



## Highlights of Research on Summer Reading and Effects on Student Achievement

<http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/summer/research.htm>

Celano, Donna and Susan B. Neuman. *The Role of Public Libraries in Children's Literacy Development: An Evaluation Report*. Pennsylvania Library Association, 2001.

<http://www.statelibrary.state.pa.us/libraries/lib/libraries/Role%20of%20Libraries.pdf>

In this 2001 LSTA-funded report, Drs. Donna Celano and Susan Neuman describe the ways in which public libraries foster literacy skills through **summer reading programs** and **preschool programs**. Recent literature they studied showed:

- Libraries continue to play a **major role in fostering literacy**, especially among those most needing assistance in developing literacy skills (e.g., preschool and elementary school children).
- Children who have been exposed to library preschool programs showed a greater number of **emergent literacy behaviors and pre-reading skills** than those in a control group.
- Children who participate in summer reading programs benefit from the many **literacy-related activities** offered, aiding significantly in literacy development.
- Public Library preschool and summer reading programs encourage children to **spend a significant amount of time with books**.

The research they conducted of summer reading programs in Philadelphia studied four groups of children with low reading scores who came from low-income working families. Two groups attended summer reading programs; the other two attended day camps. After a few weeks in the programs, the **children in the summer reading program read significantly better** than those who attended camp. This study also highlighted the following benefits:

- Programs encouraged children to spend **increased time** with books.
- Public Library reading programs played an important role in the **reading achievement of children who lack access to books** and other reading materials in their daily lives.
- Literacy-related activities and events **enriched reading experiences**, encouraging children to read themselves, hear stories read aloud and write about what they'd read.
- Public Library programs encouraged **parents** to become involved in children's reading.

**The Heyns Study:** In her **definitive and classic** study, "*Summer Learning and the Effects of Schooling*" (Academic Press, 1978), Barbara Heyns followed sixth and seventh graders in the Atlanta public schools through two school years and the intervening summer. Among the findings of her research:

- The **number of books** read during the summer is **consistently related to academic gains**.
- Children in **every income group** who read **six or more books** over the summer **gained more in reading achievement than children who did not**.
- **The use of the public library during the summer is more predictive of vocabulary gains than attending summer school is.**
- The **major factors determining whether a child read over that summer** were: 1) whether the child used the public library; 2) the child's sex (girls read more than boys but also watched more TV); 3) socioeconomic status; and 4) the distance from home to a library.
- "**More than any other public institution, including the schools, the public library contributed to the intellectual growth of children during the summer. Moreover, unlike summer school programs, the library was used by over half the sample and attracted children from diverse backgrounds."** (p.77) (highlighting is mine).

Summary from: <http://statelibrary.dcr.state.nc.us/ld/youth/case.htm>

Johnson, Peter. *Building Effective Programs for Summer Learning*. U.S. Department of Education. 2000.  
[http://www.ed.gov/americanreads/sum\\_build.doc](http://www.ed.gov/americanreads/sum_build.doc)

Johnson's report focuses on: 1) Who needs summer programs and 2) Effective ways to reach them. Drawing on research from the Baltimore "Beginning School Study" (Karl Alexander and Doris Entwisle, 1996), he found that "the academic gap between rich and poor children, as measured by test scores, increases throughout the elementary school years." **Summer losses in achievement add up year by year and "seem to be the major reason why the academic gap between low- and high-income children grows throughout the elementary school years."** Since the losses are largest in the summers of the first three to four years of school, "preventing these losses, particularly over the first few summers, could make the gap much smaller." [Note: This age group, it should be noted, is the primary target audience of public library summer reading programs, having the most attendance and appeal. In New York State's statewide summer reading program, all age groups, from preschool to teenagers are included, but elementary aged children make up the most enthusiastic and easy-to-reach population.]

Suggestions for **effective ways to reach the neediest youth** include:

- Form **partnerships with the schools**
- Form **partnerships with community groups** and services that reach the disadvantaged
- Make **programs accessible and convenient for parents**
- Involve the parents
- Involve **volunteers**
- **Make learning fun** for everyone. [Note: This is one of the greatest strengths of the NYS Library Statewide Summer Reading Program.]

Krashen, Stephen. *The Power of Reading*. Libraries Unlimited. 1993.

Krashen's book reports on research demonstrating the value of **free voluntary reading** in the development of reading, writing and spelling skills. He makes a strong statement: "**Free voluntary reading** (henceforth FVR) is **one of the most powerful tools we have in language education**, and... is the **missing ingredient** in first language 'language arts' as well as in intermediate second and foreign language instruction." The book then reviews studies that illustrate how free voluntary reading **benefits student achievement**, including these highlights:

- **Children read more** when they **see other people reading**. Teachers need to be models by reading for pleasure when students are reading.
- The **longer** free voluntary reading is practiced, the **more consistent and positive the results**.
- People who **read more, write better**.
- **Reading as a leisure activity is the best predictor of comprehension, vocabulary and reading speed**.
- **Skill-based reading exercises** (in two studies) **did not help comprehension levels**
- Outstanding high school writers reported **extensive summer reading**.
- The **relationship** between **free voluntary reading** and **literacy** is **extremely consistent**, even when different tests, different methods of reading habits and different definitions of free reading are used.
- If children read **one million words a year, at least one thousand words will be added to their vocabulary**. (One study found this could easily be accomplished by letting children and teens read any format reading material they wanted, including comic books and teen romances.)
- Studies also showed that **spelling improved** the more kids read.
- In summary, Krashen found that FVR resulted in better:
  - Reading comprehension
  - Writing style
  - Vocabulary
  - Spelling, and
  - Grammatical development

**These improvements were in contrast to poor results from direct reading instruction!** (pp. 13-26) [Note: The NYS Statewide Summer Reading Program directly encourages local libraries to use free voluntary reading.]

**Krashen, Stephen and Fay Shin. "[Summer Reading and the Potential Contribution of the Public Library in Improving Reading for Children of Poverty](#)," *Public Library Quarterly*, Vol. 23 (3/4), 2004.**

Research shows that there is very little difference in reading gains between children from high- and low-income families during the school year. Over the summer, children from high-income families make better progress in reading and the difference is

cumulative over time. Increasing access to books and reading over the summer through public library programs is of great benefit to children from low-income families. However, libraries need to improve the quality of materials available to these children for the benefit to occur.

McGill-Franzen, Anne and Richard Allington. “**Lost Summers: For Some Children, Few Books and Few Opportunities to Read.**” *Classroom Leadership* August 2001. The Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University.

This article looked at research that examined learning losses over the summer, especially for students from lower-income families. Some highlights:

- A 1996 University of Missouri study found “**an annual reading achievement gap of about 3 months between students from middle- and lower-income families.**” The middle-income children’s achievement remained stable or increased
- In the elementary grades, “a summer loss of 3 months accumulates to become a gap of 18 months by the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade. By **middle school**, summer reading loss...produces a **cumulative lag of two or more years in reading achievement, even when effective instruction during the school year is available.**” (Highlights are mine.)
- Another study illustrated that “children with a history of less successful reading experiences simple aren’t as interested in voluntary reading...” and that often “**Lower-achieving readers are typically asked to read books that are too difficult.**” [Note: NYS Statewide Summer Reading Program recommends a self-selection approach and setting individual goals.]
- Building on **student interest** can **stimulate voluntary reading**, even among **lower-achieving readers**.
- According the National Reading Panel’s 2000 report, hundreds of correlational studies suggest that “the **more children read, the better their fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.**” (p.12)

*Evaluation of the Public Library Summer Reading Program: Books and Beyond...Take Me to Your Reader!*” Final Report, December, 2001 by the Evaluation and Training Institute for the Los Angeles County Public Library Foundation.

Study results included:

- 98% of the participating students reported they liked the program
- 99% stated they liked going to the library.
- There was an 11% increase in the number of parents reading to their children more than 15 hours/week.
- Before the summer, 77% of parents reported their child read 9 hours or less/week. During the summer, there was a 9% increase in the number of children reading 10-14 hours/week and the number of children reading 15 or more books/week rose 11%.
- Teachers reported on over 900 participating and non-participating students.
  - 55% who participated had a high enthusiasm for reading versus less than 40% of non-participants.
  - More of the participants versus the non-participating students performed at or above grade level in: word recognition, reading vocabulary and reading comprehension.
- Student perceptions concurred with teacher reports.

*Preventing Summer Reading Loss.* Checklists no.161 4/05. Alaska State Library.  
[http://www.library.state.ak.us/pdf/anc/summer\\_reading\\_loss.pdf](http://www.library.state.ak.us/pdf/anc/summer_reading_loss.pdf)

This newsletter from the Alaska State library provides an annotated bibliography of recent research on summer reading, as well as links to websites with research, project reports, and advice about summer reading and summer reading programs.

**In Summary:**

1. **Research shows the public library summer reading program as promoted by the NYS Statewide Summer Reading program enhances student achievement – even when compared to direct instruction.**
2. **Research studies and our experiences with promoting summer reading have shown how essential partnerships are between schools and public libraries.**

**Recommendations:**

1. The State Education Department and school and public library systems need to actively encourage more collaboration between public libraries and schools in promoting summer reading programs through the NYS Statewide Summer Reading Program.
2. The State Education Department and school and public library systems need to provide incentives for collaboration and discourage competing programs or parallel programs operating in isolation from one another in local communities.
3. Federal and state funds, initiatives, etc. that come to the Department should include funding and other incentives for partnerships that promote free voluntary reading programming in schools and public libraries (e.g., No Child Left Behind Act funds).
4. Because the research strongly supports free voluntary reading, as practiced in most public library pre-school programs, it is also recommended that state and federal funds be used to support pre-school programming in public libraries as well.

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