



School Calendars Public Policy Position

Position

The American Camp Association® (ACA) believes the organized camp experience is a vital component in the development and education of the whole child. ACA supports local educational objectives which include a school calendar that recognizes and promotes the developmental needs of children and youth with appropriate programming and schedules. In addition, ACA encourages educational objectives that allow for the extension of organized summer camp experiences to all children. Furthermore, ACA also supports a partnership between educational officials, community youth development professionals, and parents in determining the school calendar.

Background

Over the last decade, camps and other traditional summer programs have steadily faced a growing phenomenon known as “calendar creep”. Calendar creep may be best described as an encroaching school calendar, in which the summer months are shortened and replaced with additional time in the classroom, resulting in an earlier school year start date. Some states allow for a school calendar start date as early as the 1st of August.¹

Many factors contribute to the occurrence of this phenomenon. Some groups believe that a learning-loss occurs because of an extended summer vacation – creating the need to re-teach students before moving forward with new material. Others believe that a shorter summer will result in a higher academic retention rate. Perhaps the most significant factor contributing to calendar creep is the federal “No Child Left Behind Act” legislation, enacted in 2001. This legislation, intended to create mutual accountability measures among the federal government, states, and their respective local school administrations, requires adequate yearly progress reports. These reports, directly tied to the level of federal funding a school may receive, are generated through uniform statewide assessment tools, which typically take the form of a standardized test. Many local school corporations have responded to this legislation by beginning the school year earlier in an effort to get more review time and to achieve higher test scores.

Rationale

It is our belief that learning should not be confined to the time spent in school. We acknowledge that summer learning loss is a real challenge facing America’s youth. However, we uplift the challenge of accomplishing the goals of “No Child Left Behind” through the ideals of “No Child Left Inside.”² We believe summer learning loss can be significantly reduced when children have access to structured, supportive, and safe summer out-of-school environments. Camp is a prime example of such an opportunity.

Indeed, summer learning-loss is a real challenge – with research spanning 100 years showing that students typically score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer vacation than they do on

the same tests at the beginning of the summer.³ However, research also shows that learning loss can be diminished when children participate in camp experiences.⁴

The camp industry has been instrumental in working to diminish the learning-loss challenge. Peg Smith, CEO of ACA, writes in the preface of the American Camp Association's *Creating Camp-School Partnerships: A Guidebook to Success*: "Camps across America have embraced the critical role they play in helping young people learn and grow. They are developing innovative programs that help reduce summer learning loss, bolster academic enrichment and student socialization, provide opportunities for leadership development, and ensure that our young people achieve their full potential."⁵

Many camps have embraced their role in youth development with intentional programming. Camps specializing in math, language arts, and the sciences have grown steadily over recent years. Other organizations have subtly comingled academically centered skill-building activities with other activities that one would typically consider as a traditional camp activity.

Camp helps fill the gap. The results are promising:

- 75% of campers report learning something new at camp.⁶
- Studies showed a statistically significant growth in thinking skills in children attending camp.⁷
- Research has shown that sleep-over camps and other experiences that allow children to travel alone may reduce children's academic losses over the summer.⁸

The American Camp Association supports systems that recognize a child's right to a developmentally appropriate approach to education: experiential learning experiences that enhance academic skills, build character, provide education and experiences in the outdoors, promote positive behavior, self-confidence, and healthy risk-taking. Providing these experiential learning opportunities for our youth becomes a challenge when an ever-creeping school calendar limits a child's ability to participate in camp experiences.

Call to Action

The American Camp Association supports and encourages the creation of strong partnerships between educational officials, community youth development professionals, and parents in determining the school calendars. (*approved 2/12/2008*)

Notes

¹ White, 1906; Heyns, 1978; Entwisle & Alexander 1992; Cooper, 1996; Downey et al, 2004.

² <http://www.naaee.org/ee-advocacy/why-we-need-both-no-child-left-inside.doc/download>.

³ Council of Chief State School Officers (2006). *Key State Education Policies on K-12 Education*.

⁴ *Directions – Youth Development Outcomes of the Camp Experience*. American Camp Association. 2005.

⁵ American Camping Association, Inc. (2002). *Creating Camp School Partnerships: A Guidebook to Success*. Martinsville, Indiana.

⁶ *Directions – Youth Development Outcomes of the Camp Experience*. American Camp Association. 2005.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pg 13.

⁸ Greene, Joelle, Ph.D. *The Summer Learning Gap*, UCLA Urban Education Studies Center. 2001.