

## Research in Brief:

# Are Summer Reading Programs Effective for Low Income Students?



### Are Summer Reading Programs Effective for Low Income Students?

A number of studies have shown that on average, students from low-income families score significantly lower on most measures of reading. Although there are many underlying causes for this gap, other research has suggested that this gap increases over the summer months, when students may not be routinely involved in reading activities.

Summer reading programs that involve students in reading activities during the summer are often suggested as a strategy to reduce this gap. Summer reading programs may take a variety of approaches, and are most often either classroom-based programs or home-based programs.

Classroom-based programs may be led by regular classroom teachers, or they may be led by trained university students or other non-school personnel. In classroom-based programs the quantity and quality of teacher-directed literacy instruction is the critical mechanism that promotes reading achievement.

In home interventions, the quantity and quality of child-initiated book reading is the critical mechanism that promotes reading achievement.

### What is a meta-analysis?

Meta-analysis is a way of combining the results from similar studies to determine if the results from different studies add up



### *Why does this matter?*

- ⇒ ***Students from low-income families are at greater risk of having reading difficulties.***
- ⇒ ***Students who are struggling in school may be more effected by the gap in routine learning that occurs over the summer.***
- ⇒ ***Summer reading programs are seen as an effective strategy to maintain or increase reading skills over the summer.***
- ⇒ ***This meta-analysis of a number of studies found there were positive effects for summer reading programs.***
- ⇒ ***The summer reading interventions had significantly larger benefits for children from low-income backgrounds than for children from mixed income backgrounds.***



Research in Brief articles can be found at:  
<http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/e-best/>

---

# Are Summer Reading Programs Effective for Low Income Students?

to strong evidence. The important parts of a meta-analysis include a comprehensive search, ensuring that the results can actually be compared across studies (measuring the same thing, the same way) and a way of combining the results that is meaningful.

## What did they do?

To find relevant studies, the researchers searched Academic Search Premier, Education Abstracts, ERIC, PaycINFO, EconLit and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses databases. They found 1,691 published and unpublished articles, papers and reports over more than a 15 year period.

They then reviewed all these studies looking for studies that (a) evaluate the effects of classroom or home-based summer reading interventions in the United States or Canada, (b) evaluate effects on a measure of reading achievement, (c) provide sufficient empirical information to compute an effect size, (d) included students in kindergarten to grade 8, and (e) use an experimental or quasi-experimental design to compare the results of students who participated in program to those who did not.

Thirty five studies were identified that met their criteria. The results of these studies were combined to examine the type of summer reading intervention, the program participants characteristics, the quality of the study, and the student reading outcomes.

## What did they learn?

Overall, summer reading programs are effective in improving reading skills in students. The programs are particularly effective in improving the reading skills of low income students.

There was no difference in the outcomes between home-based summer reading programs and classroom-based summer reading programs. Both were effective in increasing total reading achievement, reading comprehension, fluency and decoding, and vocabulary.

Only about one-third of the summer reading programs used reading practices endorsed by the National Reading Panel. (<http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/>)

The summer reading interventions had significantly larger benefits for children from low-income backgrounds than for children from mixed income backgrounds. There are several possible explanations for this.

Low income families may have fewer books available in their household, summer reading programs may increase the number of books for these students to read. Middle and upper income students may participate in activities that expose them to new knowledge and reading opportunities during their summer break, and summer reading programs may help low-income students to continue and consolidate their classroom learning.



*This brief summary was prepared from:*

James S. Kim , David M. Quinn (2013) The Effects of Summer Reading on Low-Income Children's Literacy Achievement From Kindergarten to Grade 8: A Meta-Analysis of Classroom and Home Interventions *Review of Educational Research* 83: 386-431  
doi:10.3102/0034654313483906

*Please see the original document for full details. In the case of any disagreement between this summary and the original document, the original document should be seen as authoritative.*