

## HOW TO



Wonder at the Steinhart Aquarium at the California Academy of Sciences.

# Sidestep the Summer Slide

Promote both rest and learning with these suggestions from a local elementary school teacher.

BY LEEANNE JONES



As the school year ends, many parents scramble to purchase workbooks and register their kids for STEM camps. They've heard about the dreaded "summer slide" and worry their kids may forget what they've learned after too much time away from the classroom.

Learning loss is a complicated and widely debated topic. But through myriad studies and articles, experts say the best summer approach is one that balances rest and learning through life experiences.

Erin Diaz, a teacher of 34 years currently at Pleasanton's Walnut Grove Elementary School, agrees. "The idea of learning loss can make people feel like their kids should be enrolled in a regimented summer curriculum ... like, when they get to third grade, [they should] already know third-

grade math," she says. "To me, that is not as valuable as experiences."

While dips in reading fluency or math facts are sometimes observed, they are usually within expected norms, and material is reviewed in the fall. But when students return to the classroom having explored and played, Diaz notices they come back with a broadened vocabulary. They are able to make connections between what they are learning in class and their lived experiences, which adds greater depth and retention.

How can you plan this kind of summer? Follow these tips, and be sure to participate as a family. If you see a play together, ask your kids about their favorite characters. Diaz suggests parents encourage their children to think critically about something they enjoyed. "Let them draw conclusions on their own," she adds.



### Quick Tips

Simple ways to keep your kids engaged this summer.

**1. Read for fun.** Take trips to the library, participate in a summer reading program, or consider a family book. "I knew a family who would choose a book and read it together in the summer," says Diaz. "This allows a child to read something that's not quite at their level."

**2. Get out and about.** Step away from screens and visit museums, science centers, or parks. "We are so lucky to live in the Bay Area," Diaz says, "where you can go to the coast and check out tide pools or head to the Sierras and Gold Country—and they can be day trips."

**3. Try something new.** Spend time in a different city, eat a new-to-you food, or learn a skill. "In class, we read *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, and I always ask the kids who has ever flown a kite," says Diaz. "Not many."

**4. Play games.** Dominoes, Yahtzee, Scrabble, and Othello incorporate math facts, spelling, and problem solving. Or try cooperative games, like escape rooms. There is also a great deal of social learning happening during unstructured fun with friends, so schedule plenty of playdates.

**5. Have kids help around the house.** Make a new recipe or fix something that's broken, and you will sneak in some math and science. "My grandfather was a tinkerer, and he'd give us old phones," Diaz says. "We'd take them apart and figure out how they worked. Those kinds of experiences link to new learning down the road."