

# School Library Journal®

## Idaho School Libraries Open this Summer to Tackle “Summer Slide”

By [Lauren Barack](#) on February 17, 2014 [Leave a Comment](#)

Idaho’s betting its younger students will choose school this summer—investing \$30,000 to keep six school libraries open during June, July, and August. The goal is to entice children to come in during the heat of the summer, crack a book, and read.

In the state’s previous summer literacy initiatives, “We have focused most of our efforts on public libraries since 2005 and watched numbers increase,” says Stephanie Bailey-White, program coordinator for the Read to Me project at the Idaho Commission for Libraries (ICfL). “But in schools with large numbers of low-income students, we only saw a 10 to 20 percent participation, and we know that’s not enough to combat summer slide.”

Idaho’s 2014 Summer Slide Pilot Project will launch in June, with three schools receiving \$1,500 to cover the cost of staff to keep their doors open for the season. An additional three library programs will receive new paperback books in return for staying open. Bailey-White hopes to learn from the way all six pilot programs perform and to assess what strategies are most successful in attracting young students to pick up a book once school’s out.



The Horizon Elementary School Library in Jerome, Idaho, is one of six libraries in the state staying open this summer.

The initiatives, financed with grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), are aimed at students in kindergarten through second grade—an age where decrease in reading skills and aptitude can have an effect on a student’s later success. Summer slide is one area educators have long battled against, with studies showing that low-income students in particular can lose two months of reading proficiency during summer vacation. Having kids continue to read during these months may be able to combat this loss, particularly in literacy skills.

“One of the most attractive portions of this grant was the opportunity to offer focus-group sessions to the parents of our students to help them understand that summer vacation is not supposed to be a vacation from learning,” says Ellen Rexroat, the school librarian at Horizon Elementary School in Jerome, Idaho, which was awarded the full grant of \$1,500, as well as books. (For the full list of schools, see below.) “The school can provide a safe and familiar environment for parents and children to check out books and spend time reading and learning together over the summer.”

ICfL opened the grants to applications in December, giving school libraries just four weeks to submit their applications. Bailey-White says winners were selected from 11 applications. In particular, she looked at how many applicants' students received reduced-price lunch, as well as their geographic location. Winning schools had to agree to be open at least two days per week for a minimum of four hours per day, for nine weeks, and have established a partnership with their local public library's summer reading program. Books are being provided by ICfL at three test sites, and students will be allowed to keep "one or two," says Bailey-White.

Working with Dr. Roger Stewart, a literacy professor at Boise State University, ICfL hopes to confirm whether free books can stabilize—or even boost—a student's literacy skills over the summer, as other research has suggested. Bailey-White says ICfL is using the "Book Fair" model, based on research by Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen at the University of Tennessee, which found that over three summers, children given free reading books outperformed children on test scores who were just given activity books.

Bailey-White notes that school libraries are ideal settings to reach students during the summer, as children can usually walk to their local school and are already comfortable in the setting. Idaho State Librarian Ann Joslin adds that ICfL is hoping to see more partnerships between school libraries and public libraries going forward.

"A lot of interactions between school libraries and public libraries have been taking place at the local level," says Joslin. "We have long recognized that school libraries need some assistance in a variety of ways similar to the way we've worked with public libraries."

*Schools that won the \$1,500 IMLS/LSTA grant plus books include: Horizon Elementary in Jerome, Fernan Elementary in Coeur d'Alene, and Desert Sage Elementary in Meridian. The three sites offered the stipend only include: Wilson Elementary in Caldwell, Mountain View Elementary in Burley and Lakeside Elementary in Plummer.*



#### **About Lauren Barack**

Lauren Barack writes about the connection between media and education, business and technology, and is the recipient of the Loeb Award for online journalism. She can be found at [www.laurenbarack.com](http://www.laurenbarack.com).