Summer Learning Loss and Library Summer Reading Programs

In 2009, Idaho libraries registered 63,300 children in summer reading programs statewide. This was a 38% increase from 2008.

What the research says...

“Many low income and minority students lose some literacy and academic abilities during the summer months. Some students lose as much as three to four months of academic progress while children in high income areas gain at least a month of progress during the summer (Karweit, Ricciuti, and Thompson, 1994).”


61 percent of low-income families have no books at all in their homes for their children. While low-income children have, on average, roughly four children’s books in their homes, a team of researchers recently concluded that nearly two thirds of the low-income families they studied owned no books for their children.

(Reading Literacy in the United States, 1996. US Department of Education.)

“Public libraries are helping to close the ‘book gap’ by providing children of all backgrounds access to high-quality reading materials and rich language experiences.... The public library is important to the reading achievement of many children, particularly those children who lack other reading resources.”

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.
- 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)

[Above summary from *Making the Case for Library Services to Children and Teens*, State Library of North Carolina.]

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

- 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

[Excerpt from *Building Effective Programs for Summer Learning*, by Peter Johnson, U.S. Department of Education. 2000]