

Summer Reading Counts

Combating the Summer Slide
One District at a Time!

2012



When schools close for summer, what do your students face?



For many children, summer is a time of enrichment with activities that enhance and expand on things they learn in school. For other children, the summer break puts a pause on learning and causes what's known as the "summer slide"— the loss of academic skills while school is out of session.

All children experience summer learning loss when they do not engage in educational activities during the summer months. However, for children who are already struggling academically, summer learning loss widens existing learning gaps that can challenge academic success in the new school year.

The Cost of Summer Reading Loss

On average, students lose up to two months of reading achievement over the summer. Studies show that summer loss is correlated to learning later in life, affecting whether or not a child earns a high school diploma and continues on to college.

All children are vulnerable to summer reading loss, but children from low-income families, and those who are already academically at-risk often develop learning gaps which can significantly limit their academic trajectories. There are ways to limit the damaging effects of summer slide for all children. Studies show that children who read four or more books during the summer tend to fare better than their peers who did not read, regardless of a student's ethnicity, socioeconomic level, or previous achievements.

Combat Summer Slide in Your District

Make reading a community event. One of the best ways to combat the summer slide is to give children access to high-interest books that match their reading abilities. Research also suggests that students enjoy the most reading success when they share their reading experiences with family and friends. Many school districts have created summer reading events that engage children—and communities—in shared reading experiences. These events, shared on the following pages, reinforce the message that reading is important to everyone.



Summer Reading Can:

- Increase a student's performance
- Increase opportunities for family engagement
- Increase a student's overall motivation to read

Engaging the Community

LOCATION: Hampton, Virginia

YOUTH SERVED ANNUALLY: 6,023 children

PARTICIPANT AGE: Children ages 4 to 10 — Grades Pre-K to 5

FOCUS: Establish reading as a district-wide priority.

The Hampton City Schools, Title I Program used summer as an opportunity to engage with families across the district around the important issue of combating the summer slide. The program began once the district deemed summer reading as a district-wide priority. This strategic decision allowed funds directed at summer reading to be allocated early in the budget year. Fifteen schools that receive Title I funding participated in the event.

Because family and community engagement was a district priority, each school created a customized event and family engagement plan. For example, Machen Elementary School initiated its “Machen Transition Day.” On that day, parents and students received summer reading packs, learned about fun summer activities to do together, and visited their next grade-level classrooms. Teachers explained the expectations of their class to parents and students, and current students offered advice to the incoming class on how to prepare for the next school year.

Other schools in the district planned similar events, from pep rallies highlighting literacy and reading to other events that invited volunteers and parents into the school. Parents were especially excited to have materials that supported their children’s summer reading efforts.

Each Scholastic Summer Reading Pack provided a parent workbook with tips and tools encouraging interactions in the home around literacy. Parents said this workbook was an important tool that helped them maintain a family focus on reading.

“Summer Reading Pack Distribution Day, has created a great opportunity for parents and other volunteers to come into the school. Volunteers get to witness firsthand the excitement of students and encourage them to read and take care of their books as they are distributed.”

– Chandra Epps,
Title I Coordinator

Getting Jazzed About Reading

LOCATION: Bibb County, Georgia

YOUTH SERVED ANNUALLY: More than 24,000 children

PARTICIPANT AGE: Children of all ages — Grades Pre-K to 11

FOCUS: Connecting students and families with local libraries, churches, and other community organizations that support reading.

More than 3,000 parents and students attended Bibb County’s “Get Jazzed About Reading” event which included the distribution of grade-appropriate books via Scholastic’s Summer Reading Packs. The local media also joined in the collaboration with the school district.

The event was supported by all departments and schools in the district. Engaging parents was key, so communicating with families before the event was a priority. Parents were engaged in multiple ways, including phone calls, emails, and letters mailed to homes. Before the official event, the district’s superintendent appeared on local talk shows to promote reading, which encouraged even more partners in the community to participate in the program.

On the day of the event, students performed and presented along with speakers from the local community. Camps, recreation centers, and libraries all partnered with the school to encourage summer reading. Reading circles were established throughout the community to encourage children to talk about reading over the summer. When students returned to school in the fall, teachers followed up with book talks and projects related to students’ summer reading.

This new approach to summer reading became the most successful event of the district. This summer reading event—with more than 3,000 parents and students attending—had ten times as many participants as previous reading events which typically drew in only about 300 attendees.

“The turnout at our kickoff event is proof that this is a community that knows and understands how important reading is to a child’s future.”

—Dr. Romain Dallemand,
Superintendent of
Schools

Focusing on Literacy

LOCATION: Columbia, South Carolina

PARTICIPANT AGE: Children of all ages — Grades Pre-K to 8

FOCUS: Ensuring that children have home libraries for summer—and anytime—reading.

Richland County School District One has focused on literacy for several years. This focus on literacy was the catalyst for improving students' academic achievement across all curriculum areas. The literacy initiative focuses not only on regular reading and exposure to a variety of genres, but also on the development of home libraries so children can share the joy of reading with their families.

As part of the drive to get books into children's hands, Richland County School District One partnered with Scholastic to purchase Summer Reading Packs for all students. More than 17,000 books were distributed to students in Kindergarten through 8th grade last summer. Each packet of books included a letter from the school superintendent reinforcing the district's commitment to reading. The letter emphasized the purpose, rationale, and importance of parental involvement. After two years of participation in the program, students across the district now have at least fifteen books in their home libraries.

“I believe this is a very good way to keep kids practicing their reading and writing skills.”

– Parent

It is estimated that the “summer slide” accounts for as much as 85% of the reading achievement gap between lower income students and their middle- and upper income peers.

—*Why Summer Matters in the Rich/Poor Achievement Gap*, Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen, August, 2009

Sharing Research and Responsibility

LOCATION: Golden, Colorado

YOUTH SERVED ANNUALLY: 10,000 students

PARTICIPANT AGE: Children of all ages — Grades Pre-K to 8

FOCUS: Sharing summer reading research to build enthusiasm.

Schools can't control how students spend their summer break. However, Jeffco Public Schools felt that the best way to influence reading during the summer months was to engage the entire community by sharing research about the summer slide, and to provide children with books they could take home and share with their families.

Jeffco purchased 80,000 Scholastic Summer Reading books for 10,000 students across all the Title I schools in the district for grades K to 8. Every student received eight books; four fiction and four nonfiction. To encourage parents to engage in reading, schools established automated call systems scheduled to phone homes throughout the summer. The dual-language calls—in both English and Spanish—provided students and families gentle reminders to stay on track with their summer reading.

Research regarding the summer slide was shared with school leaders and teachers to promote a supportive school-wide climate for summer reading. Teachers connected the summer reading event to their everyday instruction, and ended their last week of school by introducing the first book in the students' book bag. In the fall, teachers kicked off the new school year with a lesson about the last book in the bag. This strategy consistently related the importance of summer reading across the district.

“The Summer Take-Home Books Project really supported us in getting the message out to families that books and reading are important.”

—Laura Munro, Executive Director, Diverse Learners

Creating Continuity

LOCATION: Roselle, New Jersey

YOUTH SERVED ANNUALLY: 1,600

PARTICIPANT AGE: Children of all ages — Grades K to 7

FOCUS: Creating life-long readers.

The Roselle Public Schools' mission is to prepare students for college, life, and work by providing them with the best education possible and opportunities for success. The district does this by instilling a lifelong love of reading in children. Students are encouraged to read at home daily. To create continuity to this commitment, Roselle Public Schools partnered with Scholastic to create Summer Reading Packs to ensure that children had opportunities to continue their daily reading during the summer months.

The Roselle Public School district committed to the summer program by partnering with local libraries and book stores to guarantee that all children would have access to the materials on the district's reading list.

Each Summer Reading Pack included ten weeks of skill-boosting activities with daily practice in targeted areas to promote reading comprehension. When students returned to school in the fall, all of those students who read four books or more were recognized in their school's Readers Hall of Fame.

“The goal of this program is not only to instill the value of reading but also to have the students fall in love with reading!”

– Miriam Malabanan,
Supervisor of Language
Arts and Humanities
K to 12

Teachers typically spend between 4 to 6 weeks re-teaching material students have forgotten over the summer.

—*Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap*, Karl Alexander, Doris Entwistle, Linda Steffel Olson, April 2007

Where Children Come First

LOCATION: Irving, Texas

YOUTH SERVED ANNUALLY: 34,770

PARTICIPANT AGE: Children ages 4 to 14; Grades K to 7

FOCUS: Engaging parents and communities.

Family and community engagement is at the core of Irving Independent School District's mission. In fact, IISD believes that inviting parents and the community as partners in children's literacy development reaps academic success for every student. That's why they created a summer reading program incorporating books for students, training for teachers, an action plan for family engagement, and a clear way for the community to participate in and support the program.

One of the ways the district supported its literacy program, "Irving Reads!," was with a simultaneous reading moment shared across schools, churches, hospitals and other community organizations. Thousands of students and hundreds of teachers, parents, and community and school leaders stopped for ten minutes at 10 a.m. on May 27th, 2011 to read.

After the synchronized reading moment, students in grades K to 7 received book packs that were customized by grade level. Each pack included a letter to parents from the school superintendent, bookmarks, and activity sheets. Teachers attended a half-day training session to learn about the importance of summer reading, and to work collaboratively on follow-up activities related to the books. In the fall, students were welcomed back with activities that tied to their summer reading efforts—thereby consistently emphasizing the importance IISD places on summer reading.

“The beauty of this event is that it included the entire community.”

—*Thelma Cantu*,
Partnerships in
Education Coordinator

Bridging the Summer Reading Gap

By Anne McGill-Franzen and Richard Allington

A break from books can mean big losses for at-risk readers, but schools can help keep pages turning and minds sharp.

Summer Reading Loss

Regardless of other activities, the best predictor of summer loss or summer gain is whether or not a child reads during the summer. And the best predictor of whether a child reads is whether or not he or she owns books. While economically-advantaged kids often have their own bedroom libraries, poor kids usually depend heavily on schools for books to read.

Understandably, summer reading loss or “summer setback” is a bigger problem for children from low-income families. Their reading achievement typically declines an average of three months between June and September, while that of typical middle-class students improves or remains the same. This means that a summer reading loss of three months accumulates to a crucial two-year gap by the time kids are in middle school, even if their schools are equally effective. It suggests that focusing all of our efforts on improving the schools isn’t going to work.

Children need to read outside of school. Research clearly shows that the key to stemming summer reading loss is finding novel ways to get books into the hands of children during the summer break.

Motivation Matters

Limited access to books is only part of the reason for summer reading loss. While we know that the more children read, the better their fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, it is less clear how to motivate children to read. Put simply, children whose reading skills are not strong “who have a history of less-than-successful reading experiences” simply aren’t as interested in voluntary reading as are those children with a history of successful reading experiences.

Lower-achieving readers are typically asked to read books that are too difficult. Without books that can be read easily with good comprehension, these less-skilled readers will not improve. All of their cognitive energy is devoted to trying to figure out unknown words “which produces a dysfluent, word-by-word reading with little understanding of, or engagement with, the books in their hands.”

These disjointed reading experiences fail to help children consolidate skills, and perhaps most significant, such experiences make children feel unsuccessful. They offer little incentive to persevere and, ultimately, participate in the world of readers. Children don’t just need books; they need the right books. Providing children with books that fit “books that match their skill levels and their interests” is an important first step in encouraging voluntary reading.

Holding Their Ground

While the statistics on summer reading loss seem discouraging, there are answers. Studies suggest that children who read as few as six books over the summer maintain the level of reading skills they achieved during the preceding school year. Reading more books leads to even greater success. When children are provided with 10 to 20 self-selected children’s books at the end of the regular school year, as many as 50 percent not only maintain their skills, but actually make reading gains.

Getting the Books Out

School book collections are typically the largest and nearest supply of age-appropriate books for children. When teachers and school libraries can find ways to share books with students over the summer, the gains can be notable. This low-cost, low-intensity intervention obviously can’t address the many and varied reading needs of all students. But it is a starting point. With planning, there are simple ways to ensure that books become available to any child at any time of year “but especially in the summer, when the reading should be easy.”

Action Tips for Districts

- Identify summer as an out-of-school priority and budget funding accordingly at the beginning of the year.
- Strategically plan structured activities for students over the summer.
- Work with community partners to discuss ways to combat summer slide and find ways to make books available to all children.
- Encourage reading “events” that emphasize reading as a social activity. Look for ways children can come together and read—as opposed to focusing on independent reading opportunities.



For information on the
My Books Summer Reading Program
or to learn how Scholastic FACE can support your
school, district, or literacy program, please contact a
Scholastic Literacy Specialist at 1-800-387-1437,
or visit www.scholastic.com/mybookssummer.