the regular school year.

The district offers both academic and enrichment summer learning opportunities. These programs are designed to maintain academic achievement over the summer break, offer students a chance to grow both socially and academically and promote grade level gains for those students needing a little boost before entering their next grade.

Academic summer school serves students who have completed kindergarten through seventh grade and is federally funded through Targeted Services dollars. This is one way in which we catch kids before they fall and give them the help they need to attain the highest level of achievement possible.

The program addresses a cross-section of students, not heavily dominated by any category such as special education. Students qualify for academic summer school through various criteria such as teacher referrals, test scores, special education and English Language Learning (ELL) status.

Academic summer school focuses on reading and math skills and includes a social component. Parent involvement in their children's summer learning is required and monitored through meetings, phone calls and mail.

Teams of teachers work with small groups of students and engage them in learning with lots of games and other alternative teaching methods that supplement regular school-year curriculum.

ELL students concentrate on English skills and reading. The program will be enhanced this summer through the work of specialists in science, art and music, helping ELL students increase their vocabulary.

Data collected from last summer shows significant growth in achievement on NWEA scores due to participation in summer classes. Last year, we served almost 200 students. This year we hope to increase that number to 300 students.

If you feel your child is in need of academic summer school, please speak with his or her teacher.

Enrichment classes help families strike a balance between structured and unstructured summer learning and play. Our community education department offers a wide variety of classes for children, from infants through age 16 in areas such as reading, math, art, music, science, swim instruction, sports and gymnastics. Registration is underway. Class listings and registration information can be found at www.slpcommunityed.com and in Community Education's Summer Learning and Play catalog, mailed to homes earlier this month. For more information, call the summer school secretary, Kim Fisher, at 952-928-6325.

For next year, we are providing families with the opportunity to enroll their children in an all-day, every day kindergarten program. It is one way we provide additional learning opportunities for kindergarten students. There is a fee for this special program, called Kindergarten Plus, which will serve kindergartners at Peter Hobart and Aquila Primary Centers. Children will have the same teacher all day. If you feel your child would benefit from Kindergarten Plus, but the fee is an obstacle, please contact us to discuss fee assistance. For more information, go to www.slpschools.org or call 952-928-6777.

These are just a few of the ways we support student achievement in our district. Our goals to maintain and grow student levels over summer break will be assessed, documented and reported to teachers, administrators and local officials to provide continuous improvement in the program as well as monitor individual and group student achievement.