

Addressing Summer Reading Loss: A Public Education Partners and Greenville County Schools Initiative

Executive Summary

Summer 2016

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RESEARCH &
VALIDATION

Overview

Make Summer Count (MSC) is a summer reading initiative sponsored by Public Education Partners (PEP) for Greenville County Elementary Schools (GCS) in Greenville, South Carolina. PEP provides students and families with resources and opportunities to encourage reading through the summer. Scholastic, the global children's publishing, education and media company, partnered with PEP to learn more about how summer reading activities contribute to reducing or stemming summer reading loss, the increasing gap between lower- and higher-income students that can occur when literacy resources are not equally available to all students during the summer.

PEP provides the resources needed for children to be able to read all summer long by addressing the challenge of equal access to books and literacy activities during the summer by providing two targeted, research-based opportunities to engage students with literacy:

- **MSC Book Selection:** students build home libraries by selecting 11 books within their reading levels to take home and read over the summer; and
- **Family Reading Nights:** families learn techniques and strategies to support their children's reading over the summer, and children select an additional five books to take home.

The program aims to serve children and families in higher-needs elementary schools, defined in this research as schools with 50% or more of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Price Meals.

PEP, GCS, and Scholastic approached addressing summer reading loss and conducting related research by:

- Providing 11 free books per student to over 18,000 1st–6th grade¹ students across 29 higher-needs elementary schools via the MSC Book Selection; more than 209,000 total books distributed
- Hosting 23 Family Reading Night events to foster family engagement, reaching more than 1,200 participants
- Distributing surveys to over 9,000 3rd–5th grade students
- Distributing over 18,000 book logs to track summer reading in 1st–6th grade students²
- Analyzing assessment data on over 8,000 3rd–5th grade students

¹ Throughout this document, grade refers to the grade students were in during the fall of 2016

² Students in 5th grade rising into 6th grade were given logs to record their books over the summer; however, only students in 1st–5th grade in the fall of 2016 were included in analyses

This Executive Summary contains exploratory findings concerning the effectiveness of the MSC program as well as descriptive information about the students and families who participated. The findings should be contextualized in the sense that there was not a comparison group of students; rather this is an analysis of the unique results of all students participating in MSC. Additionally, this research does not account for additional summer learning/enrichment opportunities that may have been sought out and participated in by some of these students and families.

• Key Findings

Our preliminary work examined how summer reading activities might contribute to reducing or stemming typical summer reading loss, as well as the role of students' attitudes and beliefs about reading and their actual summer reading habits. Key findings from this work include:

- **MSC students read more books over the summer than the national average.**
 - MSC students read an average of 14.7 books, compared to the national average of 12 books.³
- **The majority of students participating in MSC did not experience the summer reading loss that is typically associated with students in higher-needs schools.**
 - More specifically, 78% of 3rd–5th grade students maintained or increased their reading level from spring to fall 2016.⁴
- **Students who read more books over the summer were less likely to experience summer reading loss.**
 - Students who read 11 or more books were less likely to experience summer reading loss as defined by moving to a lower MAP performance tier at the end of the summer.
- **There was a substantial increase in reading stamina, or the time spent reading without taking a break, from spring to fall 2016.**
 - The percent of students who read for one hour or more without stopping increased from 13% to 26%.
- **Students reported increased confidence in reading after participating in the MSC program.**
 - 82% agreed that they were better readers after the summer.

³ National average based on Scholastic's nationally representative *Kids & Family Reading Report*™ with kids aged 6–11.

⁴ Reading levels as measured by overall MAP RIT performance tiers created for this study's analyses

- **Families overwhelmingly found the MSC program to be valuable.⁵**
 - 99% agreed that the program contributed to their children reading more books over the summer.
 - 98% agreed that their children were better readers after the summer.
 - 100% found Family Reading Nights to be valuable for learning about how to support their children's reading.

• Next Steps

The exploratory findings in this Executive Summary are in line with research showing the importance of providing access to books to help address summer reading loss.⁶ Together, PEP and Scholastic will continue to explore the relationship between access to books and increased family engagement, and summer reading loss in elementary students. Specifically, for summer 2017:

- PEP will:
 - continue their book selection activities and refine these processes by ensuring that books are even more well-suited to students' interests and reading levels by utilizing self-selection of books; and
 - continue to provide opportunities to engage families by hosting Family Reading Nights, using these events to provide families with tools to have meaningful conversations about books.
- Scholastic will:
 - continue to partner with PEP to provide students and families the books and resources they need to read all summer long;
 - continue its work with PEP this upcoming summer by gathering more specific and longitudinal student data to determine the impacts of MSC; and
 - expand summer reading initiative research to other districts in the country and include a comparison group this summer.

⁵ Based on parents who responded to the post-survey (n=101).

⁶ Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (2003). The early catastrophe: The 30 million word gap by age 3. *American Educator*, 27(1), 4-9; Heyns, B. (1978). *Summer learning and the effects of schooling*. New York, NY: Academic; Neuman, S. B., & Celano, D. (2006). The knowledge gap: Implications of leveling the playing field for low-income and middle-income children. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 41(2), 176-201.

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