

Giving books to kids before summer break can stem reading losses

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It's common knowledge among teachers that when students return to school after the long summer break, they likely will have lost some academic ground—a phenomenon known as "summer slide." A new study, to be presented on Saturday, April 25 at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in San Diego, shows that giving students books at the end of the school year can help stem losses in reading skills.

"Reading proficiency is a critical skill and an important determinant of health. However, many [students](#), particularly low-income students, struggle," said lead researcher Erin Kelly, M.D., a fourth-year medicine-pediatrics resident at the University of Rochester in New York.

An intervention at high-poverty elementary schools in Florida dramatically improved reading achievement by providing students with a collection of self-selected books at the end of each [school year](#). Dr. Kelly aimed to improve literacy among low-income Rochester City School students by replicating the Florida intervention.

"This is a tremendous challenge in Rochester," Dr. Kelly said. "Only 21 percent of Rochester students are proficient on the state English/language arts exam, and the high school graduation rate is an abysmal 43 percent."

Researchers initiated a pilot project in 2013, holding a book fair for a class of 18 second-graders at the end of the school year. Students could

choose 13 [free books](#) at the fair. Another second-grade class of 20 students served as a control group, receiving a few books mailed to them over the summer by a community group based on their grade and reading level. All students had reading assessments in the spring and following fall.

Results showed statistically significant improvements in [reading scores](#) among students in the intervention group but no change in scores among the control group.

In 2014, the project was expanded to four classes of kindergarten through second-graders. Each student could load up a backpack with 15 free books at the end of the school year. Students in other classes served as controls. Due to ethical considerations given the success of the pilot program, control students also were able to choose a few of the books they received.

Results showed no significant difference in the two groups' reading scores, with more than 75 percent of students maintaining or improving their reading, compared to an average summer learning loss of up to three months seen among low-income students in prior studies.

"This simple intervention allowing students to choose their own books at end of the school year had a significant positive impact," Dr. Kelly said. She noted that even the [control group](#) made reading gains, suggesting that receiving some [books](#), even if students don't pick all of them out, may stem the summer slide. "A multifaceted approach is needed to address poor child literacy rates," she concluded, "but this intervention can be part of the solution."

More information: Dr. Kelly will present "Stories to Stop the Summer Slide: Books to Prevent Summer Learning Loss Among Low-Income Students" from 9:45-10 a.m. PT Saturday, April 25. To view the study

abstract, go to

http://www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view.php?nu=PAS15L1_1160.8

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