

Importance of Summer Reading

One of the biggest areas of advocacy focus of The South Carolina Reading Project™ is to encourage parents to encourage their children to read for pleasure during the summer vacation months. Voluntary summer reading for pleasure increases positive feelings about reading and is potentially an effective way to inspire in children an intrinsic love of reading.

But for students to be motivated to read voluntarily during the summer, it is important that they be given the opportunity to choose their own books. And the two largest contributors to reading achievement, according to numerous studies, are access to interesting books and student choice of books.

Research has shown that when children were given the opportunity to choose their own books, reading gains were almost double those of children whose books were selected by someone else (Lindsay 2013). Clearly, giving children ample access to books and empowering them to make their own choices are the keys to preventing the step backwards known as "summer reading loss."

Summer reading loss is that backsliding in reading development that can occur during the summer vacation periods, when children are not enrolled in school. Summer reading loss is a real issue that affects student preparedness for the next grade level and widens the achievement gap between students of different socioeconomic backgrounds. And there is abundant evidence that its compounding effect is an important factor contributing to the reading achievement gap between rich and poor children.

In one large scale research study on the accumulating impact of summer reading loss (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olsen, 2007), the authors reported that the achievement gap between rich and poor children grew dramatically across the elementary school years, from less than a year's difference upon entering kindergarten to almost three year's difference by the end of the 6th grade.

But research clearly shows that the key to stemming summer reading loss is in finding novel ways to get books into the hands of children during the summer break. And experimental studies have shown that increasing children's access to print (books and magazines) produces positive effects on children's reading achievement greater than all other educational interventions.