



Take-Home Backpacks

A Research-Based Resource to Support
Summer Learning at Home

Introduction

Take-Home Backpacks give families and caretakers exactly what they need to help their children build skills in high-risk areas like math, reading, and writing, and to strengthen the school-home connection with real-world learning. This collection of resources covers essential educational concepts and skills needed for student success.

Each *Take-Home Backpack* includes:

- One *Kids Learn!* activity book to maintain math and literacy skills from the previous grade, and help prepare students for the next level.
- Four high-interest fiction and nonfiction books to keep students reading during their break from school.
- One *Family Engagement Guide* to give families and caretakers suggestions and ideas about how best to support student learning and growth throughout the summer.



The Logic Model

The Logic Model in Figure 1 demonstrates how *Take-Home Backpacks* are designed to extend learning and practice through the summer to mitigate or eliminate summer learning loss. Evidence of this is suggested through the resources and activities in *Take-Home Backpacks*, which are linked to positive outcomes for students. The goal of this table is to represent how utilizing *Take-Home Backpacks* can support and contribute to achieving school and district goals.

Figure 1 – Logic Model

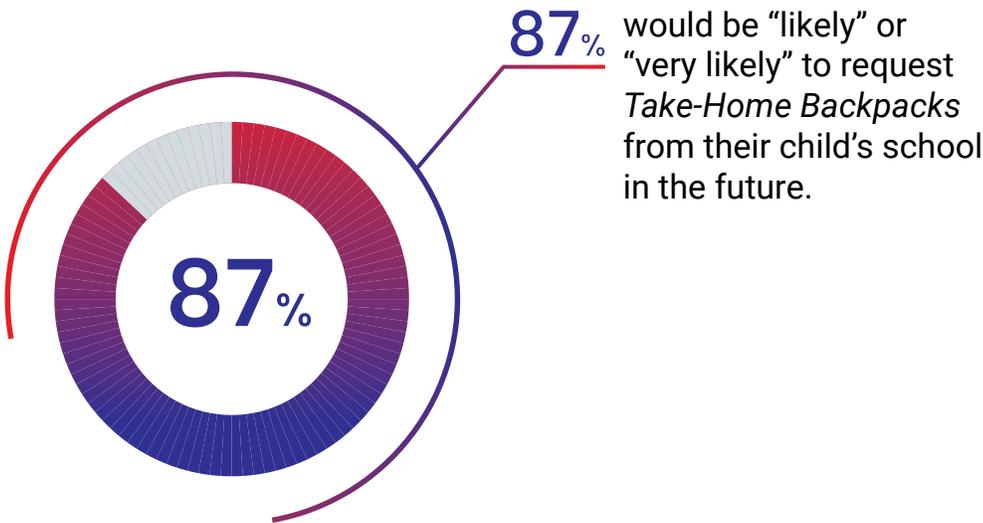
Theory of Action					
Problem Statement: There is a need to mitigate summer learning loss.	Outcome/Goal: To help students and families reduce or eliminate summer learning loss.				
Assumptions	Resources/Inputs	Activities	Outputs/Metrics	Outcomes	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School districts are interested in and prepared to provide support to students and families to mitigate summer learning loss. Students and families can reduce or eliminate summer learning loss using materials and texts to support continued learning. Providing high interest texts to engage students in reading during school breaks can reduce summer learning loss. Offering guidance and support for families and caregivers in multiple languages will help families and caretakers provide continued learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Kids Learn!</i> workbooks for grades PK-5 and high school Materials developed through collaboration of experts in the field <i>Family Engagement Guides</i> in English and Spanish Additional family/caregiver support in Arabic, Mandarin, and Creole A selection of several high-interest fiction and nonfiction books Activities in reading, writing, and mathematics Focused practice to prepare for standardized testing Student-guided activities Reflection opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly reading, writing, and mathematics lessons and activities for nine weeks Text discussion and comprehension practice Engaging activities and structured practice for students to engage with texts High-interest fiction and nonfiction texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student engagement in texts and resources Completion of lessons Reading of texts Student and parent reflections Maintenance or growth in academic success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of skills for upcoming grade level Continued practice in reading, writing, and mathematics Reduction of loss or maintenance of achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics skills Engagement in reading, writing, and mathematics Increased confidence in reading, writing, and mathematics Increased family engagement in student learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction of summer learning loss among school-aged students Increased confidence in reading, writing, and mathematics Preparation for secondary and post-secondary educational success
Logic Model					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educators provide evidence-based <i>Take-Home Backpacks</i> materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students engage in and utilize <i>Take-Home Backpacks</i> and <i>Kids Learn!</i> content and strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will build good reading practices and build vocabulary by reading engaging, student texts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will learn with the support of families and caregivers using the <i>Family Engagement Guide</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will be prepared for success in the next grade level following summer break. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will reduce or eliminate summer learning loss.

Guiding Principles

Teacher Created Materials' *Take-Home Backpacks* reinforce learning and bridge the away-from-school gap in instruction.

- Provide students with access to materials that focus on reading, writing, and mathematics while students are out of school, and provide structured practice that prevents the “summer slide.”
- A curated selection of high-interest fiction and nonfiction books from across key content areas motivates students to keep reading during breaks from school and helps to strengthen content-area literacy.
- Equip parents and caregivers with the essential tools needed to support students in accelerating learning, boosting student achievement, and preparing for the upcoming year.

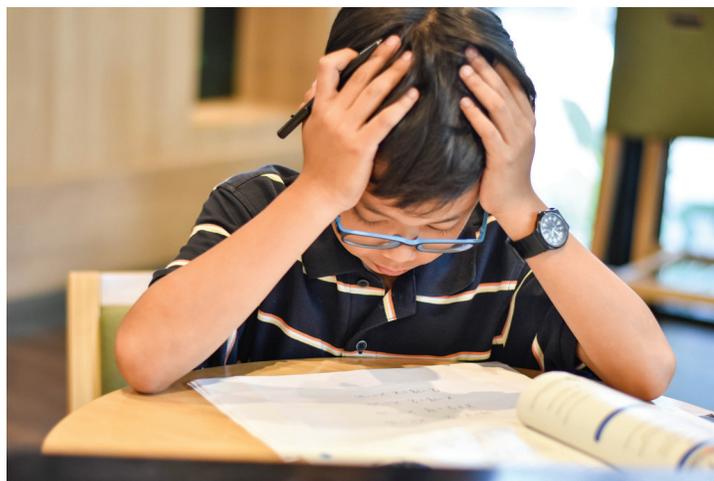
Family Feedback: *Take-Home Backpacks*



In summer 2022, Lodi Unified School District purchased *Take-Home Backpacks* for students in grades TK–6.

The Impact of Interrupted Learning

Each fall, many teachers notice their students seem to lack an understanding of the foundational skills they were taught in the previous grade. This phenomenon is referred to as the “summer slide.” This slide that teachers notice is not merely anecdotal. In actuality, the long summer break from school “can result in a one month loss of academic skills acquired during the school year” (Pennell 2020). Research shows that “children who do not participate in learning experiences over the summer year after year have an academic achievement gap that grows throughout the elementary and middle school years” (Caputo and Estrovitz 2017).



These achievement gaps can be seen across content areas. Studies conducted by Megan Kuhfeld (2019) revealed that 70–78% of elementary students lost ground in math during the summer, and 62–73% of elementary students lost ground in reading. The evidence is clear with older students as well. Kuhfeld’s research showed that 84% of students experienced a drop in math skills between elementary school and middle school (2019). The average reduction in mathematical computation skills over summer break is approximately 2.6 months of grade-level equivalency (Cooper et al. 1996). Clearly, students’ mathematical and literacy skills suffer when learning is interrupted.

It is also clear that learning loss in the summer disproportionately affects lower income students. Albee et al. (2019) report that “according to Allington et al. (2010) more than 80% of the rich/poor reading gap accumulates during the summer break from continuous reading instruction” (291). Children from affluent families tend to experience lower rates of learning loss and may even make some modest gains (Boulay and McChesney 2021). Schools can help reduce the impact of interrupted learning by providing resources for students who might otherwise not have access to them.

Take-Home Materials Help to Maintain Student Achievement

Schools can help reduce the impact of interrupted learning by providing resources for students who might otherwise not have access to them. In a study conducted by Julie Albee et al. (2019), students were given books, other reading materials, and supporting materials for families. They found that “pre-first-grade students maintained 30%–40% more reading level achievement” (296).

Results were even more pronounced in older elementary students. Rising second graders “maintained 50%–55% more reading level achievement” and “pre-third-grade students maintained 67% more reading level achievement (Albee et al. 2019, 296). The practice of sending students home with books and learning materials to read and use over the summer break is a powerful strategy to mitigate summer learning loss. This is especially true for students who “lack access to educational materials” (Alexander et al. 2017, Heyns 1978, as cited in Albee et al. 2019, 296).



Kids Learn! Books

Each *Take-Home Backpack* includes one copy of *Kids Learn!*, an activity book that provides a robust and user-friendly resource for students and families. These books engage students in continued learning and growth over summer break through nine weeks of activities that support mastery of skills and cross-curricular connections. The standards-based reading, writing, and mathematics activities both reinforce learning from the recently completed school year and prepare students for the next grade level.



Research to Practice

The *Kids Learn!* activity books support literacy, reading development, writing, numeracy, and mathematics skills. This book also engages families in their child's summer learning by offering ideas for activities to do as a family that will continue to build skills in reading, writing, and mathematics.

The collage displays several pages from the *Kids Learn! 3rd Grade* activity book:

- Front Cover:** "Kids Learn! Getting Ready for 3rd Grade" with a blue and yellow design.
- Week 1: Cones and Cylinders** - A math page with diagrams of a cylinder and a cone, formulas for volume ($V = \pi r^2 h$ and $V = \frac{1}{3} \pi r^2 h$), and problems involving a cone and a cylinder.
- Week 7: Another Fable Message** - A reading page titled "The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse" with a story and comprehension questions.
- Week 8: Who Am I?** - A literacy page featuring a poem about a bee and a drawing of a bee, with questions for students to answer.
- Week 9: Reading Bar Graphs** - A math page with a bar graph showing the frequency of different types of candy and a table for students to complete.
- Week 9: STEAM Activities Around You** - A STEAM page with an introduction to STEAM, a challenge to solve a real problem, and instructions for an investigation on baking ingredients.

High-Interest Books

Take-Home Backpacks include fiction and nonfiction books to keep children engaged in grade-appropriate content while they are away from school.

Fiction Books

Fiction books provide important exposure to literary devices, as well as situations and characters that mirror our experiences and help us understand the experiences of others. In a study reported in 2018 in the *Journal of Research in Reading*, the authors found that reading literature “can be an effective, school-based medium for social-emotional learning and development among young adolescents” (Tijms, Stoop, and Polleck 2018, 540). Though schools are charged with increasing students’ exposure to nonfiction reading, it is clear that fictional works still hold a very important place in the curriculum.

While libraries are a rich resource for children and their families, some “children who struggle with reading may not be comfortable coming to libraries for reading programs” (Caputo and Estrovitz 2017). Providing *Take-Home Backpacks* with reading, writing, and support materials is an impactful way to remove this barrier and allow students to bring their reading to whatever environment is available to them.

Nonfiction Books

Reading requirements at each grade level are expanding to include nonfiction selections (Albee et al. 2019, 293). Research shows that students must engage in reading nonfiction. While teachers recognize this need, a study conducted by Dan Li, Constance Beecher, and Byeong-Young Cho in 2018 found that teachers’ “less frequent use of other informational texts may be resulted from limited access” (18). For this reason, the nonfiction texts included in *Take-Home Backpacks* provide critical resources for students. These high-interest, nonfiction books will keep students engaged in reading grade-appropriate content and topics that include life cycles, health, community, and world culture.



Family Engagement Guide

The single most accurate predictor of academic achievement is the extent to which families engage their child in learning at home and are involved in their child's education (National PTA 2000). In her book *Being Your Child's Most Important Teacher*, Rebecca Palacios notes that breaks from school "impact student learning and progress," and that over time "these learning losses add up, and the academic achievement gap widens" (2022, 172). Palacios recommends that parents and caregivers read aloud daily to their child, talk with their child daily about their experiences, find activities in the community to experience with their child, and allow for age-appropriate technology use to build and maintain learning (2022).

While the connection to academics may be clear, there are social and behavioral benefits as well. According to a study conducted by Nermeen E. El Nokali, Heather J. Bachman, and Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal at the University of Pittsburgh (2010), "[increased] parent involvement over time were related to concomitant increases in children's social skills and declines in problem behaviors" (2010, 13). In recent years, research has emerged highlighting the need for, and value of, supporting students' social and emotional well-being. Educators recognize that "school engagement and academic achievement are impacted by students' social-emotional skills" (Tijms, Stoop, and Polleck 2018, 540). Providing support for families and caregivers along with materials for the children is critical.

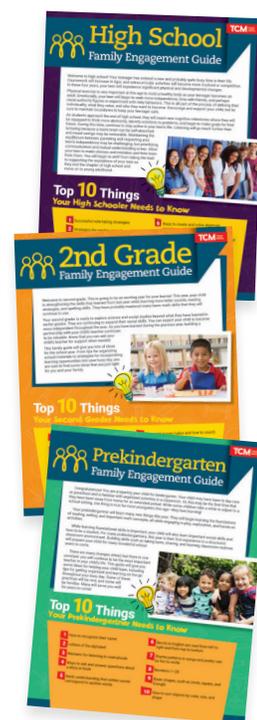


Research to Practice

The Family Engagement Guide includes helpful information for family members and/or caregivers. The guide includes:

- The "Top 10 Things" students in that grade level should know. This helps families and students focus on the skills needed for the next grade level.
- A list of grade-level appropriate texts that families may wish to check out from local libraries or purchase in addition to the books included in the backpack.
- Word play, reading rules, and spelling strategies that families and caregivers can employ with their children.
- A focus on content area skills that are foundational for that grade level.

The Family Engagement Guide allows for continued summer learning as students receive structured, relevant, and guided support from the adults in their lives.



English Learner Support

Parents want to help their children, but without the proper resources, they feel frustrated. When a parents' preferred language is not English, this can create additional barriers. A 2018 study by Stephanie Lechuga-Peña and Daniel Brisson reported challenges parents faced in helping their children with schoolwork in English and the resulting helplessness they felt. The Spanish *Family Engagement Guide* can help families and caregivers support their children.



Conclusion

Take-Home Backpacks help families and caretakers engage students in grade-appropriate content during school breaks. The combination of resources provided prevent learning loss and prepare students for the next grade.



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