Summer Learning Spotlight

Math

Early Childhood/ Elementary School Summer 2026

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Summer picnics, outings, game nights and even exercise bring opportunities to do *and* enjoy math. Support your child's math learning with frequent fun activities all summer long.

Add excitement to summer math practice

Plan some special events for your child this summer that feature math. To make building math skills appealing:

- **Stage a treasure hunt.** Hide a "treasure" in your home or yard, such as ingredients for s'mores. Write clues that involve math to lead your child to the surprise. For example: "In this room, look underneath a piece of furniture that is 36 inches wide" or "Walk up 3 x 4 stairs to find the next clue."
- **Design an obstacle course.** With your child, arrange buckets, hula hoops, beach towels and pool noodles on the ground. Tie a jump rope between two lawn chairs. At each obstacle, place an index card with a math problem, like 8 + 9, 42 ÷ 6 or 1/2 x 2/3. As players run, jump, "limbo" or crawl through the course, they must call out the solution before advancing to the next obstacle.

- **Throw a math-themed party.** Together, cut up fruit and sandwiches into geometric shapes. Decorate cookies with numbers and math symbols. Toss around a beach ball—with a math twist: Write a problem on each stripe. After catching the ball, players must solve the one closest to their right thumb.

Sharpen your child's estimation skills

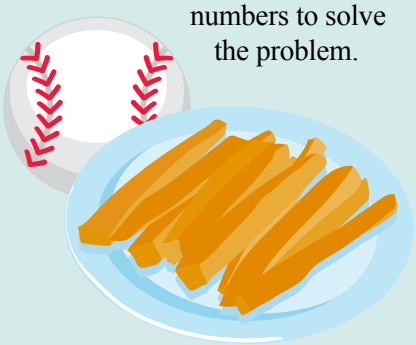
Strong estimation skills help students become accurate and efficient problem solvers. To support skill development, ask your child to:

- **Estimate quantities, times** and sizes. How long have the lifeguards been on break? How many scoops of sand will fit in that bucket? How tall is the slide?
- **Narrow it down.** Before your child estimates, ask, "What number would be way too small? Way too big?" Getting extremes out of the way sets your child up to estimate more accurately.
- **Offer a basis for comparison.** Get two identical jars. Partially fill one jar with dry beans and say how many are inside. Then, fill the other one all the way and ask your child to estimate.
- **Think out loud.** Estimate things together, and talk about how you make your estimates. ("There are about 1,200 people in the bleachers. I counted about 30 rows and about 40 people in each row and then multiplied.")

Increase comfort with story problems

Story problems, also known as word problems, can intimidate some students. To provide regular practice and make story problems easier for your child:

- **Be story problem "pen pals."** Throughout the summer, you and your child can write story problems for each other to solve. Add to the fun by leaving problems on bathroom mirrors, at place settings and under bedroom doors. Your child must solve a problem before leaving one for you!
- **Use events and outings** to inspire word problems. If you're planning snacks for the T-ball team, say, "The team has 16 players. Each player will eat 6 carrot sticks. How many carrot sticks should we bring?" Encourage your child to use objects, drawings, words and numbers to solve the problem.



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Strengthen fact fluency with math games

Games are an effective and fun way to help your child become fluent with math facts. Enjoy these easy-to-create games together:

- **Addition Four-in-a-Row.** Have your child draw a grid with 7 rows and 6 columns. Write numbers (2–12) randomly, one per square, and let each player choose a different color crayon. Take turns rolling two dice, adding the numbers, and coloring a square with the answer. The first player to color four connected squares—vertically, horizontally or diagonally—wins.
- **Subtraction "War."** Remove 10s, face cards and jokers from a deck of cards. Deal four cards to each player. Players arrange their cards to make two two-digit numbers. (For 3, 5, 6, and 9, a player might create 96 and 35.) Then they subtract the smaller number from the larger one. The player with the largest difference wins the round and keeps all the cards. (Keep scrap paper and pencil handy!)
- **Capture Times Squares.** Get a sheet of graph paper and give each player a different colored pen. Players take turns rolling two dice, multiplying the numbers and drawing a box around that many squares on the graph paper. (For 6 x 7, draw a box 6 rows and 7 columns wide.) Write the answer (42) in the box. The game ends when no one has room to play or after three consecutive rounds. The player with the most squares wins.

Exercise for math fitness

Planning and tracking physical activity is a healthy way to practice math. To strengthen math fitness:

- **Mark walking, hiking** and biking paths on a map for your family to explore this summer. Ask your child to calculate the length of each route and estimate how much time to set aside for an outing. If your family hikes at 3 mph, how long will it take to hike a 6-mile trail, including breaks?
- **Graph physical activity.** Have your child make a chart using a different color for each type of activity and graph time spent on it. At the end of the summer, have your child add up the total time spent being active.

Count down to math mastery

To build your child's number sense and subtraction skills, announce a day when family members count everything—backward! Try these activities when you are:

- **Playing outside.** Write numbers on a hopscotch grid in reverse order, using smaller or larger numbers depending on your child's age. Players jump and count backward. Practice while jumping rope, too. Set a goal for how many jumps in a row you'll do, then count backward from that number as you jump.
- **Traveling.** In the car, let your child look at your GPS and count down the miles to your destination aloud ("24, 23, 22 …"). During longer trips, have your child skip-count backward, announcing your progress every five or 10 miles. For an extra challenge, ask your child to count down by multiples of a number like 7 or 11 ("132, 121, 110 …").
- **Going on a picnic.** Cut sandwiches, apples or carrot sticks into fourths or eighths. Each person starts with 1 whole and counts back after eating each fractional piece: ¾, ½, ¼. Do this with percents, too: 100%, 75%, 50%, 25%.

Shape up geometry

Foster spatial reasoning and geometry skills with activities that go where you and your child do:

- **Create take-along puzzles.** Give each person an index card. Draw lines from edge to edge to divide it into squares, rectangles and triangles. Shade in each shape with a different color, then cut them apart. Pack each puzzle in a separate bag. On outings, trade puzzles and put them back together.
- **Get sporty.** What's bigger, a soccer field or a football field? Have your child research the length and width of sports facilities your family visits, then calculate the area of each.

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