

The Impact of Summer Reading Programs in Colorado Libraries

Public libraries throughout Colorado provide summer reading programs (SRPs) to children ages 0-19 that encourage reading in a fun, engaging way, and offer a wide variety of reading and listening materials to suite a range of abilities, interests, and languages. These programs prove critical to stem student achievement losses over the summer. Academic studies prove that:

- if children read 1 million words per year, 1000 words will be added to their vocabulary
- the longer free voluntary reading is practiced, the more consistent and positive the results
- kids read more when they're having fun, when they see others reading, and when they can choose their own reading material
- reading as a leisure activity is the best predictor of reading comprehension, vocabulary, and reading speed
- by the end of fifth grade, students who do not read during the summer are behind their peers by two years on average
- SRPs have a major role in fostering literacy skills for all children, but the impact is greatest for those who live in poverty
- preschool children who attend library story programs have greater emergent literacy and pre-reading skills that those who don't participate
- not only did children in SRPs spend more time looking at and reading books, 11% of the parents of participating children reported that they increased the time they spent reading with or to their children
- teachers reporting on over 900 students concluded that 55% who participated in an SRP had a high enthusiasm for reading versus less than 40% of non-participants, and that more of the participants than non-participants performed at or above grade level in word recognition, reading vocabulary, and reading comprehension
- the use of the public library during the summer is more predictive of vocabulary gains than attending summer school



During the summer of 2010, 112 Colorado public library jurisdictions held summer reading programs. Collectively they made a tremendous impact on the state's youth:

- 157,705 children and 43,261 teens registered for SRPs, for a total of 200,966
- 535,501 children attended 6,131 fun, educational library programs; 24,954 teens attended 1,258 similar programs for their age group (many more than the total number of people—517,140—that attended the 2010 CO State Fair!)
- Children and teens read over 1.5 million pages while attending their local libraries' SRPs

Libraries reported many success stories; here are just a few:

- Had a Mom come in and tell me that her son hated to read. We had a pirate party as a kick off and I read a pirate book. The son became interested in pirates and read enough to receive a prize! She says he is still reading and not for prizes!
-East Morgan County Library District/Brush
- One grandmother said she so appreciated the program we did because her grandson has trouble reading and this program helped to encourage him to keep at it and work hard at reading. All the teens were excited to read and seemed excited at the fact that adults encouraged them to read for fun.
-John C. Fremont Library District
- One parent told us, "We are so thankful that you have a summer reading program - it makes us feel that our kids won't lose ground in their achievement over the summer and gives us a way to help motivate them. It makes reading fun all summer long!"
-Lafayette Public Library
- Here are some of our findings: (1) The number of respondents who enjoy reading increased by 23 percent to 87 percent; (2) the number of respondents who like reading on their own increased by 12 percent to 83 percent; and (3) 83 percent of program participants felt they were a better reader after the program than they were at the beginning of the summer!
-Ouray Library District
- We had an all ages Summer Reading Program, babies through adults. Families told us that they were all reading together for the first time.
-Upper San Juan Library District