

The Tutor Times

VOLUME II, ISSUE 2

JUNE 16, 2010

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Tutoring Students with Special Needs 2

Getting Credit for College: AP & IB Exams 4

Summer Tutoring

By: *Laura Smith*



Summer is finally here! Your sons and daughters have had a long, strenuous, and hopefully productive year, and they deserve a little vacation time. The job now is to balance their leisure with preparation for the coming year. We encourage you to think of summer as an opportunity for your child to reinforce topics covered in the pre-

vious year as well as get a jump-start on next year's material.

President and CEO of the Nellie Mae Foundation states, "the findings regarding summer learning loss are profound."¹ Nellie Mae compiled findings from 39 studies on children's learning during the summer months and found that "children lose an average of 2.6 months of grade level-equivalency in math and reading over the summer."² (See the chart on page 3 on the effects of summer on California test scores). The chart demonstrates that the removal from the classroom during the summer is an obstacle in learning progresses.

That's why we take a two-pronged approach to tutoring at Commonwealth Education to ensure continuous academic success by reinforcing the material from last year and offering preparatory exposure to information for the coming year. How your child fairs academically in those first months of the new school year determines how the rest of the school year will go. Think of it like a track race: if the runner starts on shaky footing, he or she will spend the rest of the race playing catch up. On the other hand, a strong start means that the runner only has to maintain what they

(continued on page 3)



(703) 241-5416 (o)
(703) 268-1032 (c)

Tutoring Students with Special Needs

By: Sara Stanton

Tutoring students with special needs can be challenging and sometimes overwhelming. In order to effectively meet the needs of students, a tutor must be creative and engaging. The study environment must be conducive to the various learning styles of students with special needs. There are several strategies tutors can use to ensure all students comprehend and retain new information.

When introducing a new topic to students, direct instruction is very effective to access students' prior knowledge of the topic and to introduce the new concept. When using direct instruction, teachers utilize the following three steps that translate well to one-on-one tutoring: First: I do it. The tutor demonstrates the new task for students, such as reading a passage or completing a math problem. Second: You do it. The student practices the new task independently. Third: We do it. Together, the tutor and the student will review the new material. During this time the student may ask questions to clarify unclear concepts and the teacher can assess the student's comprehension of the new task.

Effective questioning is another strategy that can be used to assess prior knowledge and introduce new topics to stu-

Effective questions stimulate interest in the topic, clarify concepts, emphasize key points, enhance problem-solving ability, encourage higher order thinking, motivate students to search for new information, and assesses students' prior knowledge to aid in modifying instruction. Effective questions are open-ended questions, not questions that require a simple yes or no response. They are not "why" questions, but rather "what" or "how" questions. Effective questioning encourages the student to think about the question, activate prior knowledge, and ask further questions to clarify the topic being presented.

“The study environment is critical to student success.”

(Continued on page 5)



The Tutor Times is a publication of Commonwealth Education, a leading provider of private one-on-one tutoring in the following areas:

- SAT/ACT Preparation
- All School Subjects
- College/High School Application Assistance
- Basic Study Skills

Summer Tutoring (cont'd)

are already doing. All can agree that it's far less stressful to be in the second category. By exposing the student to new information, a tutor can anticipate problems before they leave a permanent mark on your son's or daughter's report card. As parents, we invest so much time and energy into giving our children a leg-up. Why not do the same academically?

Consider weekly tutoring sessions that focus on the previous year and the coming year's course load. Once or twice a week is a palatable amount of time to most students, but is consistent enough for the child to retain the information. Weekly tutoring also prepares your child emotionally for the idea of going back to school, and sends the message that you are never truly done learning. As you get closer to the commencement of the school year, consider throwing an additional tutoring session into the mix, to prepare them for the rigors of going back to school.

Talk to your child's teachers about the materials that will be covered in the coming year if you are unsure. Also consider talking to the prior year's teachers to discuss what subjects your child found especially difficult. You will find that when your child is comfortable and feels well prepared in the classroom, their confidence will skyrocket. The summer is too great of an opportunity to waste!

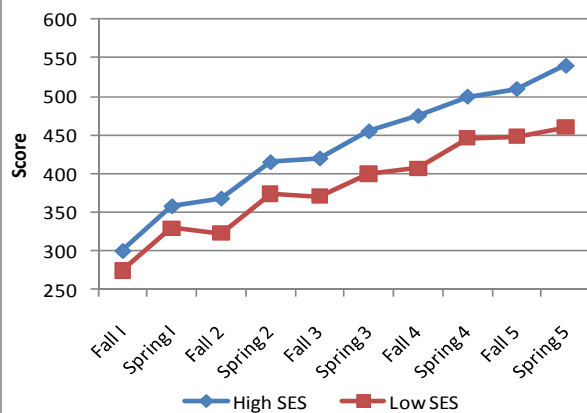
(1) http://www.nmefdn.org/uploads/Learning_Season_ES.pdf

(2) http://www.nmefdn.org/uploads/Learning_Season_ES.pdf



Laura is an English and Humanities, French, SAT, ACT, and study skills tutor for Commonwealth Education. She earned her B.A. in English Literature from the University of Virginia.

Verbal Scores, California Achievement Tests, by SES and Season (Alexander, Entwistle, and Olson, 2001)



Getting Credit for College: AP and IB exams

By: Leah Nelson

In today's economy, paying for college is becoming an increasing challenge for all students and parents. Many colleges have approved drastic increases in tuition and fees, yet obtaining a degree is as crucial as ever in the job market. It is smart for high school students who know they will attend college to get college credits while still in high school. This may be an opportunity to graduate early and cut down on expensive tuition costs, or maybe just an opportunity to knock out general education requirements or pre-requisites now in favor of taking courses in the major right away. This article will focus on two of the most prevalent and accessible ways to gain college credit during high school: Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate examinations.

Advanced Placement

Many high schools offer Advanced Placement (AP) courses, which are taught at the college level and are based on a curriculum supplied by the College Board (the same organization that runs the SAT). In addition to looking good on a high school transcript, students have the option to take examinations upon completion of the course that are recognized by many colleges for credit or placement. Different high schools may offer different AP course offerings ranging from psychology to art and physics to Latin. At many schools, students may take AP courses as early as their sophomore or junior year, so there is a lot of opportunity to take many exams for credit. Check with your guidance counselor to see which AP courses are available at your school.

Exams may be taken at the conclusion of the

course. Exams are scored on a 5-point scale, with 5 being the highest score possible. Some colleges may award credit for a score of 3 or better on certain examinations, while others require a score of 4 or 5 to receive transfer credit. The College Board collects data from many colleges regarding their AP credit policy, which can be accessed from their website:

<http://collegesearch.collegeboard.com/apcreditpolicy/index.jsp>

It's important to research several AP credit policies before signing up for courses. The College Board site is a good resource, as is the Registrar's Office page for each college you may be interested in. As each school sets their own policy, some schools may limit the amount of credit that can be awarded or require higher scores for credit than others. Some schools may award credit for specific courses where others may offer only exemptions from certain requirements. If earning college credit is important, do your research on college policies, or ask your admissions counselor.

International Baccalaureate

International Baccalaureate (IB) is a world-wide program ranging from primary-level education through high school. If your school district offers IB programs, see your counselor regarding admissions procedures and curriculum information. Like AP, IB courses look impressive to college admissions officers and offer college-level examinations at the conclusion of a course. IB examinations are offered at

(continued on page 6)

Special Needs (cont'd)

Graphic organizers are an effective tool to use with special needs students. Graphic organizers help students to outline important information in a large amount of text. A KWL chart is effective when introducing new material. The K stands for what a student already *knows* about a subject. .. Here, a student will list everything he/she knows about the topic being discussed. The W stands for what a student *wants* to learn. After reviewing what a student already knows, teachers can use effective questioning to encourage further discussion about the topic. The L stands for what a student has *learned*. Tutors are able to assess what the student understands about the new topic based on their answers in this area of the chart.

The study environment is critical to student success. A noisy, cluttered area can easily frustrate a student with special needs. In order to organize the learning environment for the student, teachers create work stations for students to

work on one task at a time. Tutors can use similar methods. Write key points on a notepad for the student to see. Hand out materials on at a time. Teach organizational skills, such as maintaining a binder with dividers.

An organized, prepared tutor will have much more success working with special needs students. Remember to set expectations high; encourage questions, positively reinforce student participation, and assess student comprehension continuously when reviewing new/unclear information.



Sara currently helps Commonwealth Education with curriculum alignment, and is a full-time special education teacher at the Community School of Maryland in Brookeville, MD. She earned her psychology degree from American, and her masters in special education from George

KWL Chart Template

What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I Learned

AP and IB exams (cont'd)

in each subject and at each school. Higher Level courses cover a broader range of material than Standard Level courses. Typically, students seeking the IB diploma take 3 HL subjects and 3 SL subjects in order to specialize in an area of study. All examinations are graded on a scale of 1-7, with 7 being the highest possible score.

Credit policies for IB examinations vary greatly, most notably in recognition of SL examinations. As noted on the IB website, many schools do not recognize SL examinations for college credit, while there are many that do. The recognition summaries for each state detail the difference in policy, as well as the range of acceptable scores (anywhere from 3 to 5 as a minimum score for credit):

Recognition summaries by state:

<http://ibo.org/diploma/recognition/recognitionpolicy/>

Search policies by school:

<http://www.ibo.org/diploma/recognition/directory/index.cfm>

Therefore, when considering IB examinations as a way of getting ahead and college, it is extremely important to research each college's policy to know what type of credit is available. For example, if a student in an IB program is interested in placing out of History in a college that only recognizes Higher Level examinations, that student would be encouraged to take History at the Higher Level as opposed to the Standard Level, assuming this level is recommended by the guidance counselor.

Conclusion

There are many opportunities for students to plan ahead with college credit even before graduating from high school. AP and IB examinations are two common methods of doing so, but require careful planning to ensure that the credit will be recognized when the students goes on to college. There are other options: dual enrollment programs, summer programs at colleges, or taking courses at the local community college are just a few. In each case, students should do their research, especially if they have a particular college in mind or hope to avoid taking certain classes in college. When in doubt, consult your guidance counselor or a trusted college counselor to help you navigate your options and choose the path that is right for you.



Leah helps Commonwealth Education students with the college and high school application process. She graduated from William and Mary with a B.A. in Sociology and also earned a M.Ed. in Counselor Education from the University of Virginia.



Commonwealth Education was founded by Ryan and Maria Garton to meet the tutoring needs of students in greater Washington, D.C. and in Richmond, Virginia. Both have more than ten years of experience tutoring students in a wide variety of subjects.

Ryan is responsible for the day-to-day operations of Commonwealth Education, including the coordination of tutors and students. He has tutored students of all ages, from middle-school to adult literacy students. He currently also volunteers as a literacy tutor and tutor trainer for the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia.

Ryan received his B.A. from the University of Virginia, and his Masters from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Email Ryan at Ryan@CommonwealthEdu.com.



Maria provides advisory and oversight functions for Commonwealth Education and provides Spanish assistance for our students. She has worked with Spanish-speaking students learning English in both classroom and individual settings. She has also tutored fellow students in English and in the Sciences.

Maria received her B.S. from the University of Virginia and her J.D. from Columbia Law School. Maria currently practices law in Washington, D.C.

CommonwealthEdu.com

Office: 703.241.5416

Mobile: 703.268.1032

Fax: 703.241.1148

107 Falls Avenue
Falls Church, VA 22046