

KDLA Trustee Tip
June 2016
Best Practices for Summer Reading Programs

Last year, 146,371 children and teens participated in reading challenges and over a quarter million youth – 258,313 – attended classes and events as part of Summer Reading Programs at public libraries across Kentucky. Why do libraries spend significant resources on Summer Reading Programs? What benefit do they have for the children who participate, and the wider community?

One of the biggest reasons for a public library Summer Reading Program is to combat a phenomenon known as **summer slide**. During the school year middle-income and low-income children make pretty much the same rate of reading skills improvement. Over the months of summer vacation, low-income children lose reading skills, while middle income children steadily gain in reading skills. Low-income children leave school at the beginning of summer at the same reading level as middle-income children and return to school in the fall with their reading skills 3 months behind the other children. The reading losses experienced by low-income students over the summer aren't made back up during the school year. They are cumulative year to year. By 6th grade as much as 80% of the reading skills gap between children from low and middle-income children can be attributed to summer slide.

The public library is the perfect place to fight summer slide. Studies have shown that regardless of other activities, the best predictor of reading skill loss or gain over the summer is whether or not a child reads during the summer. In fact, reading over the summer has been shown to be just as effective at maintaining reading skills as summer school.

What are some of the best practices for Summer Reading Programs?

- Time Spent Reading: Children who spend approximately 11 minutes per day reading score in the 50th percentile, while children who spend 38 minutes per day reading score in the 90th percentile.
- Incentives: Reading motivation improves when incentives take the form of praise and reading related rewards like books or bookmarks.
- Reading choice: Reading motivation improves when children are given free choice of what to read. During the school year, children are generally very restricted in what they are allowed to read. It is important that during the summer children be allowed to choose their own reading material.
- Partners and Community Stakeholders: Library summer programs are strengthened significantly when they are shaped around broader community learning goals, especially with the focus around S.T.E.M. skills and careers. There are many opportunities to engage community leaders, artists, entrepreneurs, and influencers from advocacy and volunteer support to event and program collaboration.
- Collaboration with Schools: During the school year children focus on comprehension, fluency, and technical improvement of reading skills. Schools can encourage enrollment and completion of the program and libraries can help schools keep students reading over the summer and make them ready to continue learning in the fall. Summer Reading is a great time to sharpen your library's "elevator speech" and lay the foundation for year-around communication.

Libraries have long been a place for kids to read, play, create, explore and learn. Public library Summer Reading Programs are unique in that they place emphasis on enrichment, enjoyment, and sharing a love of reading.