

# The Huntsville Times

## Program looks to make an impact

**Cost for students: zero; value of the program could really be priceless**

By Paul Gattis  
Times Staff Writer  
paul.gattis@htimes.com  
June 14, 2010

The sky is blue, the sun is bright and school is in session.

No, not a multiple choice question for which one doesn't belong. But summer and studies are no longer mutually exclusive.

Impact Alabama, a not-for-profit organization, is sponsoring a tuition-free three-week course to help students prepare to take advanced placement classes in the fall or sustain the knowledge learned in just-completed AP classes.

The classes started June 7 at the University of Alabama in Huntsville with 30 students from Huntsville and Madison County. There are 90 more students taking the same courses in Birmingham.

The objective is to quickly expand it to lure more students away from the summer, at least temporarily.

“Hopefully, next year we will serve over 500 kids,” said Stephen Black, the president of Impact Alabama. The organization is partnering with the A+ College Ready program on the CollegeFirst classes.

With sponsorship funds from Boeing and the law firm of Maynard, Cooper and Gale as well as grant money, there is no cost to students.

But the benefits may well be priceless.



*Glenn Baeske/The Huntsville Times*  
Sparkman High students Drema Jones, left, and L.J. Vining, third from left, keep their academic skills sharp at a CollegeFirst program with the help of University of Alabama in Huntsville tutors Thao Tran, second from left, and Daniel Brown.

“Kids who take and pass just one AP exam from a course in high school are three times more likely to be successful in college,” Black said. “It’s the most immediate, concrete way to help ensure, as best you can, success in college.”

Melanie Dalton, an AP chemistry teacher at Sparkman High School who is also one of the summer program’s teachers, agreed.

“Statistically, that’s true,” she said. “If you take even one AP class, you tend to do better at university and complete your degree.”

The classes students are more focused on than summer vacation are chemistry, biology and calculus. And don’t forget that AP classes can translate into college credit.

“We’ve had students come in with as many as a whole semester’s worth of high school credits through AP,” said John Fix, the dean of the College of Science at UAH. “They are off to a flying start.”

The program also gives students a snapshot of the college experience by attending classes on campus and interacting with college students. In Huntsville, the 30 AP students work with 28 students from UAH and the University of Alabama.

“It’s also a time to mingle with college kids, which may sound like the softer side of the value of this,” said Tina Watts, who works in community relations for Boeing. “But you can’t overestimate the value of college students having concrete conversations with these students.”

But what about the students who could wistfully look out the window on a hot summer day? For two students, Drema Jones and L.J. Vining, it didn’t matter because they were more attentive to their chemistry lab.

“It’s a prep for AP chem because a lot of us need the extra practice and work to get ahead and do better in school,” said Vining, a rising junior at Sparkman.

And in this world that promotes getting ahead, these students are getting ahead.

“I think they should (take the class) if they want to improve their academic level,” said Jones, another rising junior from Sparkman. “And it’s also free.”

Hey, mixing economics with chemistry. All the better.

## **Keep kids busy to avoid summer academic slide**

By Pat Ammons Newcomb  
*June 14, 2010*

Are you worried your children's brains will be oozing out their ears after a summer of video games and television?

In academic circles, it's called the summer slide or slump.

According to the National Summer Learning Institute's website:

- Without educational activities during the summer, young people experience learning losses. Research shows 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.
- Most students lose about two months of grade-level equivalency in mathematical skills over the summer months. Low-income students also lose more than two months in reading achievement.
- More than half of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities.
- Children gain weight more rapidly when they are out of school during summer break.
- Parents cite summer as the most difficult time to ensure that their children have productive things to do.

The 30 students attending the CollegeFirst program that began on June 7 at the University of Alabama in Huntsville are getting a jump start on advanced placement classes they'll be taking in the fall. The students voluntarily signed up to spend three weeks in classrooms and labs on the UAH campus to stay academically fresh.

But not all children keep learning when school's out.

"Summer slide is a real phenomenon," said Stephen Black, president of Impact Alabama, the not-for-profit organization that is partnering with A+ College Ready on the CollegeFirst program.

While teachers have been handing out summer work for a long time, "that has been handled with varying levels of success," said Mary Boehm, president of A+ College Ready, a division of A+ Education Partnership.

"More than half of the achievement gap present in ninth grade between lower- and higher-income children can be explained by summer learning loss," Boehm said. "That relates to what higher income parents are able to do," such as send their kids to dance classes and summer camps and go on trips.

"That leads to educational development of another kind," Boehm said.

To keep kids' minds sharp during the summer, Boehm suggests parents encourage them to read. Sign up for the summer reading program at the public library or check out books on summer reading lists, even if your child's teacher isn't requiring the book.

- Get them involved in sports, which keeps kids healthy and active as well as teaches them teamwork.
- Get them outside and away from the television and video games. That will help with obesity and exercise the mind.

- Practice math skills in the grocery store or the mall.

"Part of summer slide research shows it's important to provide (children) with opportunities to have intellectual activities," Black said.

The National Summer Learning Association has several links to help parents keep their kids academically sharp while they're out of school for the summer:

#### Scholastic Summer Reading Challenge

[www.scholastic.com/summerreading/index.htm](http://www.scholastic.com/summerreading/index.htm)

This free summer-long literacy program is designed to motivate children to read four or more books. The Summer Challenge site also features resources for educators and parents.

#### Active Bodies Active Minds

[www.mlssoccer.com/mls\\_works](http://www.mlssoccer.com/mls_works)

This site provides summer reading and fitness challenges designed by Summer Bridge Activities and Major League Soccer to help kids stay sharp and fit over the summer.

#### Reading Is Fundamental

[www.rif.org](http://www.rif.org)

RIF's Summer Reading Guide has tips, book ideas and a daily calendar of summer reading activities.

#### Read Write Think

[Thinkfinity.org](http://Thinkfinity.org)

This site has a range of summer activities that promote "Learning Beyond the Classroom" for K-12 children and youth.

#### Freshbrain.org

[www.freshbrain.org](http://www.freshbrain.org)

Freshbrain.org offers an online summer camp focused on multimedia development and production including application development, graphic design, music mixing and robotics.

#### Exploratorium

[www.exploratorium.edu](http://www.exploratorium.edu)

Exploratorium is a virtual science center with exhibits, interactive tools and modules, as well as science projects.

#### American Library Association

[www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)

The ALA has tips on making the most of the trip to the library.