2017 Salt Lake County Library Summer Reading Challenge Evaluation

Since 2006, Salt Lake County Library Services (SLCo Library) has hosted a free Summer Reading Challenge for elementary school children. The library provides reading logs for children to track their summer reading for up to 12 weeks. Children can return completed reading logs for a free book. Salt Lake City Library Services (SLC Library) offers a similar program, and children in the area may participate in either or both challenges.

Summer reading programs have long been used in the U.S. to promote lifelong reading in children and teens. Public libraries encourage participation in these programs to reduce summer learning loss.[1] Summer learning loss is also known as *summer slide* or *setback,* wherein student achievement scores tend to be lower after summer than at the end of the previous school year.[2] This is more pronounced for historically underserved groups, such as children living in poverty or children from English-language learning households.[3] Reading programs in libraries and schools have demonstrated effectiveness at helping students retain important reading skills over the summer.[4]

Parent Survey and Student Reading Data

In 2016, the SLCo Library worked with the Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) to prepare a pilot parent survey to assess the relationship between Challenge participation and student reading outcomes. In 2017, SLCo and UEPC made minor revisions to the survey to reduce the number of questions. In the 2017 survey, parents were asked 1) whether or not their child participated in a library summer reading program, and if so, for how long; 2) if their child had participated in other library activities or other summer learning activities; 3) if their child had a library card, used a parent card, or only used the school library; and 4) to what extent they agree their child's reading behavior changed since the beginning of summer. SLCo Library staff administered the parent survey in library locations between August and October. In addition, library staff worked with West Kearns and Magna Elementary schools to distribute surveys in the schools.

In addition to the survey, Granite School District granted research study approval to match the survey data to Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) data for children whose parents provided written permission. DIBELS are a set of measures for assessing literacy development and acquisition from kindergarten through sixth grade. DIBELS are collected at the beginning, middle, and end of the year from elementary students in Utah. Granite SD provided de-identified DIBELS data matched with parent survey data to the UEPC to analyze.

2017 Respondent Information

> The majority of the matched survey respondents were from West Kearns and Magna Elementary schools.
> Just over a third of the respondents indicated their child (or children) had participated in a summer reading program.
> Of the 49 parents who indicated their child had participated in a summer reading program, 42 participated in the SLCo program, and 7 participated in the Salt Lake City program. (Not shown in table.)
> Within each respondent category, differences in the percentage who participated in the summer library program were not statistically significant.

Table 1. Reading Challenge Participation by Category

	Summer Reading Challenge		
	Did not participate	Did Participate	Total
Total	**64%**	**36%**	**138**
School			
West Kearns Elementary	67%	33%	67
Magna Elementary	66%	34%	65
William Penn, Silver Mesa, Bennion, Fox Hills	17%	83%	6
Grade			
1st	47%	53%	15
2nd	75%	25%	28
3rd	57%	43%	37
4th	61%	39%	23
5th	75%	25%	20
6th	73%	27%	15
Gender			
Male	63%	38%	56
Female	66%	34%	82
Race/ethnicity			
Hispanic or Latino/a	74%	26%	39
White	58%	42%	89
Other	80%	20%	10
Special education			
Not eligible	66%	34%	126
Eligible	50%	50%	12
Limited English Proficiency			
No	64%	36%	108
Yes	67%	33%	30
Low Income			
No	65%	35%	55
Yes	64%	36%	83

Source: SLCo Library Parent Survey 2017 and Granite School District data

Library Cards

- 47% of respondents indicated their child has a library card.
- 27% indicated their child uses their parent's card.
- 22% indicated their child uses the school library only.
- 2% indicated their family does not use the library.

Table 2. Challenge Participation by Library Card Use

	Summer Reading Challenge		
	Did not participate	Did Participate	Total
Child has library card	49%	51%	65
Child uses parent card	59%	41%	37
Child uses school library only	97%	3%	31
Family doesn't use library	100%	0%	3

Source: SLCo Library Parent Survey 2017

Length of Participation in the Challenge

- Over half of the respondents (59%) indicated their child participated in the challenge five weeks or more.

Table 3. Length of Summer Reading Challenge Participation

Participation Length	Number	Percent
Less than a week	6	12%
1-2 weeks	9	18%
3-4 weeks	4	8%
5-6 weeks	7	14%
7-8 weeks	22	45%
No answer	1	2%
Total	49	100%

Source: SLCo Library Parent Survey 2017

Participation in Summer Educational Programs

- 86% of respondents indicated their child participated in no summer educational programs or only library programs.
- 14% indicated their child participated in summer educational programs not affiliated with the libraries.
- More Summer Reading Challenge participants participated in other library programs than Challenge non-participants (51% vs. 9%). This difference is statistically significant.[5]
- There was no difference between Summer Reading Challenge participants and non-participants in terms of participation in non-library summer learning activities (14% vs. 15%).

Parent Perceptions of Child's Reading Behavior

- Most respondents indicated they believed their children maintained or increased their reading skills, were more confident readers, and read more often since the beginning of summer.
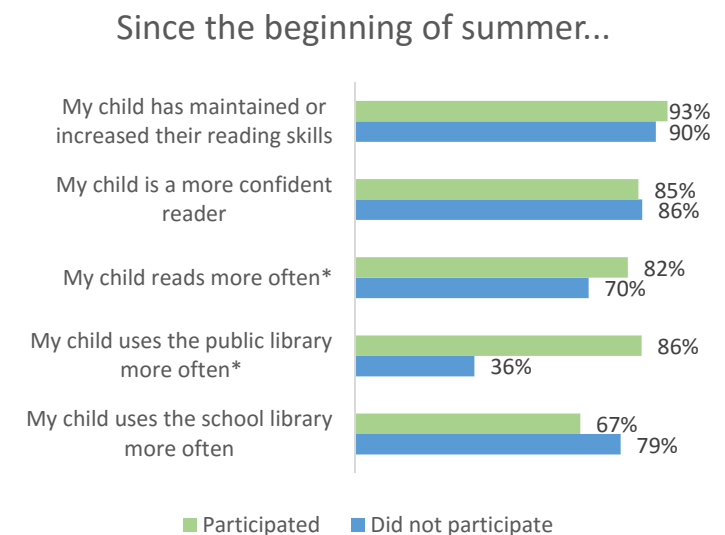
Table 4. Participation in Summer Educational Activities

Parent reported their child participated in…	Number	Percent
no educational programs	69	50%
only in library educational activities	49	36%
library activities and other activities	8	6%
only non-library activities	12	9%

Source: SLCo Library Parent Survey 2017

- Parents of Challenge participants were significantly more likely to indicate their child read more often since the beginning of summer compared to non-participants.[6]
- Parents of Challenge participants were significantly more likely to indicate their children uses the public library more often since the beginning of summer than parents of non-participants.[7]
- Differences between parents of participants and non-participants were not significant for the other three questions.
- Length of participation in the summer library challenge was significantly related to parent reported increase in reading skills, reading more, and using the public library more. More weeks of participation was associated with more favorable responses.[8]

Figure 1. Parent Reported Summer Reading

Since the beginning of summer...

My child has maintained or increased their reading skills — Participated 93%, Did not participate 90%

My child is a more confident reader — Participated 85%, Did not participate 86%

My child reads more often* — Participated 82%, Did not participate 70%

My child uses the public library more often* — Participated 86%, Did not participate 36%

My child uses the school library more often — Participated 67%, Did not participate 79%

■ Participated ■ Did not participate

*Group differences are significant at p < .05.
Source: SLCo Library Parent Survey 2017

Academic Performance

Survey responses were matched with 2016-17 End of Year (EOY) and 2017-18 Beginning of Year (BOY) student composite DIBELS scores. Because DIBELS scores are not comparable across grade levels, all scores were converted to z-scores based on the school district mean and standard deviation for each grade level and test.[9]

Figure 2. Student DIBELS Z-Scores by Participation
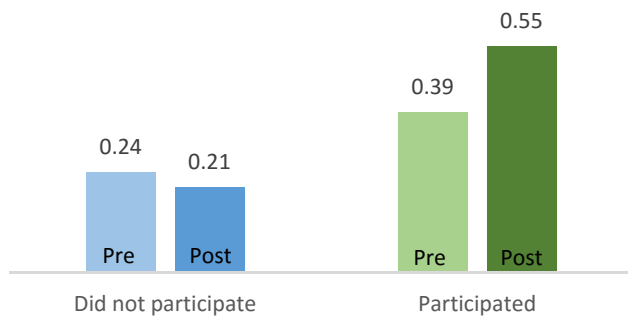
As shown in Figure 2, the z-scores of non-participants were lower than the scores of participants on both the 2016-17 End of Year DIBELS (pretest) and 2017-18 Beginning of Year DIBELS (posttest), although the differences were not statistically significant. However, when looking at change from the pretest to the posttest, **students who participated in the Summer Reading Challenge increased their DIBELS z-scores significantly more than students who did not participate.[10]**

We did not find differences in change from pre to post on DIBELS z-scores based on parents' perceptions of their children's reading behavior. We also did not find any relationship between having a library card and changes in DIBELS z-scores.

Key Findings

➢ Most of the children in this study are participating in no summer educational activities or only library activities. This suggests that the library is playing an important role in filling the summer educational needs for the community.

➢ Parents of Challenge participants were more likely to indicate their children read more and used the public library more since the beginning of summer compared to parents of non-participants.

➢ Students who participated in the Summer Reading Challenge had a greater increase in DIBELS z-score than non-participants.

Study Limitations

The primary limitation to this study is student selection into the Summer Reading Challenge. Specifically, students are not randomly assigned to participate in the program; rather, children or parents opt to participate. Therefore, the analyses cannot determine whether participation in the program led to differences between the groups, or whether differences between the groups led to participation in the program. For example, children who have a library card and visit the library frequently may be more likely to participate in the program; we cannot conclude that program participation increases library use.

However, despite this limitation, the study is suggestive that the library summer Reading Challenge is meeting a need in the community to help students continue to read and learn over the summer. Additional efforts might focus on recruiting more students into the program as well as partnering with other educational summer activities to increase awareness among parents of available options.

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[1] Utah State Library Division (n.d.). *Summer reading program. About summer reading programs*. Retrieved from https://heritage.utah.gov/library/summer-reading-program

[2] Quinn, D.M. & Polikoff, M. (2017). *Summer learning loss: What is it, and what can we do about it?* Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/research/sum Mer-learning-loss-what-is-it-and-what-can-we-do-about-it/

[3] Atteberry, A., & McEachin, A. (2016). School's out: Summer learning loss across grade levels and school contexts in the United States today. In Alexander, K., Pitcock, S., & Boulay, M. (Eds). *Summer learning and summer learning loss.* New York: Teachers College Press.

[4] Kim, J.S., Quinn, D.M. (2013). The effects of summer reading on low-income children's literacy achievement from kindergarten to grade 8: A meta-analysis of classroom and home interventions. *Review of Educational Research, 83*(3), 386-431. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0034654313483906

[5] χ^2 (3, n = 138) = 30.68, p < .0001.

[6] Participant M = 3.1, SD = .696; non-participant M = 2.8, SD = .735; t(130) = -2.33, p < .05.

[7] Participant M = 3.1, SD = .634; non-participant M = 2.2, SD = .855; t(124) = -6.90, p < .001.

[8] Maintained or increased skills: β =.06, t(125) = 2.16, p = .03. Reads more often: β =.09, t(131) = 2.68, p = .01. Uses public library more: β =.23, t(132) = 6.76, p = .001.

[9] A z-score is the number of standard deviations above or below the mean a score is, with the mean set to zero and the standard deviation set to one. Therefore, a z-score of .5 would be a raw score that was half a standard deviation above the mean, and a z-score of -2 would be two standard deviations below the mean.

[10] F(1, 136) = 7.49, p = .01.