The Summer Slide: Keeping adult learners connected in July and August

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Last week, 46 adult learners completed their year in North Shore Community Action Program’s ESOL program in Peabody. Before I joined NSCAP as the Director of Adult Basic Education last August, I had heard a lot of great things about the annual certificate ceremony at City Hall. As promised, it was a wonderful morning with family, friends and local politicians joining in the celebration.  It’s not easy for students to commit to 12-hours-a-week of classes for a year *and* juggle work, family and life’s many demands. But these folks did it, and saw major gains in their English as a result.

Now it’s officially summertime. Our classes are done and teachers are on break. It’s time to kick back and soak up the sun and surf. Well, sort of. Thirty of those 46 adult learners are slated to return for classes at NSCAP in September — which will be here before we know it. So, how do you keep students connected to their learning in July and August?

We’re trying a few different approaches to encourage independent learning this summer. Our hope is that come September, teachers will be able to spend less time reviewing and more time tackling higher order learning expectations of the new Common Core state standards.

**How to keep adult learners connected during the summer:**

* **Weekly drop-in conversation circles**This summer, we’re inviting enrolled students to “drop-in” on weekly conversation groups facilitated by myself and volunteers. The goal is to keep the discussions interesting and focused enough to encourage learners to return each week, yet fluid enough to relieve them of the guilt of missing class if the kids are sick or they are on vacation. For those that can’t make the sessions at NSCAP, we’ve encouraged them to join similar sessions at their [local library.](http://www.massliteracy.org/resources/list/english-conversation-circles-at-peabody-institute-library/)
* **Distance learning** We’re also encouraging enrolled students to come in to use our laptops and computer lab for guided online learning via [USALearns.org.](http://usalearns.org/index/welcome.cfm?CFID=15073473&CFTOKEN=77055823&jsessionid=3c3023b1d34c51ce01787054d1483e1a1860) In addition to being user-friendly and engaging, this free site from the U.S. Department of Education allows instructors to monitor student progress and provide encouragement and feedback. Our hope is that the drop-in sessions will prompt learners to continue work on the site from home. Other sites we love for self-directed learning online include tried-and-true ESOL sites like [http://a4esl.org](http://a4esl.org/), [VOA Learning English](http://learningenglish.voanews.com/) and [5 Minute English](http://www.5minuteenglish.com/)
* **Facebook** The goal of our new Facebook page is to give our social-media-savvy students another channel through which to learn about community events, find online learning resources and connect with classmates. If it takes off, we hope that the Facebook page will also be a place where NSCAP ESOL alumni share their success stories.
* **Texting**During the year, our Beginner ESOL instructor used text messages to communicate with her students when they are running late or need to miss class. This summer, she’s invited them to practice their English by sending her texts and emails. Admittedly, this approach won’t suit everyone, but a handful of students have already taken her up on the offer.

The great thing about all of these approaches to summer learning is that they cost very little time and money to implement. And whether or not they lead to measurable gains in September, the opportunity to engage with students during breaks goes a long way towards building a supportive learning community all year long.

How are you engaging ABE and ESOL learners during summer break? Please feel free to share your own program’s approach  in the comments.

- See more at: http://www.massliteracy.org/the-summer-slide-keeping-adult-learners-connected-in-july-and-august/#sthash.H6Lb7xTQ.dpuf