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# Planning And Implementing An Effective Summer Reading Program

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PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING AN EFFECTIVE  
SUMMER READING PROGRAM

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Hamline University

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Background

Teaching children to read is perhaps the most significant role of any elementary teacher. From September to June, teachers spend hours each day planning and implementing differentiated reading instruction for all students. But what happens during the summer months when students are not in school? Too many students lose the skills they worked so hard to develop during the school year. The term “summer slide” is often used to describe this phenomenon of students negating many of the gains they made over the course of the school year (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). It can be really frustrating for teachers to realize much of the hard work they put in was lost, and disheartening for students who return to school to find out reading does not come quite as easily as it did before.

As a teacher of English learners (ELs), the summer slide is something I have witnessed first-hand on far too many occasions. At my school, we have regular meetings as interventionists to discuss which interventions would be best for each child. When we analyze student data in the fall, we often see a linear decline, and it is not uncommon to observe students falling back one or more reading levels compared to where they were in May. When students return to school in September, we find we have more students in need of interventions than we have available staff. Could this phenomena be mitigated if

students were regularly reading books at their level throughout the summer months? This lead me to consider my research question, *How can a summer reading program be implemented in order to most effectively close the achievement gap and allow students to maintain literacy skills over the summer months?*. Throughout this chapter, I will illustrate the events that sparked my passion for this topic, explain the planning that went into the implementation of the pilot year of the program, and discuss the necessary improvements for year two.

### **Personal Journey**

In my school district, EL teachers are often shifting schools as populations of ELs continue to grow and change. While this is my second year teaching full time at my current school, in the past I have been split between two schools at a time, and have taught in seven different schools in the last five years. While starting over at so many schools has been a challenge, it has also been a wonderful learning opportunity. Through the last five years, I have been able to learn about how different schools work to conquer challenges, and how teachers collaborate to meet students' needs. One example of this is teachers working together to create extended day and summer programming.

A couple of the schools I have taught at have implemented summer reading programs. The programs at these particular schools are by invitation only, and are designed to target students who are reading below grade-level. These students are invited to come to school once a week to check out three guided reading books at their level. One of the schools requires students to choose two fiction and one nonfiction book each week. While each school's program is a little bit different, the goal is the same--to encourage

students to read at home during the summer months. While I did volunteer at these programs on a few occasions, and understood at a basic level the importance of students reading during the summer, my passion for this type of work had not yet been fully ignited.

My passion was in fact ignited while I was completing the course *Foundations of Reading, K-12* at Hamline University. Week after week I would read about how access to books is one of the greatest factors leading to the achievement gap. This led me to think about how many of my students are living in poverty, and likely do not have access to many books when they are not in school. This is when it really clicked with me--if we want the data to change, we must do something about it. If we maintain the status quo, we will continue to see the same results.

In April of 2017, I was meeting with my kindergarten colleagues during a data analysis day. We were scouring through student data and commenting on how much growth they had made over the course of the year. However, in the back of my mind, I was worried about the possibility of students losing some of the gains they had made as summer break was approaching. I casually mentioned the idea of implementing a summer reading program at our school, and one of my kindergarten co-teachers, Jackie (pseudonym) was immediately on board. Minutes later, our administrative assistant walked through the door, and seemed excited about the idea. We were given permission and full support from administration, but we quickly learned the school did not have much funding to allocate to the program. We would have to get creative.

### **The Planning Process**

Since it was already April, we had a lot to do before starting the program, and our to-do list kept growing. The two of us had two months to implement a new program while teaching full-time. There were hundreds of questions rolling around in our heads, among them: Where would we get funding? What types of books should students be allowed to check out? When should the program take place? How will we staff the program? What types of activities should we plan for? What strategies can we use to increase participation in the event?

One of the first decisions we made was to invite all students and their families to participate in the program, rather than make the program invitation only. We realized even students who are reading at or above grade-level expectations are not immune to the summer slide, and it is important for all students to maintain their acquired skills. This was also possible, since our school is one of the smallest in the district with just under 500 students. We also knew it was important for us to make the program accessible to as many families as possible, so we put a lot of thought into when to schedule the program. Our plan was to have three sessions a month, starting the week after school was out, skipping the week of the fourth of July, and ending the week before teacher workshops in August. Knowing some parents work during the day, and some at night, we wanted the schedule to reflect this, so we planned for two daytime sessions and one evening session per month. The schedule was sent home with each child, and families were asked to sign their children up before the school year was over, so we would know how many students to expect. We even had a booth at our school's family night to encourage families to sign up.



Our next major task was to secure funding for the program. We applied for a handful of grants and wrote letters to dozens of local stores asking for donations. We ended up receiving a few gift cards from nearby grocery stores, which we used to purchase food for snacks and activities. In addition, we received \$1,000 from the Walmart Community Grant, which we decided to use for books. With these funds, we purchased guided reading books along with young adult and graphic novels, which had soared in popularity, in hopes to increase students' motivation. In addition to the 142 copies of new books we purchased, students were also able to choose from our existing guided reading library of leveled books.

We now had books, and a schedule, and participants but we did not have any staffing. Without any additional funding, we knew it had to be entirely volunteer based. Jackie and I were willing to donate our time each week, but we knew that wouldn't be enough to run the whole program, so we recruited high school volunteers, and a few teachers who volunteered to run activities. A teacher from one of the local high schools even volunteered to bring in some animals for the last week of the program. Everything was now in place, but we knew it was a pilot year, and we would still have a lot to learn.

### **Reading Program: Year One**

The first year of our summer reading program far exceeded our expectations. There were 87 students who attended at least one session, with the average participant attending 3.1 sessions. We received an abundance of positive feedback from families. For example, one mother sent me an email explaining what a difference the reading program made with her son. Through the program, he discovered a new book and went on to read

the rest of the series. She explained this was one of the first times she had ever seen her son sit down to read by choice, and he read five books in a matter of weeks.

In addition to the positive feedback we received from families involved in the program, it was an overall positive experience for Jackie and me too. One additional benefit we had not previously considered was the relationships we were able to build with so many students, including students in classes and grade levels that we do not usually work with. Also, since families were invited, we got to know some of the incoming kindergarteners before the school year started. I was also able to meet one of my students who moved to the United States from the Philippines over the summer. When he started school in September, not only did we already have a relationship built, but he had a head-start on reading in English. These additional benefits further added to the success of the program; however, there are a few things Jackie and I would like to consider as we move forward with the program in the coming years.

### **Moving Forward**

While 87 students is more than we were expecting to participate in the program in the first year, that number is still less than 20% of our school's population. Since we believe so strongly in the importance of the program, Jackie and I would really like it to reach more students. One way we plan on doing this is by increasing student motivation to attend by having a different theme each week. These themes were selected by fourth and fifth grade student council members at our school, and include: Beach Day, Star Wars, Bugs, Legos, Superheroes, Outer Space, Disney, Pajama Day, and Bugs. Another strategy we have used to increase participation is sending out save the dates at our

parent-teacher conferences in February. In contrast, parent letters were not sent home until April in the pilot year. In addition, we will have a stronger social media presence this year through the school's Facebook page to spread awareness of the program. We believe these strategies will be effective in encouraging more participation in the program, therefore increasing the number of students who can benefit.

To further increase the benefits of the program, we would also like to increase parent involvement. While parents are expected to accompany their children to the program each week, it is important for their involvement to extend beyond their school presence. In order for students to get the most out of their at-home reading, parents must play some role. A parent scaffold could allow students to make gains in fluency and comprehension, among other skills.

The final major adjustment that is necessary in order to increase the effectiveness involves the selection of books. In the pilot year, students were allowed to select three books at their "instructional level" as determined by the Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) in May. This limited the number of books students were allowed to choose from, and were not always high-interest for the child. Research will need to be conducted in order to determine which factors should be taken into account for students' book selection.

### **Summary**

My passion for running a summer reading program stems from noticing the summer slide too often when analyzing the data of my own students. This, along with research about access to books and its effects on student achievement, motivated me to

make a change. Using programs from other schools as a model, my co-teacher, Jackie and I were able to pilot a summer reading program in 2017. While the program was overall a success, we have aspirations to further expand the program and help it to reach even more students. I strongly believe all educators should be educated about the topic of summer reading loss, and the ability summer reading programs have to mitigate its influence on student achievement. In the following chapter I will review literature surrounding summer academic loss, the achievement gap, students' selection of books, student engagement, and parent involvement. This information will be applied to the context of the summer reading program. Following the literature review, chapter three will describe the the project-- a website, which has been created in order to help educators in the design and implementation of reading programs in their own settings. Finally, chapter four will conclude the Capstone by presenting learnings and implications of the project, as well as a plan for moving forward.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Throughout this chapter, current literature will be reviewed in an attempt to answer the research question, *How can a summer reading program be implemented in order to most effectively close the achievement gap and allow students to maintain literacy skills over the summer months?* The topics of summer reading loss and its contribution to the socioeconomic achievement gap, book selection, student engagement, and parent involvement will be discussed in detail.

Literature relating to summer reading loss will be first be analyzed to understand the need for summer programming to mitigate this loss, which is a major contributor to the achievement gap (Allington et al., 2010; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013; Compton-Lilly, Caloia, Quast & McCann, 2016; Kim & White, 2011; Smith, 2011). Measures schools can take to address these issues will also be explored. Once the rationale behind the need for summer programming is understood, schools will want to consider what materials students should be selecting, how to get students to engage in reading, and how to involve parents in the process.

### Summer Reading Loss and the Achievement Gap

Summer reading loss, also known as the “summer slide” occurs when students are

unable to maintain the skills they acquired during the school year (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Becknel, Moeller & Matzen, 2017; Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). When many students return to school in September, they are nearly a month behind where they were in the spring (Becknel et al., 2017). This is because children do not spend as much time engaging in educational activities, primarily reading, when school is not in session, causing them to lose valuable skills (Lundstrom, 2005). This loss of reading skills among school-aged children during the summer has serious implications for the field of education and society as a whole, particularly since it is the greatest contributor to the achievement gap between children in poverty and their more affluent peers (Allington et al., 2010; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013; Compton-Lilly, Caloia, Quast & McCann, 2016; Kim & White, 2011; Smith, 2011). While it is an unfortunate reality that many students lose academic skills from June through August, children from low-income families demonstrate the steepest decline in reading achievement (Smith, 2011). One reason for this is low-income children have access to fewer high-quality texts compared with children from middle-class families (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008). Summer reading loss also compounds throughout a child's educational career, making it difficult for low-income children to catch up (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). In order to close the socioeconomic achievement gap, and increase student reading achievement as a whole, the phenomenon of summer reading loss must be addressed.

### **Summer Reading Loss**

Summer reading loss is marked by a regression of reading development when students are not enrolled in school during the summer months, and are not receiving

formal literacy instruction (Allington & McGill Franzen, 2013; Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). Students who experience summer reading loss return to school with an observable decrease in reading skills (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). On average, when students return to school in the fall, their performance in reading is about one month behind where it was at the end of the previous school year (McCombs et al., 2011). This loss can be even more severe for children who spend little time engaging in independent reading and other academic activities throughout the summer. Along with this decrease in reading skills comes serious implications for the educational system and society as a whole.

**Implications of summer reading loss.** When students return to school in the fall with decreased reading abilities, valuable time and resources and spent trying to rebuild lost skills, and academic achievement is at risk (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013; Berlinski, 2018; Smith, 2011). According to the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, summer learning loss is one of the three main challenges to third grade reading proficiency (Smith, 2011). In an educational system where reading proficiency is an area of major focus, effort must be put into addressing one of its most significant obstacles (Smith, 2011). According to Smith (2011), “Too many children are losing too much ground over summer vacation, especially low-income children...This is not a school problem, this is a community problem, and we’ve got to organize ourselves to solve that” ( p. 62). Although summer reading loss has been identified as a serious problem in desperate need of a solution, Allington and McGill-Franzen (2013) explain that most initiatives focus on the learning that takes place during the school year, and fail to address

summer reading loss. These efforts generally target curriculum and instruction, particularly interventions which focus on developing basic skills in young readers, and are aimed at increasing the achievement of students in poverty (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). Without addressing summer reading loss, these interventions aimed at improving reading achievement are not enough to close the socioeconomic achievement gap (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013).

In addition to the stresses summer reading loss places on academic achievement, it also requires schools to use up limited resources to reteach lost skills. According to Smith (2011), the time spent reteaching skills and content each fall places a real financial strain on educational institutions. In fact, it costs schools at least \$1,500 per student each year, which adds up to over \$18,000 during a child's K-12 career (Smith, 2011). As well as financial strain, "9 in 10 teachers spend at least three weeks reteaching lessons at the start of the school year" (Berlinsky, 2018, p. 19). This monopolizes time that could be spent teaching new material and moving students forward in their learning. To lessen the burden of reteaching on schools, summer reading loss must a major area of focus for the system of education.

**Reading volume.** One way to reduce summer reading loss is to increase students' reading volume. While it may appear self-evident, it has been proven in both national and international contexts that children who spend time reading during the summer are at less of a risk for experiencing summer reading loss (Compton-Lilly, Caloia, Quast & McCann, 2016). This seems fairly straightforward, since, as Allington and McGill-Franzen (2008) put it, "To become skilled at almost any activity requires



extensive and continual practice, whether the skills are physical or cognitive in nature” (p. 22). Children who do not consistently practice reading will likely lose these skills, while children who do will demonstrate reading growth. According to the National Reading Panel (NRP), “...the best readers read the most and...poor readers read the least” (as cited in Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003, p. 71). The NRP has also extrapolated that as the time spent reading independently increases, so do reading fluency, comprehension and vocabulary skills (Becknel et al., 2017). In fact, the volume of independent reading that takes place during the summer has been found to be the best predictor of whether a child will experience a loss or gain of reading skills (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Becknel et al., 2017). Allington et al. (2010) go as far as to state, “...reading activity [is] the only factor that [is] consistently correlated to reading gains during the summer” (p. 414). To put it simply, if children are to improve, or at least maintain their reading skills during the summer, they need to spend time reading.

**Self-teaching.** The effectiveness of independent reading in mitigating summer reading loss can be largely explained by the self-teaching hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, if students spend time reading large volumes of quality texts independently, they are forced to develop new strategies and skills, especially when encountering unfamiliar words (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). When readers are repeatedly exposed to unfamiliar words, they gain an understanding of patterns that exist in English orthology, which helps them “...develop rapid, flexible word-identification skills and strategies” (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003, p. 71). Additional outcomes of self-teaching include an increase in vocabulary-building strategies, knowledge of

curricular topics, and a stronger understanding of written syntax and grammatical structures (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003, 2013). According to the logic of the self-teaching hypothesis, the more children read, the more skills they acquire, and the better they become.

**Not everyone is reading.** Unfortunately, the reality is that most children spend very little time reading outside of school. In fact, one study concluded 90 percent of fifth graders spent less than one percent of their free time reading, while they spent 33 percent of the time watching television (Calkins, 2001). However, there is a wide range of amount of time spent reading among children within the same age group. Anderson, Wilson and Fielding's (1988) study found that "...[a] child who is at the 90th percentile in amount of book reading spends nearly five times as many minutes per day reading books as [a] child at the 50th percentile, and over two hundred time as many minutes per day reading books as [a] child at the 10th percentile" (p. 296). Since the amount of time spent reading is so strongly correlated with reading achievement, it can be inferred that this discrepancy in reading volume translates to a similar discrepancy of reading achievement. One factor that determines the amount of time children spend reading is their socioeconomic status, as poor children tend to do less reading than middle-income children (Celano & Neuman, 2008). Amount of time spent reading, particularly during the summer when school is not in session is one of the greatest factors attributing to the socioeconomic achievement gap.

### **The Achievement Gap**

Summer reading contributes to the achievement gap because summer reading loss

affects children of different socioeconomic backgrounds differently (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). There is a consensus among researchers that approximately 80 percent of the existing achievement gap is related to summer reading and learning (Allington et al., 2010; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013; Compton-Lilly, Caloia, Quast & McCann, 2016). This is because low-income children tend to lose more ground during the summer than their middle-income counterparts (Smith, 2011). While it is understood that most students are at risk for losing about one month of learning during the summer, children from low-income families can experience up to three months of loss during the same time period (Becknel et al., 2017). Therefore, a gap in achievement between low-income and middle-income students would develop even after just one summer.

While a small achievement gap would exist after one summer, the gap continues to compound throughout students' educational careers (Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). According to Allington and McGill-Franzen (2003), this annual summer gap can amass to one and a half years in the five summers between kindergarten and fifth grade. However, when taking into account that children from low-income families often enter kindergarten lagging behind their middle-income peers, the socioeconomic achievement gap is closer to two or three years by the time students enter sixth grade (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003, 2013). In addition, the achievement gap contributes to discrepancies in school dropout rates and college enrollment (Jesson, McNaughton & Klose, 2014). Alexander, Entwisle and Olson (2007) claim this achievement gap can even span generations. They suggest, "Since it is low SES [socioeconomic status] youth specifically whose out-of-school learning lags behind, this summer shortfall relative to

better-off children contributes to the perpetuation of family advantage and disadvantage across generations” (Alexander et al., 2007, p. 175). This socioeconomic achievement gap also translates into vastly different student performance in school between low-income students and their middle-income counterparts.

Evidence of the achievement gap can be observed quite clearly when analysing data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading. The results of this assessment demonstrate major discrepancies between poor children, or students who qualify for free lunches, and children who are not poor (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). Specifically, twice as many poor fourth graders scored below the level of basic proficiency, compared to non-poor students (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). On the other hand, only 46 percent of poor students scored at or above the basic proficiency level, compared with 77 percent of their more affluent peers. This data shows a staggering 27-point gap (an average score of 203 vs. 230) in reading achievement between poor and non-poor students (Allington et al., 2010). There are various factors which attribute to this socioeconomic achievement gap, primarily discrepancies in the availability of resources and learning opportunities.

**Summer loss experienced by poor children.** The achievement gap between low-income and middle-income children is caused largely by the amount of learning that takes place during the summer months, as this is the period of time when the gap widens the most (Alexander et al., 2007; Kim & White, 2011). In fact, most experts in the field agree that the amount of learning that takes place among low-income and middle-income children is fairly similar during the school year, as is the growth in achievement between

children of both groups (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003, 2013; Allington et al., 2010; Kim, 2004; Smith, 2011). The idea that a majority of the discrepancies in learning occur due to differences in summer learning, and not the school year can be explained by the “faucet theory” (Allington et al., 2010; Kim, 2004). According to this theory, “...when the school faucet is turned on-- that is, when schools are in session--children of every economic background benefit roughly equally” (Allington et al., 2010, p. 413). However, during the months of June to August when the faucet is “turned off”, it creates “...inequalities in educational opportunity and outcomes” (Kim, 2004, p. 169). This further reinforces the idea that the majority of the socioeconomic achievement gap exists due to differences in opportunities related to summer learning.

**The access gap.** Many studies have been conducted asserting the claim that one of the major contributors to this discrepancy in summer learning between children of differing socioeconomic backgrounds is due to the availability of books (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003, 2008; Allington et al., 2010). First and foremost, these studies have concluded that access to age-appropriate books varies greatly among communities, and children from low-income families are less likely to have access to reading materials in the home compared to their more affluent peers (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003, 2008). Specifically, researchers have discovered children from higher-income neighborhoods have approximately 10 times greater access to books than children from lower-income areas within the same urban center (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008). One study even found that in poor neighborhoods there is only about one children’s book available per 355 children (Celano & Neuman, 2008). This is significant because

discrepancies in access to books translates to discrepancies in the amount of reading and learning that takes place (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008).

Children who grow up in homes with few, or no, books in their homes lose out on up to three years of learning compared to children with access to many books in their homes (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). Researchers have even determined the number of books in the home to have as much of an influence on academic achievement as the level of parental education, and double the impact of the father's occupation (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013; McGill-Franzen, Ward & Cahill, 2016). In sum, Allington and McGill-Franzen (2013) note, "access to books is important regardless of family income, while at the same time access varies largely by family income" (p. 99). This discrepancy of access to books based on socioeconomic background relates to both owned and borrowed books, and has serious implications for student achievement.

***Borrowed books.*** Most young children, especially those from low-income families, obtain a majority of their books from school or classroom libraries (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). Many children also take advantage of resources at the public library. Research has even revealed that children from lower-income families use public libraries at a greater rate than children from higher-income families (Celano & Neuman, 2008; Pribesh, Gavigan & Dickinson, 2011). This is a significant discrepancy, with 63 percent of lower-income children using the library, compared to 40 percent of their more affluent peers (Pribesh, et al., 2011). These findings are promising, as children from low-income families could benefit the most from these resources (Pribesh et al., 2011). However, while borrowing books from school and public libraries is a convenient and

free way for children to access reading materials, not all libraries are equal.

Both school and public libraries in poor neighborhoods differ from those in more affluent neighborhoods in two major ways: quality and accessibility of resources.

Generally, libraries in schools with higher populations of students in poverty include books that are older and lacking in diversity, and tend to contain fewer books overall (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). In addition to books being of lower-quality in low-income areas, most poor children do not have access to the school library when school is not in session, such as during the summer (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). This is largely because libraries in low-income areas are open less frequently than libraries in middle-income neighborhoods (Pribesh et al., 2011). This further supports the faucet theory, since access to these books is “turned off” throughout the summer months for low-income students (McGill-Franzen et al., 2016).

***Owned books.*** In addition to the disparities among quality and availability of borrowed books between poor and nonpoor children, children in poverty also own fewer reading materials (McGill-Franzen et al., 2016). In fact, findings demonstrate 61 percent of children from low-income families do not have access to any age-appropriate books in their homes, with the average family owning just four books (Lundstrom, 2005).

Logically, families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have less money available to purchase books. However, they also “...invest proportionately less in the cognitive development of their children, particularly literacy activities, that would support out-of-school learning” (McGill-Franzen et al., 2016, p. 586). If children do not have access to books throughout the summer, it can be detrimental to their performance in

reading.

***Making a change.*** It is crucial for students to have easy access to reading materials since there is such a strong correlation between availability of books and the amount of time spent reading, which then influences reading achievement (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008). Unfortunately, many students in poverty do not have books readily available to them during the summer (Lundstrom, 2005). Schools do have some control over this issue, as they have the potential to open up their libraries at least once a week, or hold regular book fairs (Lundstrom, 2005; Pribesh et al., 2011). However, Allington and McGill-Franzen (2013) argue, “most schools choose to ignore the substantial differences in access to books, but in doing so they seem to be fulfilling the long, sad story of low-income kids as struggling readers” (p. 99-100). Allington also advises schools, “Don’t lock up the books all summer. It’s often the best collection of age-appropriate books around” (as cited in Lundstrom, 2005, p. 23).

Summer reading loss is marked by a decline in reading achievement over the summer months when school is not in session (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). This phenomenon is widespread and causes serious implications for the schools, which must expend valuable time and money in order to reteach lost skills (Berlinsky, 2018; Smith, 2011). Summer reading loss can be mitigated if students spend time reading outside of school; however, there are serious discrepancies in reading volume among middle and low-income students, who generally have access to fewer books. This discrepancy in summer reading and learning is a major contributor to the socioeconomic achievement gap.



### **Book Selection**

To minimize reading loss over the summer, and even promote academic gains, it is imperative that students spend a substantial amount of time reading outside of school (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008). A majority of this time should be spent reading self-selected texts students enjoy (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008, 2013). While reading level does play some role in this selection, it is not the only factor (Kim & White, 2011). First and foremost, texts should be selected based on children's interests, which will increase their motivation to read (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008; Parrott, 2017). While Allington and McGill-Franzen (2008) point out that while schools may have little control over how students spend their time during summer vacation, they are able to provide them with access to books, which may be the key to eliminating summer reading loss.

### **Self-Selecting Books**

Allington and McGill-Franzen (2013) conducted a Summer Book Project with economically disadvantaged elementary students. Throughout this project, they emphasized the importance of students selecting their own texts. Their findings demonstrate that when students are allowed to make their own choices, it increases their engagement, which in turn creates feelings of empowerment (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). When students' engagement and sense of empowerment increases, they are then more likely to engage in voluntary reading (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). Allington and McGill-Franzen (2008) explain, "If we want students to read voluntarily, then offering them the opportunity to select the books seems

to be a crucial factor” (p. 22). While there are positive outcomes associated with students self-selecting their reading materials, some schools place restrictions on students’ choices based on their reading levels (Parrott, 2017).

**Reading levels.** Many schools across the country use reading levels to inform reading instruction and label reading materials (Parrott, 2017). Two common leveling systems are Lexile, which is numerical, and Fountas and Pinnell’s Guided Reading system, which is an “A to Z” gradient (Parrott, 2017). Teachers use students’ individual reading levels to make instructional decisions, and often use them as a way to organize classroom libraries (Parrott, 2017). In classrooms with leveled libraries, students “...are often directed to color-coded bins or shelves labeled by level,” and may only be allowed to select “at their level” books for independent reading (Parrott, 2017, p. 43). While some believe students make the most growth when reading books at their levels, others argue this practice can be detrimental to students’ reading development.

***Benefits of selecting ‘just right’ books.*** One major argument in favor of requiring students to select leveled books for independent reading is that their comprehension is best when reading books at, or slightly about their individual reading level (Parrott, 2017). Without levels to guide them, Kim and White (2011) suggest struggling readers commonly choose books that are too difficult, which ends in frustration. On the other hand, some children may also select books that are below their reading level, which does not allow for as much growth in reading skills (Kim & White, 2011). With this logic in mind, it is becoming increasingly common for classrooms across the country to have levelled classroom libraries, and the practice is even mandated in some districts (Parrott,

2017). However, leveling books in this manner may also have a negative impact on students' reading attitudes and self-confidence.

***Disempowering readers.*** Some claim allowing students to select books based only on text level is a “formula for failure” and even “educational malpractice” (Parrott, 2017, p. 43-44). Even Fountas and Pinnell, creators of a popular leveling system, do not encourage leveling books for student use, and believe reading levels are “a teacher’s tool, not a child’s label” (as cited in Parrott, 2017, p. 44). This is because as children are learning to read, they are also developing their reading identity, and forming their attitudes about reading (Parrott, 2017). Students who are reading at lower levels may feel discouraged and feel like giving up on reading altogether (Parrott, 2011). When students are asked to select books only within their level, many choices are removed, which can foster negative reading attitudes (Parrott, 2017). Rather than selecting books based on reading levels, some advocate for more of an interest-based selection.

**Interest-based selection.** Not only can limiting students' selection to books at their reading level remove choices and foster negative attitudes toward reading, this practice also does not “account for...what the reader brings to the experience” (Parrott, 2017, p. 44). Parrott (2017) explains, “A reader’s ‘match’ to a book is going to change with what prior knowledge the individual brings to that specific topic” (p. 44). Therefore, the topic of the book, and students' levels of interest play a role in the readability of texts. While some believe students should not select books above their reading level, as it can lead to frustration, Compton-Lilly et al. (2016) have found, “Student choice and interest overrode text level when children had opportunities to read and reread loved texts” (p.

63). McGill-Franzen et al. (2016) explain when students, especially early readers or those who lack confidence, self-select texts, it can act as a scaffold, allowing them to read more challenging texts. Through their study of an annual student book fair, they also discovered children tend to select series books, which have similar characters and plots, which can support reading comprehension (McGill-Franzen et al., 2016). Not only can self-selecting texts scaffold students' reading, it can also be a powerful motivator.

*Student perceptions.* Students' self-selection of books leads to increased engagement and feelings of empowerment, which in turn results in students making the choice to read voluntarily (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). In contrast, when books are selected for the students, they will often lack interest (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). Some will persevere through the text without any enjoyment, while others may simply pretend to read (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). One third grader involved in Allington and McGill-Franzen's (2013) book project explains, "I like when we get to pick our own books to read. 'Cause some books other people pick we [3rd-grade students] don't like, 'cause we like start readin' it, and it be like, sometimes it be startin' off stupid" (p. 55). This demonstrates that even young children are able to verbalize their preference of self-selected texts.

*The role of popular culture.* Many researchers have determined popular culture has a major influence on children's selection of texts (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008, 2013; Compton-Lilly et al., 2016). After 300 students selected 15 different texts in Allington and McGill-Franzen's (2013) book project, the researchers compiled a list of the top ten most popular books. They found nearly all of the most popular books relate to

what they refer to as “kids’ culture”, which includes popular music, television shows and movies (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). Compton-Lilly et al. (2016) also discovered the importance of “kids’ culture” throughout their summer reading program. Several families who were interviewed regarding their participation in the program explained their children were more motivated to read books with familiar characters from TV and movies, even when these books were more challenging (Compton-Lilly et al., 2016). Based on these findings, it is important for students to have access to books that reflect “kids’ culture” in order to increase their reading motivation.

**Reduced choices.** While it is recommended for students to select their own texts to increase engagement, this task can be overwhelming for some students (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). Some students may require teacher support with finding and selecting books that interest them, at least in the beginning (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). To assist with this process, Allington and McGill-Franzen (2013) advocate for using “reduced choices”, which involves a teacher selecting three to five texts that may be interesting for the reader. From there, the reader selects one book that is the most appealing, which is much less overwhelming than selecting from an entire collection of books (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). Using reduced choices can be very beneficial to use as a scaffold when students are first learning to self-select texts; however, support should decrease over time since the ability to select books of interest and appropriate difficulty is a valuable literacy skill (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013).

Since it is imperative for students to spend time reading outside of school, they must learn how to self-select texts (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). While reading

level has some role in this selection, it is more important students are reading books they can enjoy (Parrott, 2017). Students' selections are generally related to "kids' culture", which involves popular music, television shows, and movies (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). Teachers can provide some support with this selection of texts initially; however, students must eventually learn to make select books on their own based on their individual interests (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). Not only is the self-selection of texts a necessary literacy skill for students to develop, but this practice can also increase student engagement in reading (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008, 2013).

### **Student Engagement in Reading**

In order for students to engage in reading outside of school, they must possess some level of motivation (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). While some may think of motivation relating to fun and excitement, there is much more to it than that (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). According to Gambrell (2011), "Motivation to read can be defined as the likelihood of engaging in reading or choosing to read" (p. 172). Children, like adults, may choose to read for a variety of reasons, and motivation can come in many different forms (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). To increase students' engagement in reading, schools should focus on nurturing their intrinsic motivation, which is more likely to result in long-term reading engagement (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010).

### **Forms of Motivation**

Cambria and Guthrie (2010) have discovered three common factors related to reading motivation: interest, dedication, and confidence, which often occur

independently. The first form of motivation, interest, involves reading for one's own enjoyment, and choosing to read over any other activity (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). This can be situational, meaning an interest in a book, or part of a book, in that particular moment; or it can be enduring, which lasts long-term (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010).

According to Cambria and Guthrie (2010), readers can also be motivated by confidence, which means motivation stems from the belief that one can read or is good at it. Readers with higher self-efficacy are likely to spend more time engaging in voluntary reading than those with a lower level of self-efficacy (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). The final form of motivation, dedication, involves persisting even when the reading is difficult or uninteresting (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). A reader who is dedicated believes reading is important, and will continue to engage in it (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). These motivational factors are related in the sense that when a student gains skills, motivation increases consequently (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Conversely, they can also occur independently (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). This is to say that a reader can be interested in reading, but lack dedication, or the motivation to put in hard work; a reader can be dedicated, but lack confidence in one's own abilities; and so forth (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010).

### **Motivation's Role in Reading Performance**

Researchers have discovered motivation plays a critical role in reading development (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). In fact, Cambria and Guthrie (2010) refer to motivation as, "the most important part of reading" (p. 16). They explain there are two sides of reading: on one side are the reading skills related to phonemic awareness,

decoding, and vocabulary; and on the other side is reading motivation (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). In order to develop as a strong reader, one must possess both the “skill” and the “will” (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Findings from research conducted in 64 different countries have illustrated the relationship between students’ interest in reading and their reading performance (Gambrell, 2011). The outcomes of these international assessments demonstrated that students who enjoy reading the most tend to perform much higher than their peers who enjoy reading the least (Gambrell, 2011). With this in mind, it may be concerning to educators that 37% of students admit they never read for enjoyment (Gambrell, 2011). Since there is such a strong correlation between reading motivation and reading performance, it is necessary to increase students’ reading enjoyment.

### **Extrinsic Sources of Motivation**

In an attempt to increase students’ motivation, many schools and programs draw upon outside sources, which are associated with extrinsic motivation (Becknel et al., 2017; Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Lundstrom (2005) describes two common extrinsic motivational tactics used by reading programs as “sticks” and “carrots”. Programs utilizing a “carrot” approach attempt to motivate students by incentivizing them with prizes for their reading (Lundstrom, 2005). These tangible rewards are usually given to students once they have read a certain number of books (Lundstrom, 2005). Some believe this tactic can have a positive effect on students’ motivation and reading attitudes. For example, Becknel et al. (2017) note some students enjoy being rewarded for behaviors they would have engaged in whether or not they were being incentivized. Additionally,



some students who do not generally spend much time reading may respond positively to small prizes (Becknel et al., 2017). However, using a “carrot” approach to motivate students can also result in negative consequences (Becknel et al., 2017). Some researchers have found when students are given the opportunity to read for prizes they often select easy books to read quickly without focusing on comprehension (Lundstrom, 2005). This is not an ideal way for children to develop lifelong reading strategies.

Instead of, or in addition to, “carrots”, some programs may adopt more of a “stick” approach. In this case, the “sticks” refer to required reading and reading-related activities (Lundstrom, 2005). For example, some schools have required students to turn in book reports over the summer (Lundstrom, 2005). However, this practice does not appear to be effective, as students in one district which attempted this turned in these reports less than half of the time (Lundstrom, 2005). Even if students do complete such mandated activities, they can experience unintended consequences. Specifically, if students are required to engage in reading that is too difficult, which can decrease their motivation for read for pleasure (Lundstrom, 2005). Lundstrom (2005) analogizes, “If adults preferred hard reading, *The Economist* would be flying off the shelves of 7-Elevens” (p.24). Children, like adults, do not generally enjoy reading texts which they find difficult or uninteresting.

### **Intrinsic Sources of Motivation**

Intrinsic motivation differs from extrinsic motivation because this type comes from within, as opposed to an outside source (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Cambria and Guthrie (2010) describe intrinsic motivation in the context of reading as “the enjoyment

and fulfillment in reading” (p. 17). Students who are intrinsically motivated choose to read for their own personal enjoyment, or other internal motivators, as opposed to reading to earn a prize or a good grade (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Cambria and Guthrie (2010) believe one of the major goals in schools should be to foster this form of motivation, which is more likely to increase student achievement in the long run compared to extrinsic rewards. Gambrell (2011) offers schools many suggestions for enhancing students’ intrinsic motivation.

First and foremost the author explains students’ motivation increases when they are able to make choices about what they are reading (Gambrell, 2011). While this was discussed in the previous section about book selection, Gambrell (2011) adds, “...students who are allowed to choose their own reading materials are more motivated to read, expend more effort, and gain better understanding of the text” (p. 175). In addition, students are more motivated when they have a wider variety of reading materials from which to select (Gambrell, 2011). This means providing students with a variety of materials such as books, magazines, and online resources; as well as having different genres available (Gambrell, 2011). Increasing the quantity and variety of texts available communicates to students that reading is valuable and “...sets the stage for students to develop the reading habit” (Gambrell, 2011, p. 173). Studies have also shown that providing students with opportunities to engage in social interactions about their reading also increases motivation (Gambrell, 2011). This includes talking and writing about the text, and even sharing or borrowing books (Gambrell, 2011). Social interaction has the

potential to increase motivation by triggering curiosity, boosting confidence in one's own reading abilities, and improving reading comprehension (Gambrell, 2011).

Research demonstrates motivation plays a major role in literacy development (Gambrell, 2011). Studies have shown those who enjoy reading perform higher on reading assessments than those who do not, and strong readers possess both "skill" and "will" (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010; Gambrell, 2011). With the intention of increasing students' motivation, some schools and programs utilize "sticks" and "carrots" approaches, which are not effective long-term strategies (Lundstrom, 2005). Instead, schools should seek to increase students' intrinsic motivation through providing students with choices among a variety of reading materials, and allowing them to engage in social interactions about their reading (Gambrell, 2011).

### **Parent Involvement**

While significant learning takes place at school each year, the learning that occurs at home is just as, if not more critical. At-home learning lays a foundation at a very early age, upon which future learning takes place. In fact, many experts claim parents are children's first teachers (Parker & Reid, 2017). Parents continue to play a critical role as at-home educators throughout their children's educational careers, especially when school is not in session (Parker & Reid, 2017). For summer learning to be effective, parents must continue to play a major role, which requires the gap between home and school must be bridged. Additionally, educators must provide explicit examples for parents to support their young readers at home.

### **Parents' Impact on Learning**

Parents have been identified as children's first teachers; however, they continue to play a critical role throughout students' educational careers (Parker & Reid, 2017). Many experts believe all parents have the ability to have a positive influence on their child's education (Parker & Reid, 2017). They can even be effective in providing academic interventions when students are not in school, and are important partners in their child's education (Pagan & Sénéchal, 2014). Parents' role in education is crucial, as research has demonstrated a strong correlation between parent involvement and children's language and literacy development (Pagan & Sénéchal, 2014). Many parents seem to naturally take on this role as early educators, with seemingly little outside influence, which has many positive long-term effects on children's development.

First and foremost, many parents begin reading books to their children starting at a young age (Pagan & Sénéchal, 2014). Children who are frequently read to by their parents are more likely to have increased vocabulary knowledge (Pagan & Sénéchal, 2014). In addition to reading to their children, many parents also explicitly teach literacy skills (Pagan & Sénéchal, 2014). Pagan and Sénéchal (2014) found parents who frequently teach literacy skills have children who develop early literacy skills, and emerge into fluent readers. Perhaps equally as important, parents have the ability to simply inspire their children to read (Lundstrom, 2005). This is important because as Padak and Rasinski (2007) explain, "Children whose families encourage at-home literacy activities have higher phonemic-awareness and decoding skills, higher reading achievement in the elementary grades, and advanced oral language development" (p. 350). Parents who encourage at-home literacy have the power to ensure students maintain

their reading skills over the summer, and continue their learning when school resumes (Parker & Reid, 2017). While many parents have the confidence and skills to support their children's literacy development at home, others do not (Becknel et al., 2017).

**Parents' self-efficacy.** Many parents are not confident in their abilities to support their young readers, and believe teachers are equipped with special skills they do not possess (Becknel et al., 2017). In addition, some parents are uncertain about their own reading abilities making it difficult for them to support their children (Becknel et al., 2017). This is especially true for many parents who speak English as a second language, who may be unsure of how to correctly pronounce certain words in English (Compton-Lilly et al., 2017). While it may be the case that some parents are doubtful of their abilities to support their children's reading development, Compton-Lilly et al. (2017) indicate parents who participated in their summer reading program indicate parents were highly motivated to support their children, even if they were unsure of the best ways to do so.

**Supporting parents.** While parent involvement is critical, especially during the summer, schools cannot assume parents are aware of the best ways to support their children's learning at home (Parker & Reid, 2017). Instead, most parents need, and want specific suggestions (Lundstrom, 2005; Mraz & Rasinski, 2007; Padak & Rasinski, 2007). This is especially true for low-income parents who "need to be offered concrete, specific programs and suggestions on how to participate in family literacy" (Mraz & Rasinski, 2007, p. 786). While suggestions such as "Read to your child" or "Encourage your child to read at home" may be effective to some degree, they are not sufficient

(Padak & Rasinski, 2007, p. 351). In order for schools to be able to educate parents on specific strategies for supporting their children's literacy development, a strong connection between home and school must be in place.

### **Home-School Connection**

It is difficult for educators to provide parents with guidance for supporting young readers without building relationships and involving them in the school community, such as through reading programs (Compton-Lilly, 2017). In order to encourage participation in school reading programs, schools must begin with establishing a welcoming environment and fostering a sense of community for families (Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). Mraz and Rasinski (2007) explain even simple factors such as teachers' interpersonal skills, perceived expertise, level of concern for their students' and even their gestures, can go a long way toward making families feel welcome. These factors can also contribute to teacher-parent rapport, and help teachers build trusting relationships with families (Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). When discussing the importance of relationships in this context, Compton-Lilly et al. (2017) emphasize, "It is critical to build strong and trusting relationships with families. Not only will these relationships support the summer project, but they will also create networks of support that extend into the school year" (p. 66). Once these relationships and a sense of community have been established, teachers can provide parents with guidance for supporting their children's literacy development.

### **Scaffolding**

Parent support, or scaffolding, may be the key to a successful summer reading program (Kim & White, 2011; White & Kim 2008). Kim and White (2011) argue

students need more than access to books during the summer. The researchers add, “...giving students books without any form of scaffolding did not have positive effects, even when the books were carefully matched to the students' reading levels and interests and the students reported reading them” (White & Kim, 2008, p. 124). Since parent scaffolding is so critical to literacy development, schools should educate parents on ways to scaffold their children’s reading. These guidelines for support must be simple enough for busy parents (Padak & Rasinski, 2007).

**Creating a culture of reading.** Many parents may be supporting their children’s reading development without even realizing it. Parents can act as powerful role models by reading in the presence of their children and talking about what they read (Lundstrom, 2005; Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). This strategy can be effective in creating a home environment in which reading is valued and enjoyed (Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). Mraz and Rasinski (2007) explain that often, and without realizing it, parents send a message to children that reading is a chore that must be completed before moving on to more enjoyable activities. Research also supports the idea of parents acting as positive reading role models with findings indicating that “Students who see adults reading daily or weekly tend to read more and have higher reading scores than those who don’t” (Lundstrom, 2005, p. 22).

**Supporting oral reading.** In addition to reading in front of their children, parents can support children’s literacy development by reading to them (Padak & Rasinski, 2007). Padak and Rasinski (2007) argue the practice of reading aloud to children is so beneficial it should continue even when children are able to read independently. While

reading to children at bedtime is valuable, this is not the only option (Padak & Rasinski, 2007). Parents can read aloud from the newspaper, or point out print in the environment such as food labels, shopping lists, bumper stickers, and signs on streets, restaurants and stores (Mraz & Rasinski, 2007; Padak & Rasinski, 2007). Mraz and Rasinski (2007) believe, “Every word that is read counts” (p. 786). For parents who speak English as a second language, Padak and Rasinski (2007) suggest having a teacher or parent volunteer record a book on tape for parents and children to listen to together, and then read along with the recording. However, reading bilingual texts is also an important literacy practice which should be celebrated (Compton-Lilly et al., 2016).

Another strategy parents can utilize to support the development of young readers is paired reading, or reading with children (Padak & Rasinski, 2007; Pagan & Sénéchal, 2014). With this method, parents and children can alternate reading pages or paragraphs (Padak & Rasinski, 2007). Parents should also encourage their children to read independently, which could include reading aloud to an adult, a sibling, a pet, or even a stuffed animal (White & Kim, 2008; Pagan & Sénéchal, 2014). Regardless of who they are reading to, parents can assist children by helping them with their selection of texts (Padak & Rasinski, 2007). These texts should relate to children’s interests, and can come in different forms such as books, or magazines that relate to a specific interest or hobby (Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). Once a text has been selected based on interest, parents should ensure the book is not too challenging to be read independently (Padak & Rasinski, 2007). Padak and Rasinski (2007) believe schools can teach parents the “five-finger rule” for book selection. With this simple method, a child opens up to a page



in the middle of the book, and raises a finger for each encounter of an unknown word on the page (Padak & Rasinski, 2007). If the child has five fingers up by the end of the page, this signifies the book is too challenging to read independently (Padak & Rasinski, 2007). Upon selecting an appropriate book, parents should make an effort to occasionally listen to children read aloud (White & Kim, 2008). White and Kim (2008) advocate for parents to “listen as a short passage from the book [is] read out loud, and provide feedback on the degree to which it was read smoothly and with expression” (p. 117). They add parents can listen a second time, and provide feedback about how the child has improved (White & Kim, 2008). While supporting children’s oral reading development is a positive start, reading comprehension must also be an area of focus.

**Supporting reading comprehension.** When studying parents’ involvement in reading development, Compton-Lilly et al., (2016) found, “parents overwhelmingly focused on reading accuracy” (p. 62). However, supporting reading comprehension should also be an area of focus (Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). Mraz and Rasinski (2007) recommend talking to children about what they are reading and asking open-ended questions. Pagan and Sénéchal (2014) found success with training parents on six reading comprehension strategies: making predictions and connections, asking questions, rereading difficult passages, retelling and summarizing. Based on their findings, they concluded 60% of parents trained in the intervention used all six strategies, while only 18% of control parents did the same, demonstrating “parents, in general, do not intuitively implement reading comprehension strategies” (p. 20). This demonstrates a need for schools to teach parents how to utilize specific strategies to support the

development of children's reading comprehension.

While parents are often labeled as children's first teachers, their role does not diminish once children enter school, as parents can have a strong positive influence on children's education (Parker & Reid, 2017). It is especially important for parents to support children's summer learning to avoid summer reading loss (Parker & Reid, 2017). In order for schools to encourage parent involvement in summer learning, they must foster a home-school connection by creating a welcoming environment and building relationships (Compton-Lilly, 2017; Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). From there, schools can equip parents with specific strategies for supporting children's development of oral reading and comprehension (Lundstrom, 2005; Mraz & Rasinski, 2007; Padak & Rasinski, 2007).

### **Summary**

This chapter includes a review of current literature in an attempt to provide guidance in answering the research question, *How can a summer reading program be implemented in order to most effectively close the achievement gap and allow students to maintain literacy skills over the summer months?* This literature review begins by exploring the phenomenon of summer reading loss and how it contributes to a majority of the existing socioeconomic achievement gap. This discrepancy in achievement between low-income students and their more affluent peers exists largely due to differences in summer learning and access to books. The literature supports the notion that large volumes of reading outside of school can mitigate summer loss and reduce the achievement gap. Schools assist in this by providing students to access to books over the

summer. This is especially effective when the books are self-selected by students based on their interests. In addition to having easy access to books, the literature explains students must also possess motivation in order to develop as readers, and schools should focus on fostering intrinsic motivation, which is associated with positive long-term effects on reading achievement. The research also shows that in order to implement an effective reading program, schools must seek the involvement of parents, who can act as effective partners in learning when equipped with specific strategies for supporting their children.

The information provided in this chapter can be applied to the context of planning and implementing an effective summer reading program in chapter three. The topics of summer loss and the achievement gap, book selection, student engagement, and parent involvement will be taken into account when planning a summer reading program. Information from the literature review will be combined with personal experiences to create a project, which is intended to guide other educators through the process of planning and implementing a summer reading program in their own schools.

## CHAPTER THREE: PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Introduction

This project was designed in an attempt to answer the question, *How can a summer reading program be implemented in order to most effectively close the achievement gap and allow students to maintain literacy skills over the summer months?* This is a question I asked myself throughout the process of planning the pilot year of the reading program at my own school in the summer of 2017. After the initial attempt of implementing a reading program the first year, I decided to explore this question further to increase the effectiveness of the program, and share my findings with other educators through the creation of a website.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the project, a Google Site, in detail. An overview of the project will be provided, along with a rationale for selecting a website as a means for sharing information and resources. The format and contents of the website will also be outlined.

### Project Overview and Rationale

The purpose of this project is twofold: to educate teachers about the need for a summer reading program in their own settings, and to provide them with resources to be utilized throughout the planning and implementation of the program. To most effectively meet these two goals, a website has been created using Google Sites. This seemed like the most appropriate method, as a website can reach a large audience and can easily

house important resources. During the planning of the summer reading program at my own school, Clear Lake Elementary (name has been changed for the purpose of confidentiality), I did not encounter a website such as this, with information and resources all in one location. The goal of the website is to help more educators implement a summer reading program in their own schools, and make the process of planning an effective program a little less daunting.

### **Audience and Setting**

The target audience for this project is all educators, including teachers and administrators. The website as a whole would be most useful to elementary teachers with the intent of designing and implementing a summer reading program, as this project is modeled after a real-life summer reading program, which takes place in an elementary school setting. However, elements of the project could be utilized by administrators and teachers in any K-12 setting. All resources available on the website can be adjusted to suit a variety of contexts and settings.

### **Principles of Web Design**

Throughout the process of creating this website, I regularly referred to the web design principles created by the United States Department of Health and Human Services ([HHS], 2006). This thorough document includes 209 guidelines to assist individuals and organizations in website creation and design (HHS, 2006). I referred to this document frequently to ensure my own website includes information that is relevant for the target audience, is easily accessible for users, and is simple to navigate.

Perhaps the most important principle to consider was ensuring the information

found on the site is relevant and useful for educators. According to the HHS (2006), “content is the most critical element of a Web site” (p. 2). One major purpose of the website is to house accurate content and information about summer reading all in one place. This includes current research about summer reading loss and its contribution to the socioeconomic achievement gap. My logic behind including this research is that in order to encourage teachers to implement a reading program in their own settings, they must first understand why it is necessary. In addition to this background research, the website will also include information about other topics related to the implementation of an effective program, including book selection, parent involvement, and student engagement.

Once I had decided upon the content of the website, I needed to ensure users would remain on the website long enough to discover its contents. The HHS (2006) explains users spend very little time on most sites when searching for information, so the site’s purpose should be explicitly stated on the homepage. However, prose text on the homepage should be concise, as some users may avoid reading lengthy text (HHS, 2006). Additionally, the HHS (2006) encourages web designers to limit the homepage to one screenful, as some users may avoid scrolling for further information, or may leave the site altogether if there is critical information “below the fold”. With this principle in mind, I made the decision to include a succinct preview of the site’s content and purpose on the homepage, ensuring it remained only one screenful of information. Along with a preview, I included a short video for the purpose of engaging the audience.

### **Web Pages**

In addition to the homepage, my Google Site is broken down into several other pages and subpages. As per the HHS's (2006) recommendation, the homepage will be easily accessible from each of these pages and subpages. These additional pages of the website include: "About", "Summer Reading Loss", "Book Selection", "Parent Involvement", and "Student Engagement". Users can access each section by clicking on the navigation bar at the top of the page.

### **About**

The first page after the homepage is titled "About". This includes a more detailed explanation of the purpose of the site along with my personal journey leading to the creation of the reading program in my own setting, and ultimately the creation of the website. This page also includes a subpage, "Reading Program: Year One", which includes information about the pilot year of the reading program at my school. In addition to prose text, this subpage also contains an embedded Google Slides presentation, which includes information about attendance and funding of the first year of the program. Finally, this section will also house a subpage with references to ensure I am properly citing the information on each page of the website.

### **Summer Reading Loss**

After reviewing information about the website itself, users can explore the next page, which is "Summer Reading Loss". This page includes current research related to summer reading loss. To prevent users from becoming overwhelmed by too much prose text, the page is broken down into three sections: "Summer Slide", "Implications", and "Preventing Summer Slide". Each section has a subheading, which consists of bold text

with a major point from each section. The rest of the research in each section is presented through bullet points, which are easier for users to follow. To add interest, and present information through a different format, the page also includes an embedded video at the top. This video was created by Philadelphia Public Schools, and presents information about summer reading loss in an engaging manner. After learning about summer reading loss on this page, users can move to the subpage, “The Achievement Gap”.

**The achievement gap.** Like the previous page, “The Achievement Gap” subpage also consists of three sections, which include a subheading followed by bullet points. The research presented within this subpage relates to three topics: “Summer Loss and the Achievement Gap”, “The Faucet Theory”, and “Availability of Books”. This subpage also includes an embedded video, which illustrates the effect of summer loss on the socioeconomic achievement gap. In addition, the bottom of the subpage also includes a link to a book as suggested additional reading about the subject.

### **Book Selection**

Many users may be visiting the website hoping to gain ideas for the implementation of a summer reading program. One major topic for consideration when implementing a summer reading program is the selection of books. Within the page “Book Selection”, users will find research related to the topics of “Self-Selecting Books”, “Reading Levels”, and “Interest-Based Selection”. The goal of this page is to raise educators’ awareness of the complexities related to selecting books for a summer reading program, and to help them understand that there is a lot to consider throughout this process, and it should not be taken lightly. Once users have familiarized themselves with



research surrounding the topic of book selection, they may be wondering about the best way to approach it within the context of a summer reading program.

**Suggestions for implementation.** The “Book Selection” page contains a subpage titled “Suggestions for Implementation”. This subpage includes three sections, each referencing specific research, and ways to use the research to inform decisions about implementation. For example, the first section links back to research related to the importance of providing readers with opportunities to self-select texts. Then, I explain how the research was applied to the context of the summer reading program at Clear Lake Elementary by allowing students to independently select five texts each week. For additional clarity and interest, this page contains several real-life photographs of the book bins at Clear Lake’s reading program.

### **Parent Involvement**

The next page on the site is titled “Parent Involvement”. Similar to the previous one, this page begins by providing users with research related to parents’ involvement in summer programming and their role in children’s literacy development. The page is broken down into three sections, “Parents’ Impact on Learning”, “Parents’ Self-Efficacy”, and “Supporting Parents”. This page also includes two subpages: “Communicating with Parents” and “Resources for Families”.

**Communicating with parents.** The purpose of this subpage, “Communicating with Parents”, is to provide educators with resources that can be used to communicate information about the program with families. The first resource that is provided is a “Save the Date” letter. This letter is intended to be the first line of communication about

the program, and should be sent home with students at least eight weeks prior to the end of the school year to increase families' awareness of the program, and provide them with time to plan accordingly. This letter provides basic information about the program, including the dates and times, and information about the books, themes, and activities. At Clear Lake Elementary, the "save the date" letter is copied on a half sheet of paper, and sent home with each family in their spring conference folder in February.

Approximately four weeks after sending home the "save the date" letter, educators should send home the sign up sheet, which can also be found on the same subpage. Parents are expected to write the child's name, grade and teacher, and check whether or not the child will be attending the program. In addition, the form requests parents check which dates they will most likely be attending, in order for educators to plan accordingly. However, families are welcome to attend each session whether they selected it or not. Finally, this form includes a space for parents to write down any questions or comments, so the educator can follow up with families as necessary.

Once students have signed up for the program, a follow-up letter should be sent home a week or two before the end of the school year. The purpose of this letter is to confirm each child's enrollment in the program, and provide additional information to the families. This letter provides more specific information than the "save the date" letter, and is an opportunity for educators to answer some of parents' frequently asked questions. Each resource on this page can be edited to suit the specifics of the program in a particular setting.

**Resources for families.** The other subpage of "Parent Involvement" includes

resources for educators to share with families about supporting children’s literacy at home during the summer and beyond. The subpage, “Resources for Families”, includes both embedded videos, websites, and articles on topics related to at-home literacy development. A description of each resource is provided next to each one.

### **Student Engagement**

The final page of the website, “Student Engagement” includes research related to the role of motivation in reading performance. It also includes information related to both intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation. In addition to prose text, this page also includes two embedded videos, one at the top, and one at the bottom. Both videos are of interviews with experts in the field of reading motivation, Linda B. Gambrell, and John T. Guthrie.

**Suggestions for implementation.** The first subpage related to student engagement, “Suggestions for Implementation”, includes four research-based suggestions for addressing student engagement within the context of a summer reading program. Each suggestion includes a brief summary of the research, along with a link back to the research on the previous page.

**Sample schedule.** The final subpage under “Student Engagement” is a sample schedule of a summer reading program. This schedule is adapted from the one at Clear Lake Elementary, which takes place on Tuesdays from June to August (skipping the week of the fourth of July). While the example program occurs once a week, a program could take place more or less often, depending on the availability of resources. The program at Clear Lake also takes place on two mornings and one evening a month in

order to allow for a larger number of families with different schedules to attend.

***Themes and activities.*** The sample schedule also includes different themes for each week. In order to increase student motivation and engagement in the program itself, each week revolves around a particular theme. The themes included in the sample schedule were selected by fourth and fifth grade student council representatives at Clear Lake Elementary. The representatives selected the following themes: beach day, Star Wars, bugs, Legos, superheroes, outer space, Disney day, pajama day and animals. Each week, crafts and activities will be planned, which revolve around the themes.

### **Evaluating the Project's Effectiveness**

Following the completion of the website, I will attempt to evaluate its effectiveness. My goal is to begin in my own district, and identify schools that do not already have a summer reading program in place. I will then reach out to teachers and/or administrators within those schools and share my website with them. I will then work alongside them to identify any elements that are missing from the website that could aid in the design or implementation of the program. With this feedback, I can continue to revise and improve the website in order to make it more useful for the intended audience.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a detailed description of the project, which included an overview and rationale, along with an explanation of the website format and its contents. The following chapter will act as a culmination of the Capstone project, and will include a brief review of the literature, possible implications of the project, and recommendations based on the findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

### Introduction

After observing summer reading loss first-hand with my own students, my co-teacher and I set out to pilot a summer reading program at Clear Lake Elementary in 2017. While the outcomes of the pilot program were overall positive, I personally did not feel as though I was sufficiently equipped with the knowledge and skills to make the program as effective as it could have been. In order to make the second year of the program even more successful, I knew I needed to learn more--not just about summer reading loss, but also specific elements of the program itself including book selection, parent involvement, and student engagement. This led me to develop and explore my research question, *How can a summer reading program be implemented in order to most effectively close the achievement gap and allow students to maintain literacy skills over the summer months?*

This final chapter will serve as a reflection of the Capstone project. I will first explore what I have learned about myself as a professional throughout this process. I will then revisit the literature review, and explain its relevance within the completion of the Capstone. Then, implications of the project will be discussed, including its benefits to the profession along with its limitations. Finally, I will outline my plans for the project moving forward.

## Learnings

The process of writing the Capstone and creating the website was a valuable learning experience for me in several ways. First, this journey provided me with opportunities to explore in-depth a topic about which I am passionate--summer reading loss. Over several months, I was able to devote a significant amount of time and effort to exploring current research related to the topic. Surprisingly, even throughout this lengthy process, my enthusiasm about summer reading loss never dwindled. This led me to the realization that choice is important for adults, too. While I had engaged in extensive research related to choice as an important motivator for students in their reading, I realized this was just as applicable for myself in my own work. I came to the conclusion that I am more motivated to put effort into learning about something I care about. This piece of learning is something I will carry with me throughout my career. When I am passionate about a topic, I will work toward exploring it further, and share my findings with others in an attempt to have an impact at some level within the field of education.

Another unexpected outcome of this process was a shift in my own identity. As a relatively new teacher with only five years of experience, I had not really thought of myself as an expert on any subject in the field of education, or as someone who others should seek for advice. However, I now believe I am equipped with enough knowledge to feel like an expert on the topics of summer reading loss, the achievement gap, and summer reading programs, at least within the context of my own school. I now feel I have the confidence to be an advocate to prevent summer reading loss among students, and I hope to continue to advocate for the implementation of effective summer reading

programs within my school, district, and possibly larger contexts.

### **Relevance of Literature Review**

While this process allowed me to learn about myself, it was also an opportunity to learn about topics related to my research question through the literature review. The completion of the literature review was a critical component of the Capstone process, and one that I thoroughly enjoyed. Reviewing the literature, particularly that which related to summer reading loss and the achievement gap was really enlightening for me, and it reignited my desire to continue learning throughout my career.

While I had already known there was a link between factors such as access to books and the achievement gap, I did not fully understand all of the causes, or the severe consequences. Perhaps the information I came across through my research that I found the most staggering is that summer reading loss is the greatest contributor to the achievement gap (Allington et al., 2010; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013; Compton-Lilly, Caloia, Quast & McCann, 2016; Kim & White, 2011; Smith, 2011). Upon further research, I learned this loss can be mitigated by providing students with access to books, and encouraging them to read during the summer. This information made me feel even more empowered to continue my work with the summer reading program at my own school, and encourage others to do the same.

In addition to the importance of learning about background information related to summer reading loss and the achievement gap, it was also critical for me to review literature related to several elements of summer reading programs: book selection, student engagement, and parent involvement. Researching these topics was essential

because they are the building blocks of an effective summer reading program. When planning the first year of the summer reading program at Clear Lake Elementary, I asked myself questions such as, *How will students choose books?*, *What can be done to engage students and increase attendance in the program?* and *How can parents be utilized as resources to extend the learning into the home?* It was important for me to conduct research to answer these questions, so I could apply my findings to the summer reading program, increasing its effectiveness.

The works of Richard Allington, Anne McGill-Franzen, and their colleagues were especially influential during the entire literature review process. These experts in the field have examined the relationship between summer reading loss and the socioeconomic achievement extensively, and have explored some possible solutions to the problem. Through their work, Allington and McGill-Franzen have identified access to books as being one of the major reasons why children in poverty experience more summer reading loss than their peers, and they have conducted several studies examining the effects of providing students in poverty with access to books over the summer months (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003, 2008, 2013; Allington et al., 2010; McGill-Franzen et al., 2016). These studies acknowledge that while providing children with access to books is not enough to close the achievement gap in one summer, it does yield some positive results.

While Allington and McGill-Franzen's expertise proved useful for me in developing my understanding of summer reading loss and the achievement gap, I also referred to their work when reviewing literature related to other topics, including book selection. The topic of book selection was perhaps the one I was most eager to learn



about, as books are clearly an essential component of a summer reading program, and I wanted to ensure students would have access to the right books. When referring back to Allington and McGill-Franzen's work (2008, 2013) I realized it is essential for students to self-select books based on their own interests. Additionally, Kiera Parrott's article, *Thinking Outside the Bin* (2017) also had a significant impact on my understanding of this topic. Parrott (2017) echos the idea that interest-based selection is critical, but also adds selecting books based on reading levels alone can be disempowering to readers. These understandings lead me to make changes to the summer reading program at my school, and share these learnings on my Google Site.

### **Implications**

After extensively reviewing current and relevant research related to the topics of summer reading loss and elements of summer reading programs, I wanted a way to share my findings with other educators. I was driven to educate others about the existing problems within the education system, and inspire teachers and administrators to solve some of those those problems through summer programming. With this in mind, I decided the best way to share my research findings would be through the creation of a website, which can be accessed by educators throughout the country, and possibly the world.

### **Benefits to the Profession**

I created this project with the hope that it would have a positive impact on the educational proression at least on some level. I believe my website could have the ability to benefit the profession by encouraging more educators to implement summer reading

programs within their schools. The ultimate goals of my website are to educate teachers about why summer reading programs are necessary, and also provide them with resources to make the planning and implementation of the program a little less overwhelming. I will feel my project was successful if it inspires even one teacher to implement a summer reading program and/or if it makes the process a little bit easier for educators who are already juggling many responsibilities.

### **Limitations**

The major limitation of this project is that it may not be fully applicable in every setting, as the primary intended audience is elementary educators. The website was mainly created from an elementary lens, and resources found on the website were adapted from ones used in a real-life reading program in an elementary setting. While all the resources on the site are adaptable, this would take additional time and effort for educators at the secondary level. Furthermore, the usability would vary from setting to setting, as every school is different, and has access to different funding and resources.

### **Moving Forward**

With the information gained from the literature review and website creation, I was inspired to make some changes to the design of the summer reading program at my own school. However, I believe even more can be done to increase the program's effectiveness. It is my belief that a summer reading program is effective in the short-term if students maintain, or even increase, their literacy skills from June to August. In the long-term, a summer reading program would be effective if it were able to bridge the socioeconomic achievement gap, at least to some degree. With this in mind, one change I

would like to implement moving forward is an evaluation of the effectiveness of the program.

First, I would begin the evaluation process in my own setting. I would collect reading data using the Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) in May, and again in August. Then, I would determine whether each student lost, maintained, or gained skills, and compare this data between participants and nonparticipants in the program. In addition, I would like to collect data related to affective factors, such as students' motivation and attitudes related to reading, through interviews or surveys. This data would be collected over several years to determine whether or not there is a correlation between summer reading loss and participation or nonparticipation in the summer reading program. This same method could also be extended to other schools in the district that have implemented summer reading programs.

In addition to evaluating the effectiveness of the program, another change I would like to make moving forward is increasing the accessibility of the program for all students and their families. However, in order to accomplish this, I would first need to determine what is preventing families from attending in the first place. This information could be collected through interviews or surveys, and then be utilized to develop an action plan. For example, if a family is not able to attend the program due to a scheduling conflict, more sessions could be added to better suit a variety of schedules. If a family does not have access to transportation to the program, books could be sent in the mail, or delivered in a different manner. In order for the program to reduce summer reading loss and thereby close the achievement gap, it must be accessible to all students.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The journey of completing the Capstone project was rewarding in many ways. First, it allowed me to learn about myself as a researcher and professional. I was also able to learn a lot about topics which interest me, including summer reading loss, the achievement gap, and elements related to the design and implementation of a summer reading program, including book selection. With this knowledge, I feel motivated to continue my work on the summer reading program at my own school, and continue to advocate for providing students with access to books over the summer months. Through the website, I hope to be able to reach other educators who have a similar goal of reducing summer reading loss, and make the process of designing and implementing a summer reading program a little less daunting for them.

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