

By — Margaret Webb Pressler, Published: March 6, 2012 The Washington Post

Going the extra-school mile



MARK GAIL/The Washington Post - Kevin Hunter, left, answers a math problem during Saturday school at George B. Thomas Sr. Learning Academy. Watching Hunter is, clockwise from top, Adam Guerrero, Kevin Bolanos and Kevin Morales.

Ahh, there's nothing like a weekend. You get to sleep in, watch TV, play outside, be lazy, go to school.

Wait, go to *school*?

For a lot of kids, the day after Friday isn't about cartoons, it's about school — not the same school they go to during the week, but extra instruction on specific subjects. Sometimes kids need a little extra help in reading or math, while others may go to learn a language or get religious instruction.

It's actually fun

You might be surprised to hear this, but the kids who go to school on weekends often enjoy it!

“There’s nothing I don’t like,” said Rami Najjar, 9, of Potomac, who spends 2¹ / 2 hours at Arabic school every Saturday morning with his two younger siblings.

The kids get prizes when they do well, he said, and they have recess. His parents, who are from Lebanon, are fluent in English but speak Arabic at home. School helps the kids learn to read and write the language.

No wasted brain power

Kids like to have something to do, so a little extra school can make the whole day more fun. Think about it: When you have nothing to do all day, it’s easy to get bored – and waste time on things that don’t use your brain.

At the George B. Thomas Sr. Learning Academy, which runs the Saturday school program in Montgomery County, students knew exactly what they would be doing if they were at home instead:

“Playing video games at home like any other kid,” said Khalif Welch, 8, of Silver Spring.

“Relaxing and playing on the computer,” said Kate Huaynate, 11.

But Kate, who lives in Silver Spring, said she got tired of playing with electronics, so she asked her parents if she could go to Saturday school. She especially likes that the classes are small and fun, she said.

On a recent Saturday, kids were doing math exercises with playing cards and other games to sharpen their skills as they giggled. It seems to work. “I didn’t know number lines, but here I figured it out,” Adam Guerrero, 9, said with pride.

Seeing the results

“My math grades used to be B’s all the time, and now it’s A’s,” said Selena Srirattanapirom, 11, describing the effect of spending extra time in school.

Extra school can have other benefits besides better grades.

Max Micheli, 12, of the District, is in his third year at the School of Religion (SOR) through his church, the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

This year, the seventh-grader is learning about “the gifts that God gives us,” he said, in preparation for his confirmation in the Catholic Church next year.

He goes from 9 to 10:15 on Sunday mornings, and he enjoys the discussions he has there. “I think it affects my decisions,” he said. “It makes me think in a different way.”

For most kids, of course, the big draw for school on the weekends is that it’s a social occasion.

“I’ve made a lot of friends there that I never would have met,” said Rami about Arabic school. “Some of my best friends ever.”



(MARK GAIL/The Washington Post) - Selena Srirattanapirom says her math grades have improved since she started going to Saturday School.