Summer Learning Loss and Library Summer Reading Programs

In 2013 over 60,000 Idaho children and teens participated in a summer reading program through their local library. Additionally, another 36,000 children and teens participated in library summer outreach programs.

What the research says...

Over 30 years of studies consistently show that students who do not continue reading over the summer lose as much as 3 to 4 months of academic progress. This is especially true for low-income children. While children in higher-income families have access to books and participate in activities that support continued learning, children in low-income families have few books in the home and have restricted access to them.

By the end of the sixth grade much of the achievement gap between high-income and low-income children can be attributed to loss of learning over the summer months. Some studies estimate that this gap can be as wide as three years.

“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.”


Idaho Commission for Libraries
October 2013
Summer Reading Research

- Summer setback is the main source of the reading achievement gap between high- and low-income students; this setback is due to lack of summer reading activity. Low-income students have less access to reading material at home than advantaged peers. Providing low-income students with easy access to appropriate books, allowing them to select their own books to read, and encouraging them to read increases the amount of summer reading, resulting in lessening summer setback. [Allington, R.L. & McGill-Franzen, A. (2008). Got books? Educational Leadership, 65 (7), 20-23.]

- Differences in a child’s summer learning experiences during his or her elementary school years can impact whether that child ultimately earns a high school diploma and continues on to college. [McLaughlin, B., & Smink, J. (2009, June). Summer learning: moving from the periphery to the core. The Progress of Education Reform, 10 (3).]

- A large study of elementary students from varying backgrounds revealed that reading 4 to 5 books over the summer has the potential to prevent a decline in reading achievement scores from the spring to the fall. [Kim, J. (2004, April). Summer reading and the ethnic achievement gap. Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 9 (2), 169-189.]


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]