

Research Shows Vacations Can Actually Make Kids Smarter

Study Shows Link to Academic Achievement in First Graders

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WASHINGTON, September 22, 2009 -- As the nation's children settle in for another school year, many parents and teachers wonder how the summer break affected their children's academic achievement. Analysis of a U.S. Department of Education study found that children who travel over summer break – whether to a beach, historic site or a national park – did better in reading, math and general knowledge than their peers who didn't vacation.

“The data is clear – and gives hard-working parents another reason not to put off a summer vacation trip,” said Dr. Bill Norman, Clemson University. “Providing kids with the experience of travel broadens their horizons and opens up their minds to learning.”

A series of analyses were conducted to determine the relationship between summer vacation travel and academic achievement in children entering first grade. Specifically, the study explored whether going on a vacation, the number of days spent on a vacation and places visited were linked to academic achievement in the areas of reading, mathematics and general knowledge. The results revealed a significant difference in academic achievement and taking a family summer vacation trip. Children that traveled with their family over summer vacation scored higher on academic achievement assessment tests than those who did not travel. The days spent on family summer vacation trips had a modest significant relationship with academic achievement. Lastly, children who visited plays or concerts, art or science museums, historical sites, beaches or lakes, national or state parks, and zoos or aquariums had significantly higher academic achievement scores than those who did not.

“To date there has never been a study that plainly shows the correlation between travel and academic achievement,” says Jessica Parker, researcher, Clemson University. “It was interesting to see the impact on a child when they spend vacation time away with their family.” Over three-fourths (75.2%) of the participants responded that the child had taken a family summer travel vacation prior to starting first grade. For those children that took a family summer vacation trip, the average number of days spent traveling was 11.8 days.

“The timeshare industry has always touted the importance of regular vacations for health and wellness,” says Howard Nusbaum, president and CEO, American Resort Development Association (ARDA). “This study gives families yet another strong reminder that taking vacation has benefits beyond the actual week or two of vacation.”

This research study of how vacation impacts childhood learning used the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of the Kindergarten Class database from the United States Department of Education. The database contains information on 21,600 children followed from kindergarten through fifth grades. This year study examined children's early school experiences as well as family and life experiences, such as summer activities. The parents of a subsample of 5,047 children were asked about summer travel. Academic achievement was measured with a series of standardized test in the three areas of math, reading and general knowledge.

Although the results indicate that summer vacation travel and academic achievement are linked, other factors such as income level, parent's educational level and language spoken at home may influence these findings.