



School's Out: East Bay kids ask state lawmakers how they spent their childhood summers

By Katy Murphy
Oakland Tribune

Posted: 06/27/2011 12:00:00 AM PDT

Updated: 06/27/2011 09:36:38 AM PDT

SACRAMENTO -- On the first day of summer, yellow school buses unloaded dozens of students from the Mt. Diablo, San Francisco and Sacramento school districts in front of the state Capitol.

It might have looked like a typical field trip, but it was more than that. The students came to Sacramento to champion a cause that experts believe will help them and their classmates succeed in school: high-quality summer programs in low-income neighborhoods.

Gagan Lally, a 12-year-old from Bay Point, said she couldn't take yet another summer of "staying home, sleeping in and hanging around the house," so she enrolled in a program at Riverview Middle School where she's playing sports, taking field trips and eating nutritious

food. She said she worries about some of her friends who haven't done the same.

"When I'm going home, I see them on the streets with some older kids that they really shouldn't be with," Gagan said. "They could be in a safer place instead of having peer pressure with whatever they're doing with them."

Research shows that the "summer slide" -- the loss of knowledge during the extended vacation -- adds up and that it tends to most deeply affect children from poor families. A Johns Hopkins sociologist who tracked 800 Baltimore public schoolchildren from first grade through high school found that two-thirds of the socioeconomic achievement gap in the ninth grade could be traced back to the summer months. State Sen. Mark DeSaulnier

said that research opened his eyes to the importance of summer learning opportunities for children and teenagers, which have been

diminished in some areas by budget cuts.

"It seems like it's a really good investment to keep," he said. "We need to find funding -- public or private -- to make sure programs that are working right now continue to work."

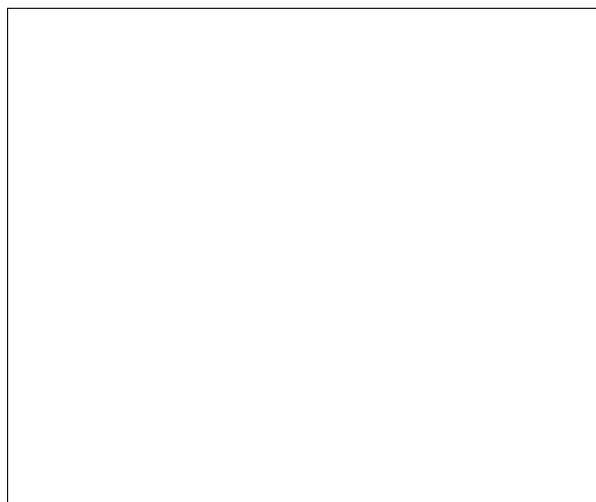
By 10 a.m. Tuesday, the sun was beating down on the group of young lobbyists gathered at the Capitol steps. The temperature reached 100 degrees that afternoon, as if to highlight the event's summertime theme.

After the speeches ended, the students headed inside, pocket camcorders in hand, for prearranged interviews with a dozen public officials, including state Sens. DeSaulnier and Loni Hancock and assembly members Susan Bonilla and Nancy Skinner.

"Growing up, what was one of your favorite summers?" Gagan asked DeSaulnier in his office, after informing him that she might run for his seat in a few years.

After the interview, the senator took Gagan and some of her classmates on an unexpected insider's tour of the Capitol. DeSaulnier led them through the members' entrance of the state Senate and Assembly chambers. He explained how bills and voting worked and noted how the Legislature, once composed exclusively of white men, was evolving to reflect California's diversity.

"In your lifetime, this is going to change so dramatically," he told them.





Then he let them sit in his seat -- Gagan, first.

The Oakland-based Partnership for Children and Youth organized the Summer Matters event. Some of the footage collected on Tuesday will be posted at [facebook.com/SummerMatters2You](https://www.facebook.com/SummerMatters2You).

Read Katy Murphy's Oakland schools blog at www.IBAbuzz.com/education. Follow her at [Twitter.com/katymurphy](https://twitter.com/katymurphy).



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™