

# Is Summer Vacation Bad for You?

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AMERICAN KIDS LIKE YOU ARE FALLING BEHIND STUDENTS IN OTHER COUNTRIES. WOULD YOU GIVE UP SUMMER BREAK TO CATCH UP?

Summer is just around the corner! Would you like to kick it off by: (a) going to camp, (b) traveling with your family, (c) spending long, lazy days at the beach, or (d) staying in school?

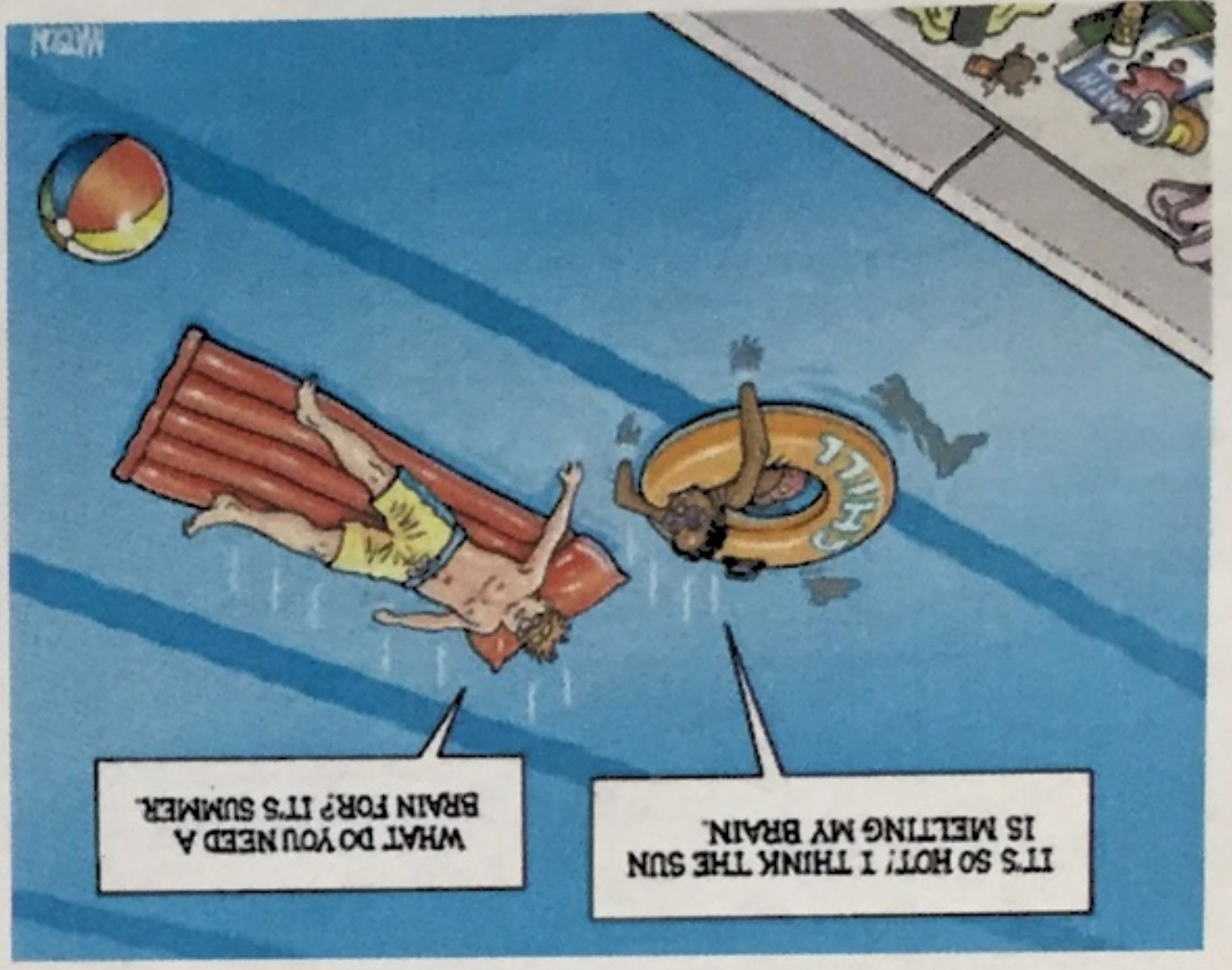
Chances are, staying in school is not your top pick. But for more than 2.5 million kids who attend year-round schools across the United States, going to school in the summer is the *only* option.

## Stress Less, Learn More

If you haven't heard much about year-round school, just wait—you will. American public schools are in crisis, experts say. Students in the U.S. are lagging behind those in China, South Korea, Germany, and other countries. President Obama and educational experts are calling for big changes—and keeping schools open all year is one idea that is catching on fast. The U.S. already has about 3,000 year-round schools. Now, before you go through with the plans you just made to run away and live in the woods, keep in mind that most year-round schools have exactly the same number of school

and vacation days as traditional-calendar schools. The difference is in the way those days are organized. Year-round schools shorten summer break, often to about 5 weeks, then use that leftover vacation time during the rest of the year. You might, for example, get a three-week break in the fall, winter, and spring. Experts say this type of calendar has clear benefits. With less time out of the classroom over the summer, most students don't need as much review when they return. Plus, the

opportunity to relax and recharge throughout the year prevents students—and teachers—from becoming exhausted. The bottom line: less stress and more learning. Some year-round schools offer optional classes during vacation weeks. These "intersession" classes are surprisingly popular among students, who can use them to get extra help in difficult subjects or take fun, creative classes in subjects ranging from karate to screenwriting. Some year-round schools operate



CARTOON BY R.J. MATSON

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on "multitrack" systems, meaning students and teachers are divided into groups. Each group runs on its own schedule, with at least one group on vacation at any given time. Multitracking is used to reduce overcrowding, a problem at many U.S. schools.

## An American Tradition

This all sounds good to some people, but critics worry about the expense of intersession classes and multitrack schools, which have to pay for extra weeks of everything, from buses to air-conditioning and teachers' salaries. Other people insist that summer vacation is an American tradition, a time for families to reconnect and for kids to recover from the academic and social stresses of school. Many people believe that summer experiences like camp, visiting museums, and traveling are just as enriching as school.

But supporters of year-round school say that the long summer vacation is outdated. The tradition began at a time when many schools were unbearably hot during the summer, and when most moms did not work outside the home. Now, we have air conditioning, and most moms are at work all day. For many kids—particularly those whose parents cannot afford to send them to camp or other programs—summer days are often spent indoors, playing video games and watching TV. The world has changed. Could it be time for summer vacation to change too?

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TAKE THIS ACTIVITY FURTHER! WRITE AN ESSAY USING OUR SCOPE TEMPLATE.

EXAMINE POINTS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE—AS WELL AS YOUR OWN BELIEFS—and decide what you think about this issue. State your opinion in one sentence below. It can become a thesis statement for an essay on this topic.

Handwritten notes on lined paper:

1 More frequent school breaks keep kids and teachers from getting burned out.

2

3

YES  
IT'S BRILLIANT!

NO  
IT'S TERRIBLE!

## What Do You Think?

IS YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL A GOOD IDEA? Go back to the article to find arguments that support each side of this debate. Write the information on the lines below.

