

The Eric Walters School Library Summer Lending Challenge: Findings from the Research

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Abstract

As part of an ongoing focus on the role of the school library learning commons in addressing summer reading loss, the co-editors of the Canadian School Libraries Journal invited best-selling author Eric Walters to contribute an article on the topic. The article called for participation in his summer lending challenge, and a wonderful opportunity for Canadian School Libraries (CSL) to investigate whether summer lending programs in Canada's school libraries could be successful, and if so, what factors would contribute to that success. Working with Walters, the researchers gathered information from participating schools. What emerged very strongly through the research is that losing the opportunity to read to whatever degree is not good for any children. School libraries provide a simple, doable and inexpensive way to make sure that all children have the opportunity to continue reading over the summer or to read more than they would otherwise. School libraries provide access to reading materials, and encouraging freedom of choice. A strong theme that emerged through the research was that the fear of book losses which inhibits schools from summer lending are largely unfounded. Students wanted to be trusted, and followed through with their responsibility to return materials in September. Losses incurred through summer lending are minimal, and worth the investment.

Introduction

Summer in Canada. For elementary and secondary students across the country, an idyllic two months' vacation from school to enjoy the fleeting warm weather, all manner of outdoor activities, family vacations, and a chance for leisurely reading. For many children the summer is full of opportunity, stimulation, and growth. However, a body of research indicates that for many children who do not have access to books and reading, the summer may leave them ill-prepared for the new school year. Even the most avid readers may find it challenging to find enough choice in reading materials to keep them engaged over the summer.

School libraries in Canada have collections developed particularly to engage young readers, yet Canada's elementary and secondary students have no access to these resources over the summer. To many this makes little sense. As Canadian author Eric Walters put it, "School is out for the summer, and your books should be, too." (Walters, 2019)

Walters' call provided a wonderful opportunity for Canadian School Libraries (CSL) to investigate whether summer lending programs in Canada's school libraries could be successful, and if so, what factors would contribute to that success.

Summer Reading Research Background

Investigating new ways for school libraries to extend their influence into the summer months was not new thinking for Canadian School Libraries. In the spring of 2018 CSL put out a call for school library professionals via social media and other networks, to share how they address the summer achievement gap in their schools. Ideas were harvested and collated in a CSL Journal article in the spring issue and a campaign to *Keep them reading, thinking, making!* (Koechlin, 2018) was launched by CSL. The article documented dozens of ideas,

many with links to existing examples for engaging students in reading and extending the learning potential from the library learning commons all summer. CSL created a social media badge which was used to promote this initiative and readers were encouraged to share their summer reading ideas and programs over the summer. “Is there more we can do from the library learning commons to get more books into the hands of students and also spur them to keep on learning over the summer break?” was the question put out to readers across Canada.

Over the summer of 2018 CSL encouraged school librarians to share summer reading initiatives via social media. In the fall, the editors of CSL Journal invited two teacher-librarians to write articles sharing their summer reading programs with readers. Janet MacLeod, teacher-librarian at Sir John A. Macdonald Secondary School in Hamilton, Ontario, shared her success over a three-year period of engaging secondary students with books and challenges shared via social media. Janet summed up her program, “Running a book club through the summer is one way to keep that flame lit from June to September.” (MacLeod, 2018). Derek Acorn, teacher-librarian at two French Immersion K-8 schools in the Louis Riel School Division in Winnipeg, Manitoba shared how he worked with his library assistants, Amy-Leigh Gray (École Varennes) and Lise Sokal (École Marie-Anne Gaboury), to develop and run summer reading programs that utilized technology to reach students and their families over the summer (Acorn, 2018). Derek hoped that his experience would inspire others, “I would encourage other school libraries to use online tools to maximize their reach over the summer months and create that link between school and home.”

In the spring of 2019 the editors of CSL Journal launched the second year of the *Keep them reading thinking and making* initiative with an article entitled, *Help make 2019 a learning summer* (Koechlin & Brooks Kirkland 2019). The article included updates from Janet MacLeod and Derek Acorn. School library professionals were encouraged to take a lead in their schools with initiatives to keep students learning for fun over the summer. It was also in this same issue that best-selling Canadian author Eric Walters put out a challenge to schools across Canada to get books in their libraries out over the summer, into the hands of the students who wanted and needed to read (Walters, 2019). The cumulative effect of these articles, the attention they received on social media, and Eric Walters’ passionate and inspired efforts to support schools willing to try out a summer lending program in the summer of 2019 provided a unique opportunity for CSL to engage in this research.

Not satisfied with merely encouraging school libraries to lend books over the summer, author Eric Walters mobilized as perhaps only he can to create a major project. He sought and received endorsement from the Canadian Children’s Book Centre (CCBC) and the Canadian Society of Children’s Authors, Illustrators and Performers (CANSCAIP) and both organizations actively

**School is out for the summer,
and your books should be too!**

A special offer from best-selling Canadian author
Eric Walters

In partnership with:

CANSCAIP The Canadian Children's Book Centre CSL Canadian School Libraries

With generous support from: ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS Reaching More Readers

promoted the idea via their own channels. As a result of many conversations with school librarians across the country during his hundreds of annual school visits, Walters understood that one of the greatest factors in preventing schools from lending books over the summer was fear of losses. It seemed a long time to trust students to take care of and return books, especially considering that they would almost certainly be increasing

lending limits for students so that they had something to read for the entire summer. To mitigate this Walters contacted Orca Book Publishers, who generously offered up to 75% off on selected titles and 50% on most of their stock to replace books lost as a result of summer lending. And so the Eric Walters Summer Lending Challenge was born.

In his CSL Journal article published on May 21, 2019, Walters invited school librarians to email him to sign up for the challenge. Word spread rapidly via social media and by mid-June over 150 schools had signed up. At his own expense, Walters sent every participating school a package that included personally signed posters and bookmarks. Author Kevin Sylvester also contributed some materials for this package, designed to help school librarians promote the program and perhaps offer small incentives to participants. As Walters' major partner, Canadian School Libraries saw this as a unique opportunity to collect data to explore the viability of summer lending in Canada's school libraries, and understand the associated success factors. CSL immediately created a support webpage, *Addressing the summer achievement gap* (Canadian School Libraries, 2019), with program ideas and support for data collection strategies.

Research Question

This editorial focus on encouraging summer reading provoked as many questions as it sought to answer, thus providing Canadian School Libraries with framework for further research. Specifically, CSL, through this research project, seeks to address the following questions.

Can summer lending programs in Canada's school libraries be successful, and if so, what factors would contribute to that success? What would be the benefits of implementing summer lending in Canada's school libraries?

What We Understand from the Existing Research: A Review

The Benefits of Reading

Supporting readers and reading literacy is at the core of the mission of school libraries. As the framework for fostering literacies in Canada's national standards for school library learning commons states, "The school library learning commons has a leading role in assisting learners to hone and apply an expanded notion of literacy as well as fostering an active reading culture." (Canadian School Libraries, 2020).

This review does not extend to a full examination of the literature associated with the benefits of reading. However, since the assumption of the benefits of reading grounds all of the research of particular relevance to this study, that is where we will begin.

In his book, *The power of reading: Insights from the research* (2nd edition, 2004), Stephen Krashen reviews and synthesizes hundreds of research studies relevant to the role of free voluntary reading in learning and language development. Through this process, Krashen is able to draw strong, research-based conclusions about the benefits of reading, and what factors contribute to the enjoyment of reading and associated literacy development.

Krashen's major conclusion is that reading is good for us, and that the act of reading is the only way that we become good readers (p. 37). Readers develop better writing style, stronger vocabulary, more advanced grammatical competence and better spelling skills.

According to Krashen, the most important way to develop stronger readers is to provide better access to books (p. 57). When books are readily available and the print environment is enriched, more reading is done, and the richer the print environment, the better the literacy development. Access to books means access to literacy. "Often those who 'hate reading' simply do not have access to books." (p. 61)

Libraries play a very strong role in providing access and in developing strong readers, according to Krashen. Data he examined demonstrated that children get their books from libraries more than from any other source. His review of the associated literature indicated that better school libraries result in more reading, and larger school library collections and longer hours increase circulation, putting more books into the hand of developing readers. Access to public libraries also results in more reading. Better libraries result in better reading. "If libraries are a major source of books, and if more reading means better reading, better libraries should be associated with better reading. This has been found to be the case." (p. 65)

Krashen also summarizes the research into reading rewards, which indicates that the intrinsic reward of reading is so great that it will stimulate additional reading (p. 116). He discourages the use of extrinsic rewards and systems that seek to encourage reading by providing these rewards, stating that using extrinsic rewards sends the message that reading is unpleasant and not worth doing without a reward. He cites research indicating that when children are asked what motivates them to read, students rarely mention rewards. By contrast, teachers often endorse reading reward systems when asked what encourages children to read (p. 117).

Research sponsored by the Ontario Library Association in 2006 corroborates Krashen's observations about the link between school libraries and students' engagement in reading. *School libraries and student achievement in Ontario* compared the results of provincial standardized test data from more than 50,000 students in over 800 schools. Specifically the researchers examined student responses in the test's questionnaire asking if they enjoyed reading to data about school library staffing models, hours open, collections and fundraising in Ontario's schools. The study found that library staffing is associated with an increase in Grade 3 reading performance and that likewise the presence of trained library staff is associated with higher achievement in reading for Grade 6 students.

Summer Reading Loss and the Achievement Gap

Early research studies into summer reading loss and the achievement gap have been formational in how educators understand and address the perceived problem. More recently the methodology and therefore the conclusions of this early research has been called into question, with critics suggesting areas for further research using current methods of gathering and analysing data. Major studies conducted in the past few years provide greater insight into summer reading loss and how to address it.

An early study by Barbara Heyns (1979) has been influential in our understanding of summer learning loss. Heyns was interested in how understanding how students learn over the summer and who learned the most or the least during the summer would provide insight into overall school efficacy. Heyns argues that schools have automatically translated the backgrounds of parents into the educational credentials of students. Educators had come to believe that social backgrounds determined the degree to which children benefited from education, inherently suggesting that actual schooling made little to no difference to student success. Heyns pointed out that this approach was inherently flawed: school is compulsory, so there was no control group for making comparisons. She suggested that summer provided a natural control and a valid context for comparison.

Heyns tested children in the spring and the fall over two years, controlling for socio-economic factors. She found that while achievement gaps narrowed during the school year, fall test scores directly reflected parental backgrounds far more than spring scores. Heyns results suggested that school does indeed make a difference, and more of a difference for students from low socio-economic backgrounds. She found that children from low-and middle-income families learned at a faster rate when school was in session and that children from low-income families tended to lose ground over the summer. Her analyses demonstrated that summer reading — whether measured by books read, time spent reading, or library usage — was the only activity strongly and consistently related to summer learning, and this effect was irrespective of family income.

Another influential study by Cooper et al from 1996 looked at what specific learning was most affected by the summer achievement gap, and suggested full year schooling as a remedy for this gap. Lacking access to the original article, our summary relies on a review by Newland (1998). According to Newland, the major findings of the research study were that summer learning loss varies depending on subject matter and economic status. Conceptual skills (“Knowing how”) such as reading skills, math concepts and grammar are less affected by the summer break, while “knowing what” skills such as computation, spelling and science facts showed the greatest loss. Children who have the opportunity to do things over the summer improve on test scores and return to school better off than in the spring. Students without these advantages either show no improvement or lose ground.

Both of these studies have very recently come into question. Kuhfeld (2019) criticizes early studies as far from conclusive. She states that the study by Cooper et al described above relied mainly on data from the 1970s and 1980s, and states that the findings may not generalize today’s social and educational contexts. She criticizes testing and scaling procedures used in early research, and also suggests that since most studies looked at only one year of data for one cohort they lack longitudinal perspective. "In short, what we know about summer learning loss is more limited and contradictory than many realize, with varying findings about whether summer setback occurs at all and whether inequality widens during the summer, particularly for students in upper elementary and middle school."

For this study, Kuhfeld analyzed data from 3.4 million students in all 50 U.S. states from two successive years of standardized testing administered in the spring and the fall. She found that while summer learning loss is common and substantial, it is not inevitable. Sixty-two to 73% of students lost ground in reading, while the remainder showed gains over the summer.

Another important finding from Kuhfeld’s research is that the more students gain during the school year, the more they lose over the summer. Race and ethnicity had been cited in earlier research as a predictor of summer reading loss, but Kuhfeld found a very small correlation. Kuhfeld draws attention to her finding that gains during the school year were the strongest predictor of academic drops in the summer. She strongly suggests that since summer represents a crucial window of time for students who may be behind to catch up, researchers should make it a priority to learn how to provide the most effective summer activities for different kinds of learners.

Von Hippel (2019) corroborates Kuhfeld’s findings about the inadequacies of early research, suggesting that modern scoring methods should be applied to new research. Despite discrepancies in research findings in the field, Von Hippel notes one consistent finding that he describes as so obvious it’s easy to overlook. He states that nearly all children, no matter how advantaged, learn much more slowly during summer vacations than they do during the school year. “That means that every summer offers children who are behind a chance to catch up. In other words, even if gaps don’t grow much during summer vacations, summer vacations still offer a chance to shrink them.”

Current research provides deeper insight into summer reading and the achievement gap. Through an intensive literature review, Allington and McGill-Franzen (2015) concluded that simply put, limited access to books seemed to underlie summer reading loss. There was substantive data on the differences in ease of access to books between middle and low income homes, schools and communities. A book-rich environment is a middle class phenomenon, not only in the home, but in the better-resourced schools that middle class children attend and in the neighbourhoods where they live.

Allington and McGill-Franzen set up a study to ensure that poor children had easy access to books over three summers. About 1000 students from low-income families in 17 elementary schools, many of whom were also from ethnic minority groups, were randomly selected to receive free summer books, which they were allowed to keep. A control group of randomly-selected classmates served as a control group, received no books.

Using a variety of criteria, the researchers selected about 500 titles for each year. Children selected 12 to 15 books for each summer, and received the books on the last day of the school year.

The researchers tracked the reading development of both groups on state assessments. After three consecutive summers, the children who received the summer books read significantly better than those in the control group who did not. Reading achievement in the summer reading group was roughly one half a year better than the control group of students. Achievement gains for the poorest students in the summer reading group were twice as large as the average reading achievement gains for the summer reading group as a whole.

Reading skills of the students who simply received books was as large as students who had attended summer school. "Understand that our experimental intervention was simply improving poor children's access to books to read during the summer months. We did not require that these children write book reports, take quizzes on the books read, or even talk to someone about what they read." The researchers pointed out the importance of both access and free choice in reading materials as powerful motivators. "We were not surprised by these findings, if only because school is typically the only place where someone tells you what to read. Outside of school we make personal choices about what we will read. We believe that allowing students choice in what they read for school is an essential necessity today."

Allington and McGill-Franzen argue that the recent widening of the rich/poor reading achievement gap should be a major concern for all American educators. The key to addressing this is simply providing access to reading materials for children from low-income families. Despite the low cost of this approach (approximately \$50 per student per year in their study) far too school districts have implemented similar programs.

Citing her research with Richard Allington summarized above, Anne McGill-Franzen, along with Ward and Cahill, wrote a comprehensive article about the summer reading gap. The authors also conducted interviews with readers, teachers and parents about their own perceptions of effective summer reading programs.

The researchers summarized who is affected the most by summer reading loss, and why. According to the researchers:

- Poverty and low educational outcomes go hand in hand.
- A "scholarly culture" of home books that speaks to a preference for and an enjoyment of reading affects literacy development.
- Poor children lose ground over the summer and more advantaged children do not.
- Free self-selected books can improve reading performance and stop summer reading loss.
- Personal technology devices may provide motivation and support for struggling readers.
- Passionate interest can scaffold readers struggling with word-level decoding.
- Limited access to print and technology in [public] libraries and neighborhoods is a structural impediment to summer reading.

Summarizing what has been found to be the success factors for summer reading programs, the researchers begin with student need. Because the poorest children benefit the most from free book distribution, and also given limited program resources and funding, educators may have to make hard choices and give books to the neediest students.

The researchers pointed out factors that might seem intuitive, but have little effect on summer reading, starting with giving parental or teacher guidance with reading. "Guidance that seems too much like school may not be as effective as educators had hoped." Similarly, matching summer reading books to student reading lexile has no conclusive effect on reading achievement.

Factors that contribute to successful summer reading programs include student choice in reading materials and programs that run every summer rather than just one summer. A recreational reading framework is critical to success rather than approaching summer reading as a remedial exercise. Privilege, access and interest are inter-connected. Students who lost ground over the summer identified lack of access to interesting materials that they wanted to read as a problem.

Summer Reading: Public Libraries

McGill-Franzen, Ward & Cahill (2016) also addressed the role of public libraries in mitigating summer reading loss, saying that research in this area is inconclusive, and studies that cite public library summer program participants' better results on standardized testing have been criticized for over-stating results. "Children who choose to participate in public library summer reading programs are more likely to be capable and motivated readers prior to rather than as a result of participation."

These conclusions are corroborated by Becnel, Moeller and Matzen (2017), who concluded that children who participate in public library summer reading programs tend to already be strong readers with parental support and an abundance of literacy resources. In many cases, participating children report that they were there because their parents had signed them up for the program. "Libraries are not reaching the population of underserved children in need of reading help and the focus needs to shift to how well libraries are serving at-risk children and how they can do better." They suggest that libraries consider the importance of intrinsic motivation for reading rather than emphasizing extrinsic motivators, which can turn reading into a competition. Where extrinsic motivators have been successful, however, is when they have a literacy focus, particularly where books are given away as prizes for reaching a goal.

That influential study by Barbara Heyns conducted in the 1970s has given librarians faith in the role of summer reading programs in reducing the achievement gap, according to Roman and Fiore (2010). Heyns stated that "the single summer activity that is most strongly and consistently related to summer learning is reading... More than any other public institution, including schools, the public library contributed to the intellectual growth of children during the summer." Remarking that librarians have been trying to replicate this result for more than thirty years, Roman and Fiore introduced their own large-scale study with national funding that took place between 2006 and 2009. Eleven sites from across the United States participated in the study. Schools in the area were part of the research. In order to qualify, 50% of the school's population had to be eligible for free and reduced-price meals, a common measure for children in poverty in the United States. Students participating in the six-week public library summer reading programs were ending third grade and about to enter fourth grade. More girls than boys participated. It is important to note that although the schools were selected because of the degree of poverty of at least half of their student populations, there were significant differences between the students participating in the program and students in the selected schools who did not. Students who actually participated already used libraries, their parents had a higher level of library use, there were more books in their homes and more home literacy activities.

Results of the study were positive. Participating students scored higher on post-tests and did not experience summer loss in reading. Surveyed at the end of the summer, the parents of participating children said that their children were better prepared to begin the new school year. Parents of non-participants universally did not make this observation. Teachers reported that participating students started the school year ready to learn, had improved reading achievement, increased reading enjoyment and motivation, were more confident in the classroom, read beyond what was required, and perceived reading as important.

Roman and Fiore concluded that their research confirmed previous studies. Participating students maintained and increased reading skills. Recreational reading outside of school made a difference in improving reading scores. They emphasized that the public library was accessible to all students, no matter the socio-economic status.

Research by University of Toronto geographer Jeff Allen (2019) questions public library accessibility. Allen cites previous research that suggests that proximity to the library influences use. The closer someone lives to the library the more likely they are to visit, while reduced proximity can dissuade or even prevent people from visiting. Allen studied access to public libraries in Regina, Saskatchewan, mapping the difference in access by travel mode and time of day. He found that those who rely on public transit have substantially less access to public libraries than those with a private car. Those without a car have substantially lower levels of access to the public library. Access during evenings and weekends was reduced, because of reduced open hours.

Canada has a very large public library summer reading program, the TD Summer Reading Club. In their annual report (Environics, 2018) prepared for Library and Archives Canada, Environics reported that over 346,000 students from across the country participated, representing roughly six percent of all Canadian children under 18, with varying rates of participation from different provincial and territorial jurisdictions. Librarians reported a high degree of promotion for the program through local schools, mostly through promotional visits. Librarians responding to the Environics survey reported that they received many testimonials indicating an increase in the love of reading as a result of the summer reading club and a high degree of satisfaction from children and parents. Many libraries reported concrete and quantifiable outcomes such as improved reading levels. Environics did not report on how this was measured.

Summer Reading Programs: Schools and School Libraries

There is a long history of schools attempting to support students over the summer. Ya-Ling Lu (2009) describes the traditional approaches that have historically been taken, including prescribed reading lists with associated activities or book logs. Lists were sorted by grade level with a heavy emphasis on the classics. Students' reading interests were not considered, nor were students given choice. The number of books to be read was also prescribed. Because the focus was typically on assessment, students were often required to submit reports or take quick reading tests. Typically the result was student disengagement and teacher dissatisfaction.

Lu and her colleagues designed a collaborative high school summer reading project in their school that broke these patterns. While the program had a web-based collaborative component, here we focus on how books were selected and how students participated as readers. Recognizing the importance of choice and voice, the school librarian surveyed students for recommended titles. As a result, over 1,000 books were represented in 12 annotated, non grade-specific lists. Students were free to choose whatever they wanted from the lists. Most students reported that having more choices enriched their reading experiences, and that they read more books than they had the previous summer.

By contrast, Compton-Lily, Colia, Quast & McCann (2016) took a much more remedial approach to summer reading loss in low-income families. In their program, the researchers matched students to books that they

themselves had selected, based on their assessment of each individual student's level. While the choices were therefore personalized, children had very little to say about the books during interviews. "We later realized that we did not have enough information from the children to be able to choose the very best books for them." While the study's focus on the social and familial aspects of the reading experience provides some insight, it is clear that there were some flaws in the approach to reading choices. For example, the researchers recognized the importance of students actually enjoying the books, they still insisted it was their responsibility to select the books for the children rather than have the children select for themselves. They also insisted that finding a few books that the child loved was more important than sending them home with a larger number of books.

Both of the articles described above are representative of the literature about actual summer reading programs in schools. Typically they describe a single year's initiative in a single school. Some are successful, some are not, and some are just downright quirky. Take, for example, the school that converted a retired school bus into a summer bookmobile (Calvert, 2019). While the school did partner with the public library, the bookmobile met the needs of their students who were unable to get to the public library easily. Everyone was welcome in the bookmobile. They could borrow books on the honour system, with no fines, and participate in bookmobile activities. This was a successful venture in a small community that relied on great volunteer effort, including teachers. No formal program assessment is evident.

At a small elementary school in Virginia teachers considered the research into summer reading loss sought to make books available to students over the summer (Peworchik et al, 2017). "During the school year, our students bring home books to read every night. They borrow books from the school library, from the reading teacher's collection, and from their classrooms. When summer arrives, they lose access to these book sources." They had read about programs that lent books to children over the summer but they decided to take their cue from research indicating that it was better for students to actually receive books to keep. They used \$1000 in donated funds to select books, considering student input. They set up a "summer reading bookstore" where students could select a limited number of books to take home and keep. Clearly very dedicated, the teachers created engaging activities and even visited homes over the summer. Again, there appears to be no program assessment.

There are some accounts of larger and sustained projects that do incorporate program assessment. Maughan (2016) describes several programs, most notably a school district in Virginia that participated in a study with the state library to support summer reading program. Each of the 61 schools in the district was invited to design a plan to meet the needs of its particular community. The school district brought in literacy specialists and specially trained librarians and teachers to create a toolkit for schools. Each school was provided with \$1500 to initiate their plans. Some schools received additional funding to keep the school library open for certain hours, staffed by the school's librarian. The article was written as the program started, so no program assessment is available. The plan was to support students in reaching a goal of reading for 1,000 minutes each, with built-in accountability and some incentives. The district's instructional specialist for library services commented, "However, improving test scores is not the primary goal. Our two main goals are, first, that students belong to a community of readers who value lifelong reading habits and literacy skills."

Baron (2016) suggests that a growing number of school districts in the United States are experimenting with keeping school libraries open and available during the summer, with funding, staffing and operation varying from district to district, but with the common goal of keeping kids reading year-round. In New Hanover County in North Carolina, 11 school libraries hosted summer reading programs. Students from all 38 schools in the district were welcome to visit any event in any of the schools, not just their home school. The schools had strong relationships with public libraries, but they noted that many students don't have transportation to get to their summer programs. All of the schools are within walking distance for students.

Baron also describes a program in Palm Beach County, Florida. The district received a large grant that has funded summer book distribution for six years at 24 schools. Some schools in the district have opened their libraries in the summer, either through the volunteer efforts of the school library media specialist, or in some cases in schools with lower achievement levels the district has funded open libraries with regular hours and paid, professional staffing. The district is gathering data to inform future programs.

Barack (2014) describes the Summer Slide Pilot Project in Idaho, which keeps elementary school libraries open during the summer in an attempt to keep students from losing reading proficiency when school is not in session. The district was able to keep six school libraries open over the summer, using \$30,000 in grant money. Other schools were receiving some grant money to support limited open hours or the purchase of resources. Schools had to have an established partnership with the local public library summer reading program in order to qualify for this funding. The program director commented that school libraries are ideal settings to engage students during the summer, as children can usually walk to their local school and are already comfortable in the setting. The state librarian was hopeful that the program would promote more partnerships between school and public libraries.

While these examples are interesting and encouraging, they represent particular pockets of engagement in addressing summer reading loss, and the examples involving the school library are rare even within this context. Duffy (2018) blames the education system's preoccupation with accountability. He notes that schools have always tried to make a difference for students without the reading advantages he enjoyed as a child that made reading an enduring lifelong joy. "Sadly, however, that is seldom the case these days, because pleasure reading has been squeezed out of most classrooms by the pressures of accountability. The result is often children who have reading skills, but do not read."

Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen, whose work has already been cited in this review, have published a book summarizing their own research (2018), and with chapters by various authors about summer reading and closing the rich/poor reading gap. Allington and McGill-Franzen make a call for change in educational policy. They note that too many current educational reform initiatives ignore the simple fact that ease of access to books and reading volume are key to mitigating summer reading loss, and that this is particularly true for reforms targeted at eliminating the rich/poor achievement gap.

Research Methodology

The invitation for schools to participate in the Eric Walters Summer Lending Challenge went out on May 21, 2019, with the publication of the spring edition of CSL Journal. Participants signed up by sending Eric Walters an email. CSL created a mailing list of the more than 150 participants through which all further correspondence was managed.

Data Gathering

The first notification was sent to participants via the mailing list on June 15, 2019 explaining the project parameters, connecting participants to the support webpage, and an appeal to participate in research. Participants were encouraged to collect their own data following the suggestions on the webpage. They were informed that a research questionnaire would be sent to them in September, and assured all appropriate measures would be taken to ensure fairness and equity and to protect privacy. Data from the survey would be aggregated and schools and participants would not be specifically identified.

The survey was sent to participants via the mailing list at the end of September and participants asked to respond by October 18. After a couple of reminders the survey ultimately closed on October 21, with a total of

111 responses, which represented approximately 74 percent of the schools that had originally signed up to participate in the project: a large enough sample to inform the research.

The researchers also conducted a literature review to determine what is already known that is relevant to the research questions, and to put our current research into this broader context.

Data Analysis

The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The researchers aggregated the quantitative data to produce statistical information relevant to the research. Qualitative data was aggregated and put through a process of qualitative data coding. Using inductive reasoning, the researchers identified themes and patterns that emerged through the coding process.

The researchers worked together to make observations about the data analysis, developing explanations and understandings and to make connections to what is already known, as revealed in the literature review. Ultimately through this process we developed theories and explanations for the new understandings that were developed through this specific study.

Limitations of the Research

The summer lending challenge was launched late in the school year, which may have limited the study in two ways: firstly, more schools may have participated with earlier notice and broader, systematic distribution of the call to participate, and secondly, initiating the project late in the school year limited the extent to which participants could consult with colleagues and market summer lending in their respective schools.

CSL was very interested in student and stakeholder reactions to the program, but collecting that information directly was beyond the scope of this research. Rather, survey participants were asked to gather this information and report it to us via the survey.

Canadian School Libraries had focussed not only on summer lending but on associated support programming through journal articles over the two years prior to the survey. Information was requested from participants who engaged in such programming in the survey. This information is not adequate for drawing conclusions for research purposes, but may nevertheless be used for informing potential program supports and/or future research.

Research Findings

Response Rate: There was a total of 111 responses to the survey. This represented approximately 74 percent of the schools that had originally signed up to participate in the project.

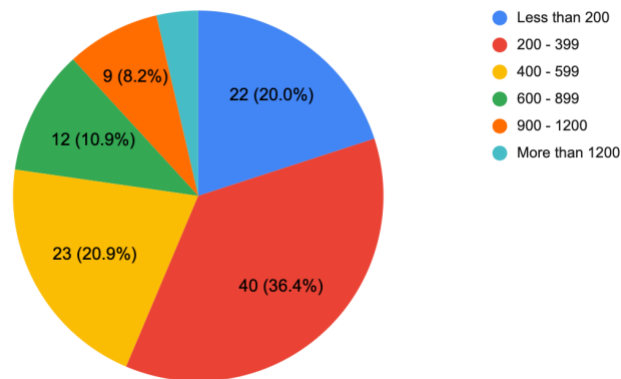
School Locations: The largest number of schools participating in the survey were in Ontario, followed by British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Jurisdictions Not Represented: New Brunswick, Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Yukon Territory

Grade Range: The summer lending program was implemented in significantly more elementary schools (83%) than secondary (17%).

Student Population: 62% of participating schools had a population of less than 400 students. 12% of schools had 900 students or more.

Student Population



Additional Relevant School Information:

53 out of 111 respondents provided additional information which they judged would be useful for us to know for research purposes.

Factors that were cited included special school programming, like French Immersion, urban or rural locations, diversity of the student population, and socio-economic status of the student population. Several respondents mentioned factors relating to students' ability to access books outside of school.

Program Participation Rate: A total of 4,365 students participated in the summer lending program in the 107 out of 111 schools that answered this question. The average number of participants per school was 41, with 63% of schools reporting that 25 or fewer students participated.

Lending Limits: 38% of participating schools allowed students to borrow fewer than 10 books for the summer. 42% had a limit of 10 books, and 10% of the schools had a limit exceeding 10 books, including a small number that had no limit on the number of books students could borrow.

Variations in Lending Limits: A small number of respondents allowed younger students fewer books. One school reported having two pop-up book exchanges during the summer. Several respondents gave students a choice in how many books they wanted to take out, and some included an element of consultation. Discussion with individual students centred on what was reasonable for that individual or on what the student felt they could accomplish.

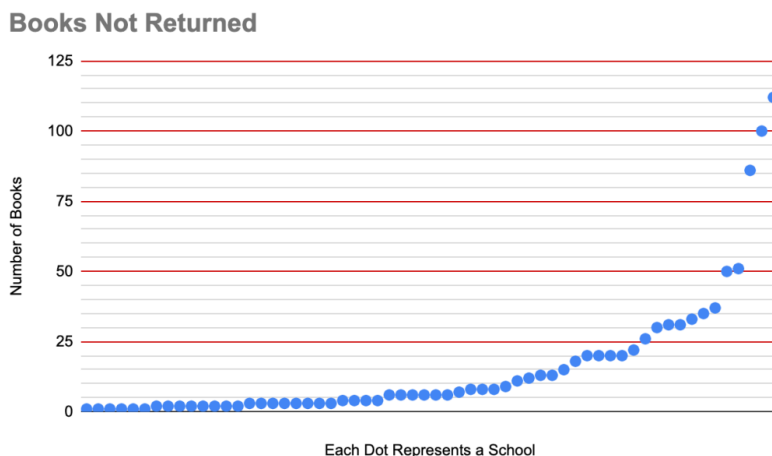
"It was actually decided with the student when they signed out the books. We talked about what would be reasonable for them and made the decision together. Some said they were traveling and shouldn't get too many. Others had lots of graphic novels, and signed out more books. A few chose longer chapter books and opted to take less books overall."

Total Number of Books Loaned: 87% of schools loaned 600 books or fewer, and of these, over half of the schools loaned 100 or fewer books. 13% of schools loaned over 700 books, with three of these schools lending more than 1400 books. A total of 28,042 books were borrowed by students as part of the Eric Walters summer lending challenge.

Average Number of Books per Student: An average of 6.4 books per student were loaned across the program. 39% of schools reported an average of fewer than 5 books per student. 46% of schools loaned an average of 5 to 9 books per student. 15% schools reported an average of 10 or more books per student.

Book Losses: 43% of schools reported that all of the books on loan over the summer had been returned at the time they responded to the survey in early to mid October. Of the 57% who reported that not all books had been returned, the majority reported very low losses. Many of the schools reporting higher losses indicated that this was probably not the final number as it was early in the school year and they were confident of

further returns. Two schools that reported low losses observed that these losses were worth the investment in the summer reading program.



43% of schools reported no losses. Graph represents losses in the other 57% of schools.

Student Response as Characterized by Survey Respondents: Over 80% of respondents reported a positive response from students, using descriptors such as happy, pleased, enthusiastic, excited, super or extremely excited, grateful, overwhelmingly positive, and even euphoric. Many of the neutral comments related to specific circumstances at the school and not necessarily attitudes. While many of the comments were short, many provided specific insights into students’ responses, as described below.

Positive Reactions: The overwhelmingly positive response to this question provided some insight into the appeal for students.

Interest: Ten respondents commented that students were excited to be able to read favourite books, more books by their favourite authors, new and exciting reads, and complete series. One respondent reported that secondary students were excited to be able to get a jump start on their historical inquiries and extended essays.

Extended Time: Having a longer time to read was a draw for many, according to six respondents. Students liked being able to keep books for far longer than usual, and for having more time to read than during the school year.

More Books: Four respondents commented on students’ happiness about higher borrowing limits, and being able to borrow more books at one time.

Trust: Three respondents commented on students’ positive reaction to the trust placed in them by library staff. “Students felt like they were getting treated with respect as I was trusting them to return the books.”

Public Library Access: Three responses related to public library access. One respondent indicated that because the school is in a rural area, it can be difficult for students to get books. The same person commented that some parents of younger students have no interest in going to the public library. Another respondent commented that although some of their students are avid readers, they don’t necessarily use the public library.

Specific Student Needs: One respondent commented on the enthusiasm of ELL students (English Language Learners) for the summer lending program. Another commented that she had students she would not consider “big readers” taking a stack of books out.

Library Interventions: A small number of comments make relationships between student reaction and the actions of library. Two respondents mentioned that summer lending was already in practice at the school, and students were excited in anticipation of participating once again. One respondent mentioned a June “launch party”. Another mentioned student anticipation for the summer book exchange opportunities offered by the school.

Neutral Reactions: Although there were a small number of descriptors like fair, compliant, or “average for our school”, most neutral reactions can be categorized as either constraints for the students themselves, or constraints of the way the program was implemented at the school that may have had an unintended negative result.

Student Constraints: One school reported that most of the students used the public library, and were therefore less interested in the school library summer lending program. One school reported that students did not generally finish reading the books they borrowed, because they were too busy in the summer. One school mentioned that younger students were excited, but interest fell off with the older students. A respondent mentioned that high school students are very busy in June and over the summer, with so many things on their minds.

Library Constraints: Some neutral responses related to constraints on the library, or constraints on the program that were imposed by library staff. Several responses indicated enthusiasm from students, but small numbers of participants. This was mostly due to lack of time to promote the program. One respondent commented on the difficulty in getting parents in for promoted dates related to summer lending. One school reported that the students who participated liked being able to borrow one or two books for the summer, but most students chose not to participate.

Response as Characterized by Direct Quotes from Students: The quotes from students collected by survey participants were overwhelmingly positive, and provide some insights into how students perceived the benefits of borrowing school library books over the summer. The predominant themes of these comments were:

Gratitude: Gratitude was the theme that infused all of the student quotes gathered by survey respondents. That gratitude infused comments related to reading engagement, reading choice, time to read, and particularly trusting students to care for and return books. One respondent received a handmade card thanking her for sharing the books.

Reading Engagement: Approximately 30 percent of the student comments related to how the summer lending program supported their love of reading. They just loved having books to read over the summer. Students described reading books and then reading them again. Some described how having the books would keep them from being bored. *“I think it was a really good idea, because if you felt like ‘I don’t know what to do or I don’t feel like doing the things I have here,’ you could get a book that wasn’t yours and you could have the opportunity to read it.”* (Grade 5 student). Several mentioned taking the books on a trip and reading in the car. Some described shared reading experiences in the family. A Grade 1 student described his mother reading the books aloud with him. Some students mentioned that their siblings read their books too. *“Me and my brother were able to read together - it brought us closer.”* (Grade 2 student). *“My brother read my books to me because I don’t know how to read Dragon Masters.”* (Grade 1 student). Several students noted the opportunity to fuel their passion

projects with reading. *"If I learn about how to take care of a rabbit, I'm allowed to get one, so I have to study."* (Grade 3 student). Having access to books in French was appreciated in a school with an immersion program. Some students mentioned that they had no books at home, and poor access to books over the summer.

Reading Choice: Approximately 30 percent of the comments focussed on the element of choice. *"I love having books this summer that I picked out."* Many chose to borrow their favourite books, books on favourite topics, or books in their favourite series, and being able to read the series without interruption. They appreciated having the books for the whole summer. There were many comments about being able to choose a larger number of books than usual. Students expressed appreciation for having so many books to choose from, and being able to get popular books that were constantly borrowed during the school year. One respondent described a Grade 10 student's happy dance as she asked to start a pile of most-wanted books ahead of check-out time.

Time: About 10 percent of the comments related to the element of time: time to read without interruption and without rushing. *"So nice to have these books when there is time to read books."* (Grade 9 student). Some students had a particular goal. *"Now I can finally get through Harry Potter."* (Grade 7 student).

Trust: Approximately 20 percent of the students focussed on the element of trust. Most of these students expressed surprise at being allowed to borrow books for the whole summer. *"No one's let me take books over the summer before. Now I don't have to stop reading."* (Grade 7 student who doesn't have access to books at home). Many expressed joy at the sheer number of books they were allowed to borrow. *"Really? I can take ALLLL these?"* (Grade 1 student). Some focussed on the length of the loan, wondering if they were expected to return the books before the new school year began.

The Public Library: About 10 percent of the comments mentioned the public library. Half of these comments related to reading choices. These students appreciated having reading choices beyond what was available at their public library. *"Our library has a way better selection of teen novels that the public library does. I love that I had access to books I wanted to read."* (Secondary student). The other half of these comments related to public library access. One student said that the public library was often closed when he wanted to visit it. The others mentioned that they found it inconvenient or difficult to visit the public library. *"I usually don't read much in the summer because I never get around to going to the public library, and I can't afford to buy books all the time. This summer I actually kept reading! It was great to have books in my house all the time."*

The Summer Lending Program: About 15 percent of the comments related to summer lending program itself, unanimously expressing that it was a great idea. One secondary student expressed the inherent logic in the idea. *"It makes sense since the books are sitting there anyway."* Many students asked if this would happen again next year. Some were already planning what books they intended to borrow for next summer. A few requested future access during the summer to exchange books. One Grade 8 student saw the bigger picture. *"I think this should be a thing in the future because it encourages people to read more."*

Sharing Results: Participants were asked how they had shared the results the summer lending program with other stakeholders in the school community, including parents, teachers and administrators. A significant number had not shared results at all, or had shared only minimally. In many cases, sharing was for administrative purposes only, i.e., sending out permission forms or reporting book return data to school administration. Where sharing was done more broadly, it tended to focus on program promotion. A small

group of respondents focused on sharing for strategic purposes, demonstrating accountability with evidence of success.

Stakeholder Response as Characterized by Survey Respondents: The response to the program from stakeholders as shared by survey respondents was mostly supportive.

Predominantly Positive Response: Survey respondents generally reported support from stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and school administrators. Comments categorized as enthusiastic often included the benefits for students in terms of reading enjoyment, literacy and learning. Parent response was almost universally positive, happy that their children would have reading materials over the summer. Two groups of parents were excited about access to specialized materials: leveled texts for primary students in one school, and French books for another, immersion school. School administrators were generally very supportive. One pointed out the program's alignment with literacy initiatives. Another was reassured about losses by the offer from Orca Book Publishing for discounted purchases for replacement books. Many teachers were supportive. In one school the teachers were so supportive that they sent in photos of themselves reading while on vacation. These photos served to encourage students, seeing their teachers model reading for leisure. In one enthusiastic school the respondent commented, *"Everyone was positive and loved it. I received positive comments from teachers, my administrators and parents. Those who were hesitant about books being returned were surprised at how many came back. My admin supported it 100 percent and loved how successful it was."*

Caution about Losses: Comments categorized as cautious universally focused on lack of trust that students would take care of books for so long and return all borrowed materials. The stakeholder group most concerned about this was teachers. In a few cases, attitudes shifted in September, when most books were returned. One principal suggested that participating students not be allowed to borrow new books, fearing losses. She relented when she found out the program was restricted to Grades 4 to 7 in that school, and in hearing the librarian's confidence in the students.

Response as Characterized by Direct Quotes from Stakeholders: All of the comments that were shared were positive. Most focused on the benefits of reading and having books in the home. *"It was wonderful to see so many kids excited to take out books over the summer! It really helped to keep the momentum going in terms of building a love of reading. They were excited to read from the very beginning."* (Teacher)

Several commented on the benefits of student choice in reading materials. *"Parents/Guardians were happy the program was offered as a variety of books and genres were selected by their children, which is why the students were engaged with the books over the summer. Student book choice and variety of the collection was an important factor."* One parent commented that popular books were often on a waiting list at the public library. One teacher was surprised to see how many students wanted to sign out books over the summer. *"Often it was students who wouldn't sign out material during the school year, as their peers weren't either. Now the program allowed them to indulge without oversight by others."*

Participant Assessment of Program Success: Participants were asked to assess how they thought the program went at their school.

76% of respondents thought that the program had gone well or very well. By far the predominant reason for these positive responses was that the students were happy to have the opportunity to read. One linked the program to positive literacy development. One mentioned that students at the school had poor access to the public library, so the program was very much appreciated. Another told of a partnership with the local public library, which offered summer programming. More students

participated because the school loaned the books over the summer. A respondent reported the positive influence of allowing more books to be borrowed. Another strong reason for reporting success was low losses. Several respondents reported that all books were returned or that there were minimal losses.

18% of respondents expressed some reservations. The majority of comments expressing reservation focussed on low participation, and mostly attributed this to the need for more promotion. Most suggested that had they started earlier with promotion participation would have been higher. Some were already suggesting ways that they could improve promotion. Two people expressed frustration that they had not been able to engage struggling readers in the summer lending program. Another worried about engaging older students. A small number of respondents worried about losses. One respondent suggested she wished she hadn't been quite so worried, as all of the books ended up being returned.

6% of respondents indicated that the program had not gone well. Respondents who indicated the program did not go well all cited poor participation. Most expressed their own disappointment at this. One suggested that students were hesitant because they had never been allowed to take home books over the summer before, and they were nervous about the responsibility. One respondent cited high losses.

Respondents' Perceptions of Program Benefits: Response to this question was very rich, with many respondents giving full answers that touched on various themes.

Access to Books: Forty-two responses related to how the summer lending program provided consistent access to books, and as a result, more students were able to read all year, including the summer. Most of these comments made no distinction between groups of students, but several did mention that the program meant that more books got into homes with few to no books and/or restricted access to books. As one respondent said, "Those who love to read got to have the books the whole summer and those that don't have access to books were able to get some for the summer." Another summed it up with, "Books in the hands of kids is always a good thing!"

Reading Enjoyment: Thirty-one responses dealt with reading enjoyment and inclusion in a community of readers. "Ultimately it built their excitement for reading. I try to instill a love of books and reading all year and letting them take books over the summer let students continue to feel that love for the library and books past the last day of school." Several responses dealt with the positive influence of the summer program in building a sense of community amongst participants. Some said their students felt special. Others commented about the rich conversations about books that they had with students and students had amongst themselves when they returned to school in September. A couple of respondents mentioned that their summer reading students were eager to write book reviews to share with other readers.

Time to Read: Seventeen comments dealt with the element of time. Simply put, students were able to enjoy their selected titles longer. More time to read meant that students were able to select more complex books without having to rush through them. Some took advantage of the time to read favourites over again. Several people mentioned that students were able to read entire series. Time allowed students to enjoy their reading without the pressure of school work. Several people mentioned the pressure of due dates during the school year: even though students could renew books, they felt the pressure of the due date and getting books finished before their next scheduled library visit.

Choice: Twenty-eight comments focussed on the positive effect of students having a rich choice of reading materials. With the library shelves full at the end of the school year, summer lending participants had a full range of reading options. They enjoyed the freedom to choose what they wanted, including favourite books and authors, new or different choices than they might otherwise have made, and popular books that were just too hard to get during the school year. The luxury of borrowing a complete series was also mentioned. “Students were intrigued to step out of their comfort zones in what they like to read, exploring different genres and authors.”

Addressing the Summer Reading Slump: Fourteen responses dealt specifically with what is often referred to as summer reading loss or the summer achievement gap. Two of the respondents said that the school had noticed a reduction in this gap as a result of the summer lending program, but provided no details on how this was measured. Two respondents used the phrase “summer reading slump”, which more accurately characterized the tone of the majority of comments. Most children, they said, experience this, either because there are not many books in the house, or they’ve read them all, or they have a difficult time getting to the public library over the summer or are disinclined to purchase books. Simply having books from the school library meant that more kids were able to read continuously over the summer, no matter their need or economic status.

Access to the Public Library: Seventeen comments dealt with student access to the public library. Many of these comments came from rural communities, where simply getting to the library in the summer was a challenge, requiring parents to drive children into town. Younger children relied on parents to accompany them to the library, which was a challenge for some because of work schedules. Some mentioned waiting lists for popular titles at the public library. Some comments dealt with how participation in the school’s summer lending program encouraged public library use. Some students participated in public library summer programming. One student commented that the pile of books she had out of the school library was her reminder to get more from the public library.

Trust: Seven comments dealt with the element of trust. Participants enjoyed being trusted to borrow a larger number of books for a longer period of time. They enjoyed not having to worry about due dates and fees. They enjoyed being able to take library books with them on vacation. They felt more trusted, and this contributed to their enjoyment of reading.

Respondents Reflect on Their Own Learning: Respondents reported that they had learned a great deal, particularly about trust.

Program Benefits: The 18 comments related to the benefits of the summer lending program typically expressed reinforcement of the core beliefs of those who work in school libraries, that reading is beneficial, fostering a love of reading is a big part of the mission, and that most students enjoy reading, given the opportunity.

Access to Reading: As one respondent said, “*Given the opportunity, students will take books out.*” The 16 comments in this theme focussed on the importance of providing access to books year-round. One respondent learned the importance of lending year-round. “*Reading is not school-bound for students so we need to treat it that way.*” Several respondents spoke of the challenges of attracting students who really need the practice with reading to borrow books over the summer. One respondent spoke of plans to increase community access overall, including starting a weekly family reading drop-in and a partnership with the local Early Years community partner.

Program Operation: Twenty-six respondents reflected on what they had learned about running the program. Some told of successes, like connecting their existing secondary school book club students to

the program and offering special book bags for younger students. A couple spoke of the success of offering small incentives, including bookmarks, “swag”, and certificates for participants. Most operational comments dealt with the need to start earlier in the year and to promote the program more effectively to all audiences: school administration, teachers, parents and students.

Trust: The greatest area of learning related to trusting students. There were 29 comments in this category, and only two of those suggested they needed to impose greater restrictions to manage borrowing and losses. The vast majority of comments dealt with overcoming their own fear that books would not be returned and that the library would experience losses. As one respondent said, *“I was right to cast aside worries about books getting lost over the summer and just do this thing because it was the right thing to do – and it was such a celebratory event.”* Another commented, *“I was surprised to learn that the return rate was 100%. I thought I was never going to see these books again.”* So many said that they have learned that their students are worthy of trust, and respond positively to high expectations. *“Kids take care of their books, love to read them and are grateful for this opportunity.”* One respondent told us he had been offering summer reading for the past five years and is still always amazed at how well the books are taken care of and always returned.

Respondents’ Future Plans: Survey respondents were asked what they would do differently in future years. Responses covered a broad spectrum of ideas. These included:

- Increasing lending limits
- Streamlining procedures for students
- Streamlining procedures to reduce losses
- Eliminating permission forms
- Eliminating grade restrictions and lending to students of all ages
- Finding ways to attract reluctant readers
- Improving program promotion by starting earlier and using a variety of strategies
- Involving teachers more directly in understanding and promoting the program
- Improving processes for gathering data about the program
- Finding ways to use incentives and rewards
- Forging stronger connections with the public library to get library cards into the hands of students

Respondents’ Advice for Schools Thinking about Summer Lending: Seventy-six respondents offered the following advice:

Just Do It! About half of the comments said just this. Try it! Don’t be afraid! It’s worth it! Jump in! Many left it at that, while others offered further words of encouragement and support.

Lending Parameters and Procedures: Several respondents offered the voice of experience for keeping good records, facilitating borrowing and minimizing losses. One recommended not punishing or charging for lost or damaged books for the summer lending program. *“I want every student/family to view this program in a positive manner.”*

Promotions and Incentives: There were several ideas for promoting the program, and ideas for easy incentives.

Trust the Kids: There were 11 comments encouraging trust in the kids to take care of the books and to return them. Several of these recounted their own positive experiences in this regard, some very eloquent. *“Don’t be afraid to lose some books. Books on the shelf are perfect and pristine but books in kids’ hands are a bit wrinkly but well loved. Let the books go home!”* said one respondent. Another offered similarly impassioned advice. *“You might lose some books, but that happens all year anyway.”*

We only lost half a dozen. Let go of that fear. It doesn't matter. The gains far outweigh those minor losses. It's always seemed sad and ridiculous to me that the books sit unused and unloved on the shelves all summer. It felt so good to set the books free."

Discussion

How do our summer reading research findings measure up to what is known in the literature already?

Starting with proven assumptions that access to books is linked to literacy gains (Krashen, 2004) one of the goals of the Eric Walters challenge and the CSL national summer reading campaign was to simply get as many books as possible into the hands of students over the summer. Grounded in the long-standing mission of school libraries to hone literacy skills and develop a culture of reading in the school community (Canadian School Libraries, 2020) and the knowledge that many studies, including that from the Ontario Library Association (2006), have confirmed a direct relationship between student achievement and school libraries with professional staffing, our research project had a solid foundation to support investigations.

Our understanding of the summer achievement gap or summer slump was informed by many studies and varied approaches as documented in the literature review. Although measuring improved literacy achievement was outside the scope of our research we found many other connections to our findings. Increasing access to books over the summer is a common objective for all studies (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2015). Access to books was also a success factor reported repeatedly in our research.

Another factor found in current studies is freedom for students to voluntarily select what they want to read over the summer months (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2015). Certainly our research confirmed that engagement in the lending program was fueled by student choice and the opportunity to select multiple books with the luxury of having all summer to enjoy them. We calculated that on average students borrowed over 6 books each. Our survey found that over 28,000 books were borrowed by students as part of the Eric Walters summer lending challenge. These books, which normally sat on darkened shelves all summer, were partnered up with well over 4,000 students to enjoy.

There are few studies to compare with that involve simple lending from the school library. Some small districts in the United States (Baron, 2016) have experimented with programs to keep school libraries open during the summer and report positive results. "Last year's trends suggest that kids who participate in summer reading have an easier transition back to school in the fall, and leaders hope that efforts like this will help the summer slide slip away." These districts invested heavily in financial support to facilities and professional staffing to enable access to school libraries over the summer. This kind of investment seems logical given that children can usually walk to their local school and are already comfortable in the setting (Barack, 2014). A few schools participating in the CSL study did offer open times during the summer to check out books but the majority of lending occurred in June prior to summer break.

Many school studies in the literature review dealt with remedial interventions designed for very specific problems and demographics such as disadvantaged learners (McGill-Franzen, Ward & Cahill, 2016) and second language learners. CSL research was more holistic and not designed to gather data for the purpose of supporting particular groups of students, although one respondent reported the positive impact on ELL learners and another on access to French language texts in an immersion school.

Most studies focus on the benefits of summer reading in terms of reading loss and achievement. What is emerging very strongly through our research is that losing the opportunity to read to whatever degree is not good for any children. Reading is beneficial in and of itself. School libraries provide a simple, doable and

inexpensive way to make sure that all children have the opportunity to continue reading over the summer or to read more than they would otherwise. One respondent noted, “Ultimately it built their excitement for reading. I try to instill a love of books and reading all year and letting them take books over the summer let students continue to feel that love for the library and books past the last day of school.”

The literature review also revealed many programs aimed at closing the summer achievement gap by giving books to students, maintaining that ownership of the books was more successful than lending (McGill-Franzen, Ward & Cahill, 2016). Although we have no findings to compare book ownership to book lending programs we can argue a financial reality. There is minimal cost in lending books from the school library, so reading can be available to everyone. The cost of a few potential lost books is exponentially less than buying books for individual students. An astounding 43% of schools reported that all of the books on loan over the summer had been returned at the time they responded to the survey in early to mid-October and the 57% who reported that not all books had been returned reported quite low losses and confidence that most would be returned soon. We have ample evidence to also make a strong argument regarding engagement. Our findings indicate that lending from the school library learning commons opens up choice for students and the potential to have multiple and varied books that they wanted to read over the summer.

We also examined research specifically based on access to public libraries and summer reading programs conducted through public libraries. Arguably the most successful of these programs in Canada is the TD Summer Reading Club (Environics, 2018). Still, library accessibility is always a concern. Proximity to the library facility, transportation and reduced hours can have a negative impact on use (Allen, 2019). This concern was evidenced in our research by a number of comments from students about having little to no access to the public library – lack of a ride from parents, rural location, reduced hours. In spite of limitations identified in our research local public libraries are another source of free books to borrow all summer long and finding ways to advocate for better accessibility can only enhance school library summer lending programs.

Over 80% of respondents in our survey reported very positive results with summer lending through the school library learning commons. We have broken down this encouraging result to determine why most schools were successful and to explore approaches which could help ensure even greater participation and engaging reading, thinking and making opportunities for students.

Conclusion

Can summer lending programs in Canada’s school libraries be successful, and if so, what factors would contribute to that success? What would be the benefits of implementing summer lending in Canada’s school libraries?

Success can be measured in many ways. The primary goal of CSL’s research was not to measure student academic success but to investigate if this national initiative could in some ways generate a positive dynamic to enable summer reading opportunities for students across Canada, particularly through school library learning commons interventions.

Education in Canada is generally the responsibility of individual provinces and territories thus the cross-Canada campaign to get books into the hands of students over the summer through a school library lending program was bold but exciting. Spreading the call for action was the biggest challenge. Given the time and communication limitations of this first CSL summer reading research project the response of 111 out of 150 schools participating across Canada in Eric Walter’s challenge was indeed a measure of positive interest, providing CSL with good data from diverse regions, schools and stakeholders. Hopefully the results of our research will catch fire and ignite a desire for many more schools to give summer lending a try. The literature

review revealed few other research projects into summer lending programs in schools that were geographically so far-ranging and few that specifically included school libraries, thus this first CSL study is groundbreaking in many ways.

Our study provides substantial evidence that summer lending programs have a positive impact on students. One might expect that students would appreciate the opportunity to borrow books from the school library over the summer but we were pleasantly surprised by the depth of student responses. Respondents reported on student engagement in reading, appreciation of choice and time to read books without constraints as well as gratitude for the opportunity to borrow the books for the summer and for the trust granted to them to be responsible and return books in September. These findings were replicated many times in various schools as well as other specific benefits cited in some individual schools.

Positive responses were also noted by those leading the summer reading programs as well as by many teachers, parents and administrators. As noted in the research findings there were a small number of schools reporting poor responses to the program and concerns regarding loss of books: however when 80% of students and 76% of other stakeholders are happy and excited with the program, we consider this campaign a success. We are very grateful to the 111 respondents who took the time and effort to collect school-based data and share with us through our survey. Study of positive and negative comments were very helpful in identifying factors leading to success, benefits of the program and recommendations for improving future summer lending programs.

Factors Contributing to Success

Access: A summer lending program initiated by the professionals in the school library learning commons has proven to contribute to participation and positive results. Students were invited to select books in a familiar setting from school library collections built to address and be responsive to student interests, needs and abilities. On hand are teacher-librarians, teachers and other school library professionals who supported students as they make choices. Of course many points of access may add to summer reading success. The reported pop-up openings during the summer were surely appreciated and utilized thanks to professional volunteers. As we discovered in the literature review some small school districts in the United States invested financially in providing professional staff and access to school libraries over summer break with great success. Investment in opening school libraries over the summer is not to be discouraged, however our research indicates that simply lending books from the existing collection will reap positive results and makes good use of excellent resources without further investment. Loss of books is minimal and considerably less expensive than purchasing a few books for students to own. Book ownership and building a culture of reading in the home are certainly to be encouraged as is ongoing discussion with parents and caregivers throughout the year. Another important point of access is the local public library; again collaboration with public librarians can only contribute to getting more books into the hands of students all year long. As we discovered in our research there are limitations as few children have a public library within walking distance and thus depend on someone getting them there. Access to books children want to read is key and the school library is a natural and inexpensive solution that is already in place.

Choice: Over and over again in the literature review previous researchers proclaimed the importance of giving students choice of personal reading materials to ensure summer reading engagement. This success factor was confirmed in our research by both students and other stakeholders in their responses to our survey. Students really appreciated the freedom to select books they wanted to read and the luxury of borrowing several books by their favourite authors or even a whole series. As expected, freedom of choice was an important factor in the success of summer lending from the school library learning commons. One special aspect to our study was the mention of having a professional on hand to guide student choices when needed.

Trust: Probably the biggest inhibitor for schools to try summer lending from the school library is the fear of book loss. Our study sheds new light on this roadblock. Responsible behaviours cannot grow without opportunity and trust. Our findings indicate that students were very appreciative of the trust they were granted to care for and return borrowed materials. This factor was repeated again and again in responses from both students and other stakeholders. This trust translated into student engagement in borrowing books, appreciation for the program, and following through with their responsibility to return books in September. The gains in building trusting relationships with students surely outweigh the minimal loss of books. This factor seems to be unique to our study and it is hoped this finding will put to rest the book loss syndrome for schools in the future.

Benefits of implementing summer lending in Canada's school libraries:

- Engaging students in reading to address the summer learning slump
- Building a community of readers within and across schools
- Putting books into the hands of students during the summer and all year
- Getting more out of school library collections
- Building responsibility and trust
- Making reading a yearlong habit

Realizing these benefits requires support from school administrators and teachers. Summer lending is a positive influence on placing the library learning commons at the heart of literacy and school-wide improvement.

Recommendations

Recommendations for school library professionals for continuing the success of and extending school library learning commons summer lending programs:

- Share this CSL summer reading research widely and discuss the potential positive impact for students in your school or school district.
- Ensure that access, choice and trust are key factors in designing your summer lending program.
- Discuss the impact that administrative procedures can have on determining the success of summer lending. Consider increasing lending limits and streamlining processes to facilitate student loans and to reduce losses.
- Invest in promotional activities to engage teachers, parents and students in participation.
- Collect school data, and analyze and share results with administration and your school community.
- Continue to build connections with local public libraries and collaborate on ways to engage more students in summer reading, including overcoming potential barriers to access.

Ideas to consider for extending programs to build a culture of summer reading:

- Utilize online collaboration spaces and technologies and social media for discussions and activities to get students reading, thinking and making.
- Investigate how the virtual school library learning commons can increase equitable access to quality reading materials.
- Reach out to reluctant readers and special needs learners throughout the school year and encourage them to continue connecting with books over the summer.
- Consider the needs of reluctant readers and special needs learners by providing access to appropriate texts and technologies.

Recommendations for Canadian School Libraries:

- Continue to add to advice and materials on the CSL website related to summer lending, and share best practices and exemplars.
- Invite provincial and territorial school and public library associations to partner with CSL in promoting summer lending programs.
- Explore approaches that would engage more secondary school participation.
- Consider pursuing further research into summer lending and into program extensions that may include virtual resources and programming and the use of technology to provide access to appropriate texts and technologies for all readers.

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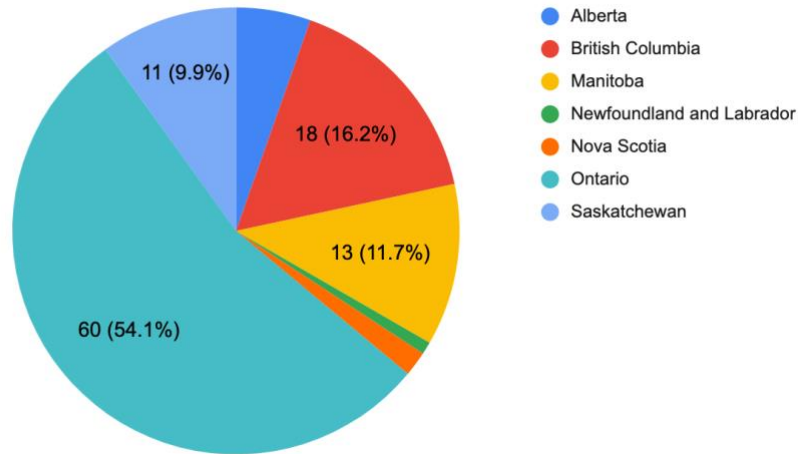
Appendix: Detailed Data and Analysis

Response Rate: There was a total of 111 responses to the survey. This represented approximately 74 percent of the schools that had originally signed up to participate in the project

School Location

111 Responses

School Location

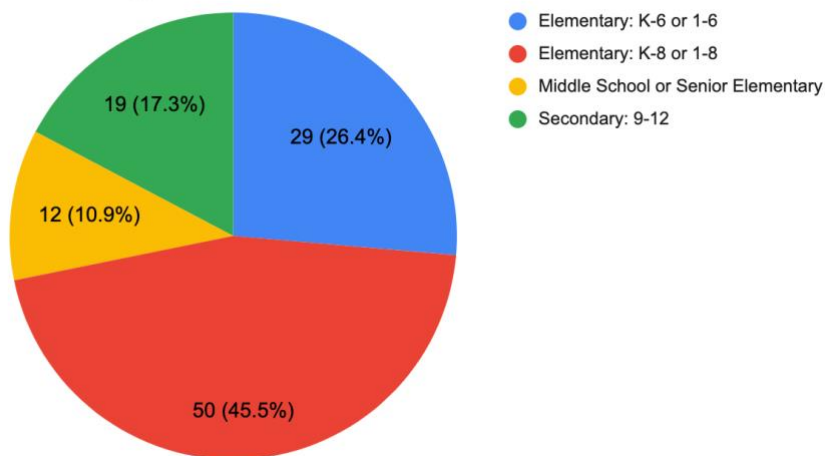


Jurisdictions Not Represented: New Brunswick, Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Yukon Territory

Grade Range

110 responses

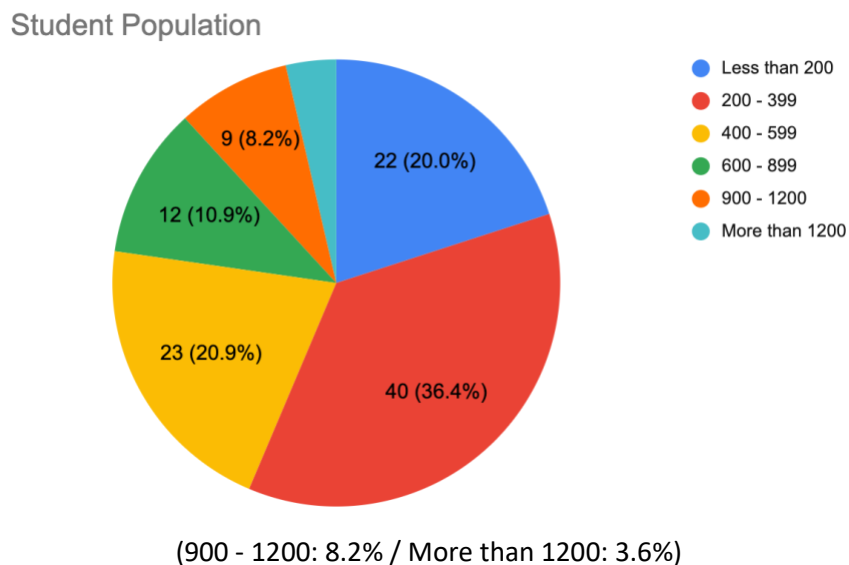
Grade Range



Additional grade ranges reported in question requesting additional relevant information about the schools. Because of the number of responses to the first grade range question, it is unclear as to whether this is new information or information for clarification. The information about additional grade ranges does not skew the observation that the summer lending program was implemented in significantly more elementary schools than secondary. Detailed information about other grade ranges reported under *Any other relevant information about your school that you think would be useful for us to know*.

Student Population

110 Responses



Any other relevant information about your school that you think would be useful for us to know.

53 Responses

Several schools reported a variation in the grade range of the school, not given as an option on the survey. This data has been noted in the response data to grade range.

Grade Range	Number of Schools
K-4	1
K-5	2
K-7	4
K-9	1
6-12	1
K-12	5

Themes and Patterns

School Program: Several respondents described unique programs at their schools. Five schools were either French Immersion or Dual Track French/English schools. One of these schools also included an Ojibwe language component. One school was independent.

Urban / Rural: One respondent mentioned specifically that their school was in an urban setting, one mentioned suburban, and four indicated that their schools were in rural communities.

Diversity: Six respondents noted the diversity of their student population, mentioning multiculturalism, specific ethnic communities, a high number of new Canadians or a high ESL population.

Socio-Economic Status: Five respondents noted the socio-economic status of the majority of their school community. One reported the school as being from a wealthy neighbourhood, one from a middle class neighbourhood, and four described their school communities as low-income, low socio-economic background with a high level of social needs, and transient.

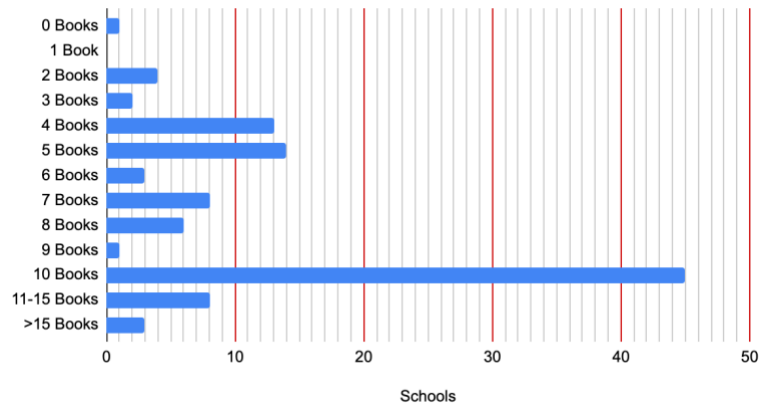
Access to Books: Several respondents mentioned factors relating to access to books. While one respondent noted that her school was next door to a public library, another noted that many students in the school are without a public library in walking distance. Some respondents made particular note of the lack of books in students’ homes. Two mentioned the importance of classroom libraries in providing access for these students. One noted that a large number of students in the school access most of their reading material through the school library.

How many students participated in your summer lending program in the summer of 2019?

107 Responses

- 4365 student participants
- Average per school: 41 students

Maximum Number of Books per Student



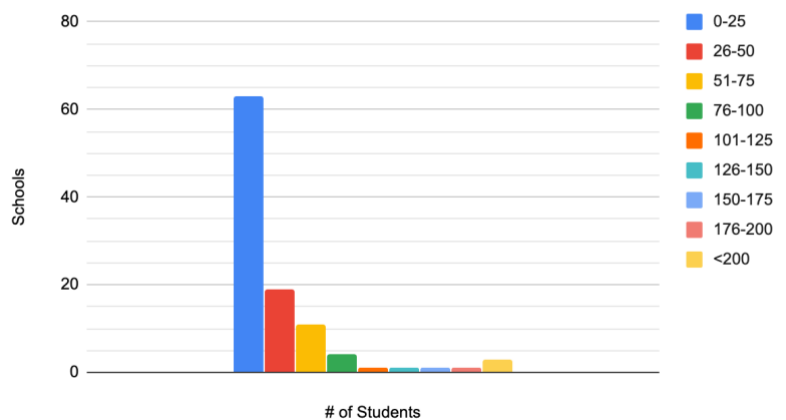
What was the maximum number of books that each student was allowed to borrow?

108 responses

Three schools reported allowing more than 15 books per student.

- School 1: 40 books max
- School 2: 99 books max
- School 3: 999 books max

Number of Student Participants per School



If the maximum number of books varied for different groups of students (i.e., primary vs junior) please explain.

40 Responses.

Themes and Patterns

Standard Limit: Although the question was about variable limits, three respondents indicated a standard limit on how many books students could borrow. One school allowed a higher limit if books were of a particular genre, like graphic novels.

Variable Limit by Grade: Three respondents reported setting a lower limit for primary students. One of these did not offer summer lending to Kindergarten students.

Unlimited: Five respondents reported having no limit on the number of books students could borrow.

Student Choice: Seven respondents reported giving the students a choice of how many books they wanted to take out. In one case the child's parent had to approve the limit their child had set.

Student Choice with Consultation: Two of the schools that gave students a choice in how many books they would take included an element of consultation with library staff. Discussion with individual students centred on what was reasonable for that individual or on what the student felt they could accomplish.

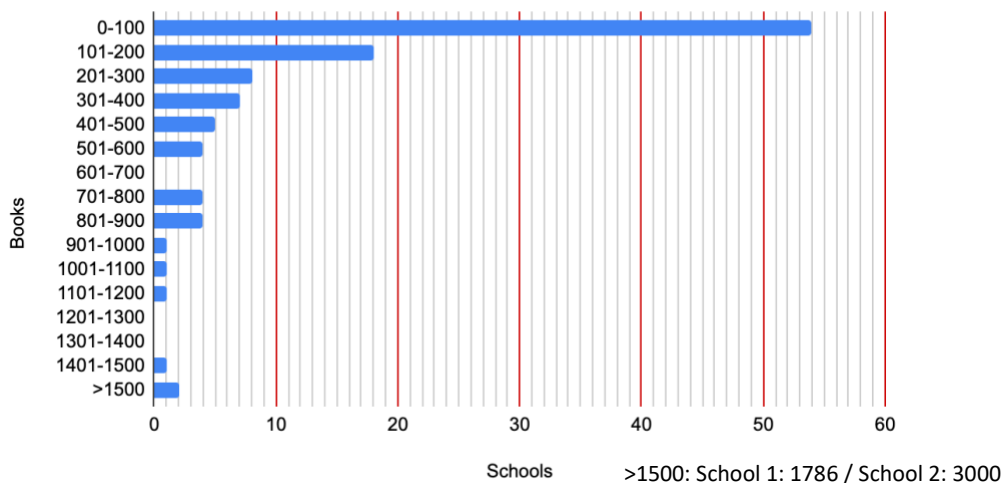
"It was actually decided with the student when they signed out the books. We talked about what would be reasonable for them and made the decision together. Some said they were traveling and shouldn't get too many. Others had lots of graphic novels, and signed out more books. A few chose longer chapter books and opted to take less books overall."

Book Exchange: One school had two Pop-Up Library days in the summer for students to exchange their books.

What was the total number of books loaned to students as part of this summer reading program?

106 Responses

Total Books Loaned by School

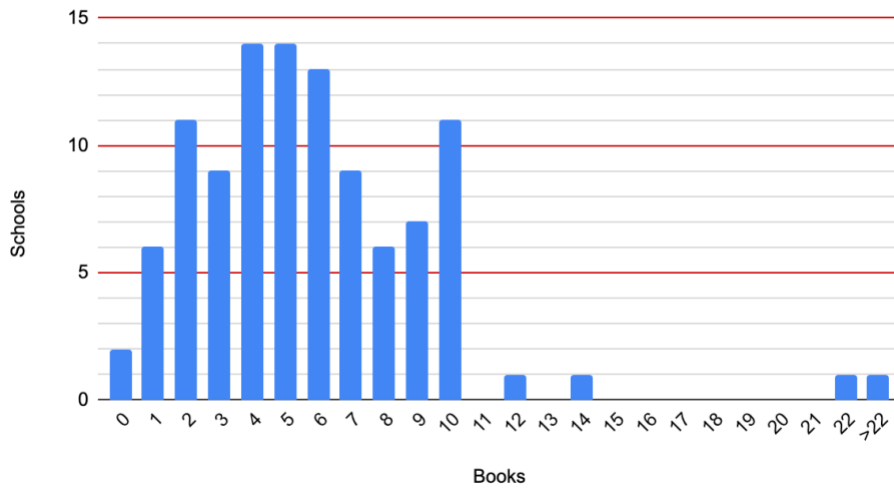


A total of 28,042 books were borrowed by students as part of the program.

What was the average number of books per participant? (Total number of books divided by number of participants.)

107 Responses

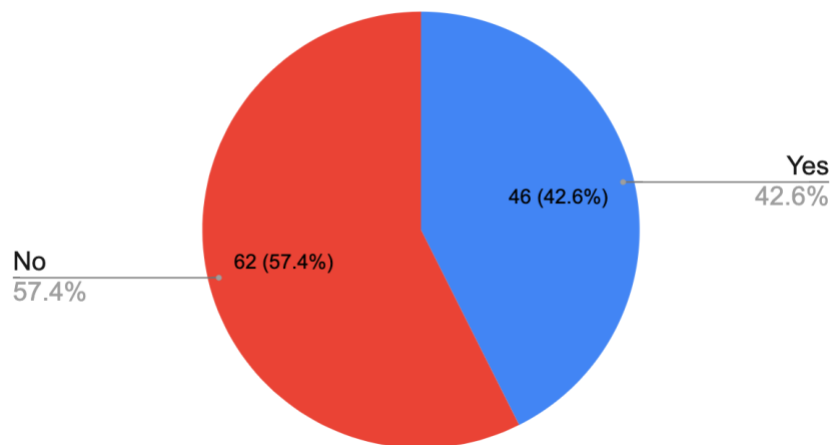
Average Number of Books per Participant



Were all of the books returned?

108 Responses

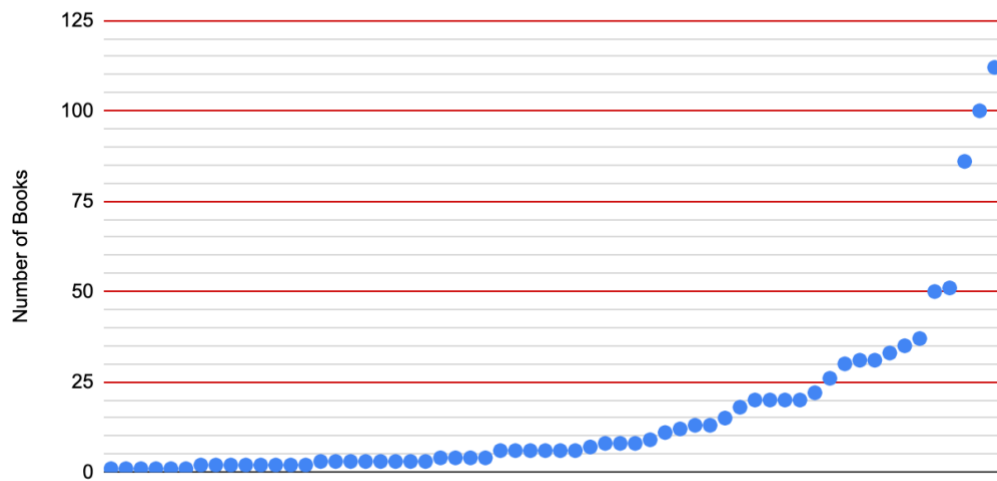
Were all of the books returned?



If you answered No to the previous question, how many books were lost / not returned? What do you anticipate the replacement cost will be?

64 Responses

Books Not Returned



Each Dot Represents a School

43% of schools reported no losses. Graph represents losses in the other 57% of schools.

Themes and Patterns

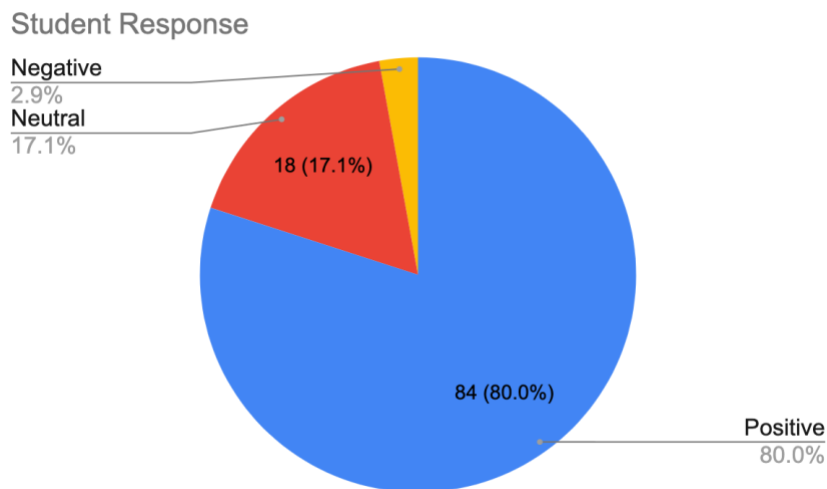
Range of Losses: The graph above indicates the number of books not returned for each of the schools that provided this number in response to the question. The data indicates that of the 57% of schools reporting that not all of their books were returned, most had low losses. Many of the schools reporting higher losses indicated that this was probably not the final number as it was early in the school year and they were confident of further returns.

Confidence in Further Returns: Twelve respondents indicated that they are confident that most or all of the books not yet returned will be eventually. Most of these had very few books not returned. One had 20, but was confident of return or replacement by the parents. One school reported a student arriving on the first day with a brand new replacement copy for a book he had lost. One school, despite reporting 112 books not yet returned, was not counting these as lost, as there was still time to retrieve them.

Worth the Investment: Two schools that reported low losses observed that these losses were worth the investment in the summer reading program.

How would you characterize student response to being able to borrow books over the summer?

105 Responses



Themes and Patterns

Overwhelmingly Positive Reaction: All 105 comments were coded as either positive, neutral, or negative. 80% of the comments were positive, and most of those were exceedingly so, using descriptors such as happy, pleased, enthusiastic, excited super or extremely excited, grateful, overwhelmingly positive, and even euphoric. Many of the neutral comments related to specific circumstances at the school and not necessarily attitudes.

While many of the comments were short, many provided specific insights into students' responses, as described below.

Positive Reactions:

Interest: Ten respondents commented that students were excited to be able to read favourite books, more books by their favourite authors, new and exciting reads, and complete series. One respondent reported that secondary students were excited to be able to get a jump start on their historical inquiries and extended essays.

Extended Time: Having a longer time to read was a draw for many, according to six respondents. Students liked being able to keep books for far longer than usual, and for having more time to read than during the school year.

More Books: Four respondents commented on students' happiness about higher borrowing limits, and being able to borrow more books at one time.

Trust: Three respondents commented on students' positive reaction to the trust placed in them by library staff. "Students felt like they were getting treated with respect as I was trusting them to return the books."

Public Library Access: Three responses related to public library access. One respondent indicated that because the school is in a rural area, so it can be difficult for students to get books. The same person commented that some parents of younger students have no interest in going to the public library.

Another respondent commented that although some of their students are avid readers, they don't necessarily use the public library.

Specific Student Needs: One respondent commented on the enthusiasm of ELL students (English Language Learners) for the summer lending program. Another commented that she had students she would not consider "big readers" taking a stack of books out.

Library Interventions: A small number of comments make relationships between student reaction and the actions of the library. Two respondents mentioned that summer lending was already in practice at the school, and students were excited in anticipation of participating once again. One respondent mentioned a June "launch party". Another mentioned student anticipation for the summer book exchange opportunities offered by the school.

Neutral Reactions:

Although there were a small number of descriptors like fair, compliant, or "average for our school", most neutral reactions can be categorized as either constraints for the students themselves, or constraints of the way the program was implemented at the school that may have had an unintended negative result.

Student Constraints: One school reported that most of the students used the public library, and were therefore less interested in the school library summer lending program. One school reported that students did not generally finish reading the books they borrowed, because they were too busy in the summer. One school mentioned that younger students were excited, but interest fell off with the older students. A respondent mentioned that high school students are very busy in June and over the summer, with so many things on their minds.

Library Constraints: Some neutral responses related to constraints on the library, or constraints on the program that were imposed by library staff. Several responses indicated enthusiasm from students, but small numbers of participants. This was mostly due to lack of time to promote the program. One respondent commented on the difficulty in getting parents in for promoted dates related to summer lending. One school reported that the students who participated liked being able to borrow one or two books for the summer, but most students chose not to participate.

Negative Reactions:

Two of the three negative respondents included explanations. One said that no students ended up borrowing books, and the other said that the only students who borrowed books were teachers' children.

Share any quotes from students that you collected. (Please identify the student in general terms, i.e., a Grade 5 student.) Add as many quotes as you like.

51 Responses, Approximately 100 student quotes

Themes and Patterns

Gratitude: Gratitude was the theme that infused all of the student quotes gathered by survey respondents. That gratitude infused comments related to reading engagement, reading choice, time to read, and particularly trusting students to care for and return books. One respondent received a handmade card thanking her for sharing the books.

Reading Engagement: Approximately 30 percent of the student comments related to how the summer lending program supported their love of reading. They just loved having books to read over the summer. Students described reading books and then reading them again. Some described how having the books would keep them from being bored. “I think it was a really good idea, because if you felt like ‘I don’t know what to do or I don’t feel like doing the things I have here,’ you could get a book that wasn’t yours and you could have the opportunity to read it.” (Grade 5 student). Several mentioned taking the books on a trip and reading in the car. Some described shared reading experiences in the family. A Grade 1 student described his mother reading the books aloud with him. Some students mentioned that their siblings read their books too. “Me and my brother were able to read together - it brought us closer.” (Grade 2 student). “My brother read my books to me because I don’t know how to read *Dragon Masters*.” (Grade 1 student). Several students noted the opportunity to fuel their passion projects with reading. “If I learn about how to take care of a rabbit, I’m allowed to get one, so I have to study.” (Grade 3 student). Having access to books in French was appreciated in a school with an immersion program. Some students mentioned that they had no books at home, and poor access to books over the summer.

Reading Choice: Approximately 30 percent of the comments focussed on the element of choice. “I love having books this summer that I picked out.” Many chose to borrow their favourite books, books on favourite topics, or books in their favourite series, and being able to read the series without interruption. They appreciated having the books for the whole summer. There were many comments about being able to choose a larger number of books than usual. Students expressed appreciation for having so many books to choose from, and being able to get popular books that were constantly borrowed during the school year. One respondent described a Grade 10 student’s happy dance as she asked to start a pile of most-wanted books ahead of check-out time.

Time: About 10 percent of the comments related to the element of time: time to read without interruption and without rushing. “So nice to have these books when there is time to read books.” (Grade 9 student). Some students had a particular goal. “Now I can finally get through *Harry Potter*.” (Grade 7 student).

Trust: Approximately 20 percent of the students focussed on the element of trust. Most of these students expressed surprise at being allowed to borrow books for the whole summer. “No one’s let me take books over the summer before. Now I don’t have to stop reading.” (Grade 7 student who doesn’t have access to books at home). Many expressed joy at the sheer number of books they were allowed to borrow. “Really? I can take ALLLL these?” (Grade 1 student). Some focussed on the length of the loan, wondering if they were expected to return the books before the new school year began.

The Public Library: About 10 percent of the comments mentioned the public library. Half of these comments related to reading choices. These students appreciated having reading choices beyond what was available at their public library. “Our library has a way better selection of teen novels that the public library does. I love that I had access to books I wanted to read.” (Secondary student). The other half of these comments related to public library access. One student said that the public library was often closed when he wanted to visit it. The others mentioned that they found it inconvenient or difficult to visit the public library. “I usually don’t read much in the summer because I never get around to going to the public library, and I can’t afford to buy books all the time. This summer I actually kept reading! It was great to have books in my house all the time.”

The Summer Lending Program: About 15 percent of the comments related to summer lending program itself, unanimously expressing that it was a great idea. One secondary student expressed the inherent logic in the idea. “It makes sense since the books are sitting there anyway.” Many students asked if this would happen again next year. Some were already planning what books they intended to borrow for next summer. A few requested future access during the summer to exchange books. One Grade 8 student saw the bigger picture. “I think this should be a thing in the future because it encourages people to read more.”

How have you shared the results of your summer lending and/or enhanced summer programming with other stakeholders in the school community? (Including parents, teachers and school administrators.)

97 Responses

Themes and Patterns

Scope of Sharing: A significant number of respondents had not shared results at all, or shared only minimally. A small number indicated that they had shared results, but provided no explanation of what or to whom.

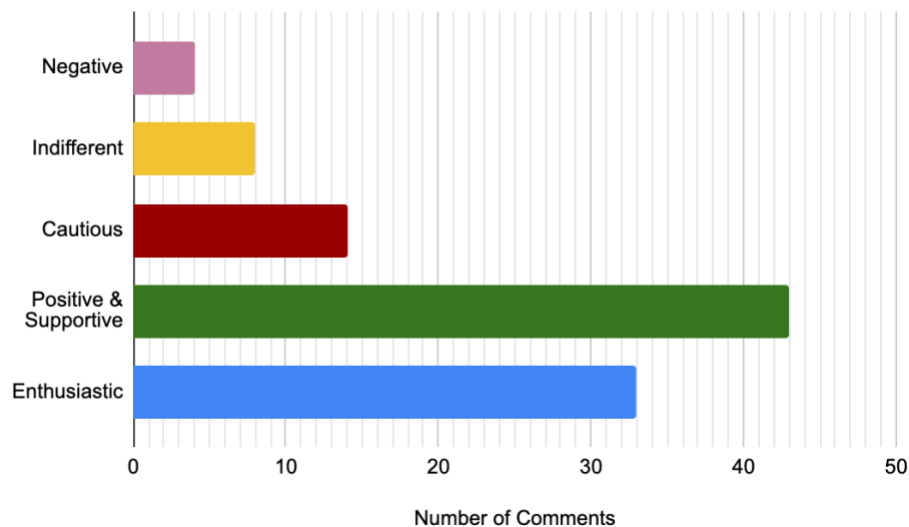
Scope of Sharing	#	Patterns
Has not shared results, and no indication of future plans.	16	No information provided.
Has not shared results, but plans to do so.	7	Many cited initiation of the program, late in the school year, and timing of survey (Sept) as factors. They had plans to share the results in the future, to varying degrees.
Minimal sharing with very limited internal audience.	14	In most of these cases, sharing was either informal or via an email, typically to school administration. In many cases, the reporting related to statistics, like books returned / lost.
Minimal sharing, but plans to do more.	3	Many cited initiation of the program, late in the school year, and timing of survey (Sept) as factors. They had plans to share the results in the future, to varying degrees.
Sharing within school staff and administration only.	17	Most of these respondents had shared with school administration and staff. Communications tended to be related to procedures in some cases, but several reported program successes to the school staff in some way.
Sharing more broadly with a wider audience. Few details provided.	13	Several respondents indicated media for sharing, but few details on what was shared. Announcements, school newsletters, class webpages, and Twitter were mentioned several times.
Sharing more broadly with a wider audience within and beyond the school community for promotional purposes.	11	These respondents used similar media for sharing more broadly. Response details focused on promoting the program.
Sharing more broadly with a wider audience within and beyond the school community for strategic purposes and for demonstrating accountability.	8	This group of respondents mentioned sharing student success, to varying degrees. One prepared a slide presentation to be shared with school board administration. One prepared a detailed infographic sharing key successes with the program. One respondent reports comparing “summer slide” data, noting that fewer students had lost ground with reading over the summer. One respondent is planning to write an article for the school website. Two respondents indicated that program success data will be included in annual reports from the school library learning commons program.

Purpose for Sharing: In many cases, sharing was for administrative purposes only, i.e., sending out permission forms or reporting book return data to school administration. Where sharing was done more broadly, it tended to focus on program promotion. A small group of respondents focused on sharing for strategic purposes, demonstrating accountability with evidence of success.

How would you characterize response from other stakeholders to the lending program? (Including parents, teachers and school administrators.)

89 Responses

Stakeholder Response



Themes and Patterns

Predominantly Positive Response: Survey respondents generally reported support from stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and school administrators. Comments categorized as enthusiastic often included the benefits for students in terms of reading enjoyment, literacy and learning. Parent response was almost universally positive, happy that their children would have reading materials over the summer. Two groups of parents were excited about access to specialized materials: leveled texts for primary students in one school, and French books for another, immersion school. School administrators were generally very supportive. One pointed out the program’s alignment with literacy initiatives. Another was reassured about losses by the offer from Orca Book Publishing for discounted purchases for replacement books. Many teachers were supportive. In one school the teachers were so supportive that they sent in photos of themselves reading while on vacation. These photos served to encourage students, seeing their teachers model reading for leisure. In one enthusiastic school the respondent commented, “Everyone was positive and loved it. I received positive comments from teachers, my administrators and parents. Those who were hesitant about books being returned were surprised at how many came back. My admin supported it 100 percent and loved how successful it was.”

Caution about Losses: Comments categorized as cautious universally focussed on lack of trust that students would take care of books for so long and return all borrowed materials. The stakeholder group most concerned about this was teachers. In a few cases, attitudes shifted in September, when most books were returned. One principal suggested that participating students not be allowed to borrow new books, fearing losses. She

relented when she found out the program was restricted to Grades 4 to 7 in that school, and in hearing the librarian’s confidence in the students.

Indifferent and Negative Responses: There were only a handful of these, and little context was provided by respondents for this observation.

Share any quotes from other stakeholders that you collected. (Please identify the person in general terms, i.e., a parent, a teacher, the principal) Add as many quotes as you like.

22 Responses

Themes and Patterns

All of the quotes that were shared were positive.

Benefits of Reading: Most focused on the benefits of reading and having books in the home. “It was wonderful to see so many kids excited to take out books over the summer! It really helped to keep the momentum going in terms of building a love of reading. They were excited to read from the very beginning.” (Teacher)

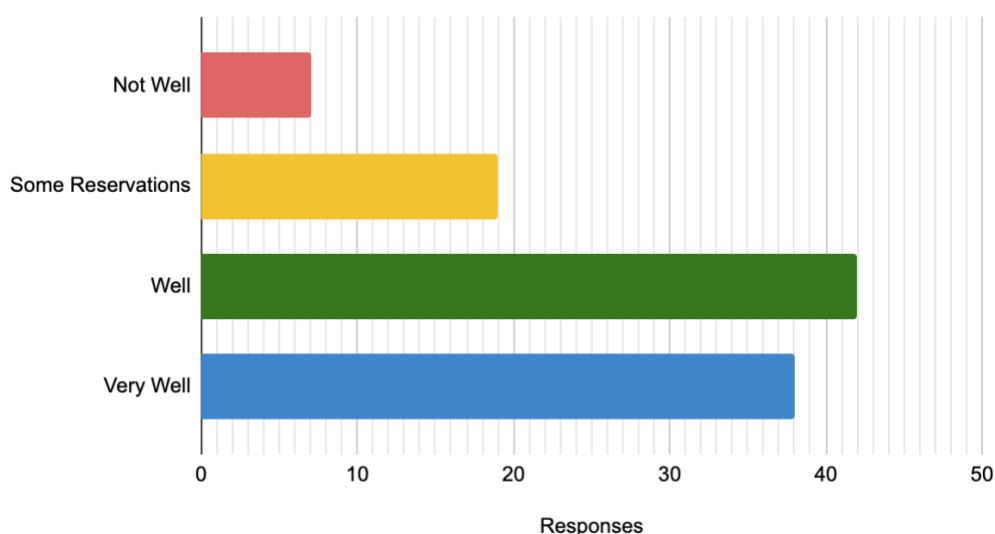
Student Choice: Several commented on the benefits of student choice in reading materials.

“Parents/Guardians were happy the program was offered as a variety of books and genres were selected by their children, which is why the students were engaged with the books over the summer. Student book choice and variety of the collection was an important factor.” One parent commented that popular books were often on a waiting list at the public library. One teacher was surprised to see how many students wanted to sign out books over the summer. “Often it was students who wouldn’t sign out material during the school year, as their peers weren’t either. Now the program allowed them to indulge without oversight by others.”

How do you think the summer lending program went?

106 Responses

How do you think the program went?



Themes and Patterns

Comments for each level of response (Not Well, Reservations, Well, Very Well) were mostly consistent within each level.

Not Well: Respondents who indicated the program did not go well all cited poor participation. Most expressed their own disappointment at this. One suggested that students were hesitant because they had never been allowed to take home books over the summer before, and they were nervous about the responsibility. One respondent cited high losses.

Some Reservations: The majority of comments expressing reservation focussed on low participation, and mostly attributed this to the need for more promotion. Most suggested that had they started earlier with promotion participation would have been higher. Some were already suggesting ways that they could improve promotion. Two people expressed frustration that they had not been able to engage struggling readers in the summer lending program. Another worried about engaging older students. A small number of respondents worried about losses. One respondent suggested she wished she hadn't been quite so worried, as all of the books ended up being returned.

Well & Very Well: By far the predominant reason for these positive responses was that the students were happy to have the opportunity to read. One linked the program to positive literacy development. One mentioned that students at the school had poor access to the public library, so the program was very much appreciated. Another told of a partnership with the local public library, which offered summer programming. More students participated because the school loaned the books over the summer. A respondent reported the positive influence of allowing more books to be borrowed. Another strong reason for reporting success was low losses. Several respondents reported that all books were returned or that there were minimal losses.

It is worth mentioning comments from four respondents who offered book exchange opportunities over the summer. All four said that this was not successful: students generally did not show up.

What were the benefits of the summer lending program for your students?

101 Responses

Themes and Patterns

Response to this question was very rich, with many respondents giving full answers that touched on various themes.

Access to Books: Forty-two responses related to how the summer lending program provided consistent access to books, and as a result, more students were able to read all year, including the summer. Most of these comments made no distinction between groups of students, but several did mention that the program meant that more books got into homes with few to no books and/or restricted access to books. As one respondent said, "Those who love to read got to have the books the whole summer and those that don't have access to books were able to get some for the summer." Another summed it up with, "Books in the hands of kids is always a good thing!"

Reading Enjoyment: Thirty-one responses dealt with reading enjoyment and inclusion in a community of readers. "Ultimately it built their excitement for reading. I try to instill a love of books and reading all year and letting them take books over the summer let students continue to feel that love for the library and books past the last day of school." Several responses dealt with the positive influence of the summer program in building a

sense of community amongst participants. Some said their students felt special. Others commented about the rich conversations about books that they had with students and students had amongst themselves when they returned to school in September. A couple of respondents mentioned that their summer reading students were eager to write book reviews to share with other readers.

Time to Read: Seventeen comments dealt with the element of time. Simply put, students were able to enjoy their selected titles longer. More time to read meant that students were able to select more complex books without having to rush through them. Some took advantage of the time to read favourites over again. Several people mentioned that students were able to read entire series. Time allowed students to enjoy their reading without the pressure of school work. Several people mentioned the pressure of due dates during the school year: even though students could renew books, they felt the pressure of the due date and getting books finished before their next scheduled library visit.

Choice: Twenty-eight comments focussed on the positive effect of students having a rich choice of reading materials. With the library shelves full at the end of the school year, summer lending participants had a full range of reading options. They enjoyed the freedom to choose what they wanted, including favourite books and authors, new or different choices than they might otherwise have made, and popular books that were just too hard to get during the school year. The luxury of borrowing a complete series was also mentioned. "Students were intrigued to step out of their comfort zones in what they like to read, exploring different genres and authors."

Addressing the Summer Reading Slump: Fourteen responses dealt specifically with what is often referred to as summer reading loss or the summer achievement gap. Two of the respondents said that the school had noticed a reduction in this gap as a result of the summer lending program, but provided no details on how this was measured. Two respondents used the phrase "summer reading slump", which more accurately characterized the tone of the majority of comments. Most children, they said, experience this, either because there are not many books in the house, or they've read them all, or they have a difficult time getting to the public library over the summer or are disinclined to purchase books. Simply having books from the school library meant that more kids were able to read continuously over the summer, no matter their need or economic status.

Access to the Public Library: Seventeen comments dealt with student access to the public library. Many of these comments came from rural communities, where simply getting to the library in the summer was a challenge, requiring parents to drive children into town. Younger children relied on parents to accompany them to the library, which was a challenge for some because of work schedules. Some mentioned waiting lists for popular titles at the public library. Some comments dealt with how participation in the school's summer lending program encouraged public library use. Some students participated in public library summer programming. One student commented that the pile of books she had out of the school library was her reminder to get more from the public library.

Trust: Seven comments dealt with the element of trust. Participants enjoyed being trusted to borrow a larger number of books for a longer period of time. They enjoyed not having to worry about due dates and fees. They enjoyed being able to take library books with them on vacation. They felt more trusted, and this contributed to their enjoyment of reading.

What did you learn as a result of the summer lending program?

90 Responses

Themes and Patterns

Response to this question was also very rich. Respondents learned a great deal, particularly about trust.

Program Benefits: The 18 comments related to the benefits of the summer lending program typically expressed reinforcement of the core beliefs of those who work in school libraries, that reading is beneficial, fostering a love of reading is a big part of the mission, and that most students enjoy reading, given the opportunity.

Access to Reading: As one respondent said, “Given the opportunity, students will take books out.” The 16 comments in this theme focussed on the importance of providing access to books year-round. One respondent learned the importance of lending year-round. “Reading is not school-bound for students so we need to treat it that way.” Several respondents spoke of the challenges of attracting students who really need the practice with reading to borrow books over the summer. One respondent spoke of plans to increase community access overall, including starting a weekly family reading drop-in and a partnership with the local Early Years community partner.

Program Operation: Twenty-six respondents reflected on what they had learned about running the program. Some told of successes, like connecting their existing secondary school book club students to the program and offering special book bags for younger students. A couple spoke of the success of offering small incentives, including bookmarks, “swag”, and certificates for participants. Most operational comments dealt with the need to start earlier in the year and to promote the program more effectively to all audiences: school administration, teachers, parents and students.

Trust: The greatest area of learning related to trusting students. There were 29 comments in this category, and only two of those suggested they needed to impose greater restrictions to manage borrowing and losses. The vast majority of comments dealt with overcoming their own fear that books would not be returned and that the library would experience losses. As one respondent said, “I was right to cast aside worries about books getting lost over the summer and just do this thing because it was the right thing to do – and it was such a celebratory event.” Another commented, “I was surprised to learn that the return rate was 100%. I thought I was never going to see these books again.” So many said that they have learned that their students are worthy of trust, and respond positively to high expectations. “Kids take care of their books, love to read them and are grateful for this opportunity.” One respondent told us he had been offering summer reading for the past five years and is still always amazed at how well the books are taken care of and always returned.

Is there anything that you would do differently in future years?

89 Responses

Themes and Patterns

Lending Parameters and Procedures: There were 25 comments in this category. One respondent suggested putting certain limits on borrowing, so that one student doesn’t wipe out a whole series, for example. One respondent pondered having parents sign a permission form to create greater accountability. Another suggested graduated limits based on borrower’s history with losses. By far the majority of the comments went the other way. Two have decided to remove permission forms from the process. Several have decided to increase limits and allow students to borrow more books. Several addressed their own procedures, seeing

improvements that would help them to manage things more smoothly and therefore facilitate lending in June and reduce losses overall. Two or three respondents contemplated opening up for book exchange sometime in the summer, while another who had tried this has decided not to continue.

Include More Students: Most of the 9 responses in this category were about including more grades in the program - mostly extending it to younger students. Some respondents were also concerned about attracting reluctant readers, who would benefit the most from the opportunity. Some felt more confident after this trial year in extending the program.

Program Promotion: At 39, the largest number of comments related to program promotion, and the consistent theme of these comments was the need to promote more and to start earlier. Some were contemplating specific strategies, including letters, newsletters, social media and classroom visits. Most admitted to starting too late in the school year.

Involving Teachers: Seven comments specifically mentioned the need to involve teachers in understanding the benefits of and promoting the summer lending program.

Program Improvements and Incentives: A small number of responses dealt with programming ideas to engage students in the idea of borrowing books over the summer, and for acknowledging student participation. Some of these ideas involved incentives, including certificates, recognition at assemblies, and “swag” such as book bags to keep.

Gathering Data: Three respondents would like to gather better data about the program, including not only statistical information but also feedback from students and parents.

Connecting to the Public Library: One respondent made a strong case for forging stronger connections to the local public library to get more library cards into the hands of students.

Do you have any words of advice for other schools thinking about supporting a summer lending program?

76 Responses

Themes and Patterns

Just Do It! About half of the comments said just this. Try it! Don't be afraid! It's worth it! Jump in! Many left it at that, while others offered further words of encouragement and support.

Lending Parameters and Procedures: Several respondents offered the voice of experience for keeping good records, facilitating borrowing and minimizing losses. One recommended not punishing or charging for lost or damaged books for the summer lending program. “I want every student/family to view this program in a positive manner.”

Promotions and Incentives: There were several ideas for promoting the program, and ideas for easy incentives.

Trust the Kids: There were 11 comments encouraging trust in the kids to take care of the books and to return them. Several of these recounted their own positive experiences in this regard, some very eloquent. “Don't be afraid to lose some books. Books on the shelf are perfect and pristine but books in kids' hands are a bit wrinkly but well loved. Let the books go home!” said one respondent. Another offered similarly impassioned advice.

“You might lose some books, but that happens all year anyway. We only lost half a dozen. Let go of that fear. It doesn’t matter. The gains far outweigh those minor losses. It’s always seemed sad and ridiculous to me that the books sit unused and unloved on the shelves all summer. It felt so good to set the books free.”
