What Parents Need to Know About Summer Enrichment Camps

Every year, parents are faced with the same question: how to make the summer both fun and constructive for their kids. More families are turning to summer enrichment programs as a way of adding value to the summer camp experience.

But not all summer enrichment camps are created equal. That’s why choosing the right enrichment program for your kids can make all the difference in the long-term value it provides.

Here are some points to consider when evaluating programs for your son or daughter for this summer.

Does the area of enrichment have any practical application to your child’s academic future?

Enrichment programs are an investment, not only in the money it costs parents, but also in opportunity time for the student. Several camps that position themselves as “enrichment programs” are not much more than glorified and expensive vacations for the students who attend. Do the kids like these camps? You bet. But before signing up, take a good look at the program’s schedule of activities. Close inspection may reveal that there’s far more downtime and unstructured free time than there is quality enrichment.

There’s nothing wrong with indulging your son or daughter in one of these programs, some of which are held in Europe, on cruise ships and in tropical locations. Just know that there may be little or no lasting value to the student or the parents in this investment.

Look at the stated benefits of a program and at the sessions offered. Do the activities match your child’s areas of interest? Will the instruction enhance your child’s development academically and personally?

What kind of training and expertise does the staff possess?

If a summer program bills itself as providing new skills to participants, then make a point to learn about the background of the staff who will teach these skills. Are the program leaders teachers themselves or experts in a particular field? Also, inquire as to the training they receive. Many summer programs scramble at the last minute to hire summer staff and, as a result, the experience and training of some staff members may be lacking.

Is there a balance between learning and fun?

The last thing a student needs in summer is more school. A good summer enrichment program gives students the feeling that they’re at camp, not back at school. While some
programs try to combine learning and fun by giving the campers adequate free time, the best camps incorporate fun right into the learning.

When a student enjoys the learning process, the brain does a better job of assimilating and retaining the new information.

In what ways can a program enrich a student’s life?
When most people hear “summer enrichment” they think of academic enrichment. Clearly, when students are able to acquire new skills in such areas as creative writing, reading comprehension, problem solving and critical thinking, they benefit. But if a camp offers them growth in life skills areas that build their confidence, motivation and self-esteem, as well as their communication and leadership skills, then you’ve found a summer enrichment program that can help a student grow in school and in life.

What’s a good length of time for a summer enrichment camp?
There is no set length that is best. Students do benefit from some downtime in the summer, so a program that runs three or more weeks may be too long for some kids and too expensive for many parents.

On the other hand, camps that last just a few days will have limited or temporary value.

Similarly, day camps don’t have the same impact as residential enrichment camps, where students get to stay on-site for the duration of the program.

Teens, in particular, are nocturnal. Some of the best learning can come in the evening sessions of summer programs.

Look for enrichment camps held on college campuses. Middle school and high school students enjoy the experience of living in college dorms for a week or more. It can even prove to be inspirational as they begin to think about college.

In summary, take the time to investigate your summer enrichment options thoroughly because sending your son or daughter to the right summer enrichment program can pay long-term dividends for the entire family. Newly acquired academic skills, increased motivation and added confidence can translate into better grades, and can lead to new academic and personal interests. In turn, this growth can lead to better colleges, college scholarships and, ultimately, rewarding careers.