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COMMENTARY

Effects of Home-Based and School-Based Summer Literacy Programs

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In California, low-income children continue to lag behind their wealthier peers in reading achievement; in 2012, 46.3% of economically disadvantaged students scored proficient or above on state reading tests, compared to 76.5% of advantaged students (based on Author's calculations using CDE data). Although there are many underlying causes of income-based disparities in reading, low-income children are particularly at risk of falling behind their classmates in reading during the summer months and summer literacy programs may help prevent summer slide for low income students. In addition to traditional summer school, summer reading programs based in the home have been gaining in popularity in recent years. Such programs often provide low income students with free books over the summer and encourage home-based, student-led literacy activities. While the majority of California parents express support for academic and enrichment summer programs, in a recent survey, low income parents reported less access to quality summer programs.

In this study, we conducted a meta-analysis to determine whether summer reading programs were effective at raising students' literacy achievement, and whether these programs were more effective for students from low-income backgrounds than students from middle- or high-income backgrounds. The results, recently published in *Review of Educational Research*, draw on 35 studies of 41 summer reading programs (14 of them home-based) conducted between 1998 and 2011 with students from kindergarten to eighth grade. Our results indicate that summer programs are effective, on average, at raising students' overall reading achievement, and home-based and classroom-based programs appear to be equally effective overall. However, programs' effectiveness differ by literacy domain; while programs were effective at raising students' reading comprehension and fluency/decoding scores (equivalent to moving from the 50th to the 59th percentile of a normal distribution), programs did not, on average, improve students' vocabulary scores (however, few programs explicitly taught vocabulary). Furthermore, we found evidence that school-based programs using research-based literacy instruction had the largest impact on students' reading comprehension scores (equivalent to moving from the 50th to the 65th percentile of a normal distribution).

Students from low income backgrounds derived more benefit from summer reading programs than did students from higher income backgrounds. The evidence suggests that this result is driven by different summer learning loss patterns across income groups for students who do not participate in summer programs. Consistent with prior research, the studies in our review showed that control group students (students not systematically participating in a summer reading program) from higher income backgrounds experienced reading test score gains over the summer on average, while students from low income backgrounds tended to have stable or declining scores over the summer. As a result, the difference between participating versus not participating in a summer reading program is more pronounced for low income students than for higher income students. Unfortunately, it appears that the benefits of summer programs tend to fade out over time.

Overall, the results of our meta-analysis support summer reading programs as a means for improving students' literacy

outcomes. While school-based and home-based programs appear to be equally effective overall, school-based programs that use research-based instructional strategies may be particularly effective. Low income students seem to derive more reading comprehension benefits from summer programs than do higher income students, but unfortunately, effects appear to fade out for all students over time. Attention must therefore be paid to the reasons for this fade-out and for ensuring that school year instruction helps students sustain their summer gains.

The full study (gated) is in Kim JS, Quinn DM. 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, September 2013 vol. 83 no. 3 386-431. An ungated version is available here.

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