

TRANSFORMING

summer programs

AT YOUR LIBRARY

OUTREACH *and* OUTCOMES *in* ACTION

NATALIE COLE
VIRGINIA A. WALTER

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FOREWORD

GREG LUCAS / *California State Librarian*

The only constant in this world is change. Libraries have been around for thousands of years, but they're far different institutions now than they were 100 years ago, 20 years ago, or even just 5 years ago. Part of that change lies in how libraries provide summer programming, as Natalie Cole and Virginia Walter discuss in the next 200 pages or so. And believe me, it's changing. The California State Library supports "Summer @ Your Library: Explore, Learn, Read, Connect." If the name of this program doesn't tell you things have changed, nothing will. Natalie and Virginia describe a lot of these changes, which help better engage community members and make learning more fun.

There is value in this book's examples for librarians in other states and for other state librarians. Pete Seeger tells a story about Woody Guthrie being asked what he thought about Bob Dylan. Guthrie laughed and said, "Dylan just steals from me. I steal from everybody." There is plenty of good stuff to steal from plenty of good people in the pages ahead.

One of my favorite changes in summer programming is offering free lunches for poor kids. Hunger doesn't go on vacation when public schools let out for three months, and an increasing number of libraries and librarians are helping address this most basic of needs. In California in 2014, 17 libraries began serving lunches. In just a few short years, there are now 160 California libraries doing this. Having visited several of these Lunch at the Library programs around the state, I've noticed a common thread—as folks finish lunch, they

ask about signing up for other summer programming, particularly reading programs.

Reimagining summer library programming is just one of the ways that new generations of librarians are reconfiguring the relationships libraries have with their community. These librarians are more than happy to find whatever you're looking for, but that's just one part of their desire to change the world. One library user at a time, if necessary.

And since change is inevitable, isn't it better to help make it as positive as possible?



INTRODUCTION

A library in the middle of a community is a cross between an emergency exit, a life-raft and a festival. They are cathedrals of the mind, theme parks of the imagination. On a cold and rainy island they are the only sheltered public spaces where you are not a consumer, but a citizen instead.

—CAITLIN MORAN, *Moranthology*

In the summer months, libraries, those vital public spaces, transform dramatically. In California, some of the libraries’ “regulars” leave town to visit relatives as far away as Oaxaca, Mexico, or as near as Flagstaff, Arizona. Destination spots like Catalina, Santa Monica, and San Francisco draw families vacationing from all over the state. Homework demands drop off except for students with summer reading lists from their schools. Conscientious high-schoolers look to libraries as venues for completing their community service hours. Library staff put up their bulletin board displays announcing this year’s summer reading or summer learning theme. And libraries are abuzz with events and activities. It’s that time of year again when children, teens, and recently adults participate in the 100-year-old tradition of summer programming at their libraries.

There are families in which three or even four generations have participated in this summer tradition. It can be a challenge to tinker with such a time-honored and loved activity. In California, we have taken a deliberative approach to transforming summer at our libraries. Librarians who serve a variety of different communities and populations have spent long hours talking about why and how libraries present summer programming, the value their summer programs provide, how they can make positive changes to their programs, and how their programs can stay relevant and have the greatest impact. As a result, they are holding on to the activities that are most meaningful today and letting go of practices that no longer work as well as they used to.

California public library staff are using statewide outcomes to guide and demonstrate the impact of their work. They are using new quality principles and indicators as a means of achieving those outcomes. They are forging new summer partnerships and collaborations, and are developing innovative outreach strategies that extend their programs beyond the library regulars. They are meeting and learning from one another, and forming the beginnings of what we see as an evolving community of practice.

California's public libraries are not alone in making these changes, but the state of California provides an ideal canvas for exploring and illustrating the transformation of summer programming that is taking place across the nation. California is a large and diverse state with summer programs taking place in a wide variety of urban, suburban, and rural communities. Each year over 800,000 children, teens, and adults sign up for summer reading in California's over 1,100 main and branch libraries, and many more participate in over 45,000 events and activities.

As with any story of change, the transformation of California's summer programs is a work in progress. In this book, we present the vision for change that was developed by California library staff and give examples of how California's summer programs are changing. We begin with a historical overview of summer programming in public libraries and a review of the research and conditions that have prompted recent changes in California's summer programs. We then discuss the outcome- and outreach-based evaluation framework and the quality principles and indicators that California librarians have created to help them drive the change they want to see in their libraries and their communities. We review a statewide campaign, Summer Matters, that is working to provide equitable summer learning opportunities for all children in California, and we explore the contributions that public libraries have made to that campaign. And we end with an in-depth look at Lunch at the Library, California's coordinated, outcome-based, public library summer meals project, which is providing free meals for youth in food-insecure families while bringing underserved families to the library, fostering community partnerships, and providing learning opportunities for children, volunteer opportunities for teens, and resources for adults. Throughout, we highlight case studies and observations that illustrate the variety of summer programming taking place today in California's public libraries.

Public library summer programs can transform communities. As we write, California's summer programs are bringing new families to the library. They

are providing children with summer learning opportunities, teens with youth development and workforce readiness skills, and adults with lifelong learning opportunities. They are providing hungry youth with meals. And they are nurturing community and connections among people of all ages. We hope that you find useful information here that you can use to transform summer in your own communities. This is more of a how-to-think-about-it book than a how-to-do-it manual. Please share with us stories of your own transformation effort through our website, www.calchallenge.org. Thank you for joining us.



Looking Backward

THE DEFINITIVE HISTORY OF LIBRARY SUMMER READING programs has yet to be written. It is possible, however, to tease out some of the evolving trends and issues by looking at articles published in the library press, mostly accounts of “how we did it good,” and at advice and guidance given in handbooks by experts in the field.¹ Many of the elements that are characteristic of library summer programs today can be traced back more than 100 years to early initiatives by innovative children’s librarians. This chapter will look back at some of the significant highlights and changes that have occurred over the years to create a service that is now offered in 95 percent of American public libraries.²

The Beginnings

The earliest records we have of library summer programs date back to the late nineteenth century. According to Jill Locke, pioneering programs were offered in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1897 and in Hartford, Connecticut, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1898.³ All three were designed to motivate children to use the library and keep reading during the summer months when they were not in school—objectives that still underpin our twenty-first-century summer programs.

The Library League of Cleveland was designed as a club for young library patrons who would learn how to care properly for books. In addition, the children kept a record of the books they read over the summer and made a list of six or more of the best books they wanted to share with other children. They were encouraged to recruit new members and received badges as a recognition of their efforts. The roster of 3,500 members in the spring of 1897 grew to 12,615 by fall. A culminating program was held in November at the Music Hall, the largest auditorium in Cleveland, where the children sang their league song with its rousing chorus:

Oh, we are the League, the Library League
The League ten thousand strong
And if you value the bright new books
Join us and sing our song.

In Hartford, children’s librarian Carolyn Hewins promoted her program as the Vacation Reading Club, where boys and girls were invited to come to the library once a week for book talks and story reading. Book-lending policies were also changed to allow the children to check out books daily during the summer instead of once a week, as was the practice during the school year.

The Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh used a different service model for its Summer Playground Program. The library provided books and story hours at selected neighborhood playgrounds. Jill Locke quotes one kindergarten child as saying, “I tell you, them skinny books are the daisies.”⁴

These three innovative programs were widely reported in the library press, at regional meetings, and at conferences of the American Library Association. It wasn’t long before summer programs for children were launched in Cincinnati, New York, Boston, Denver, Detroit, Indianapolis, Seattle, Milwaukee, Dayton, and elsewhere. In 1901, John Cotton Dana added to the national conversation on summer reading in an editorial he wrote advocating that children develop a common knowledge base by reading recommended books.⁵ He included a sample list that contained such familiar topics as Aladdin, William Tell, and Robin Hood. At least one public library in Indiana adopted this idea for its 1901 vacation reading club. Each grade was given a checklist of classic children’s books, and children were asked to write about the book they enjoyed the most.

Anne Carroll Moore, children’s services coordinator at the New York Public Library and one of the most influential of that first generation of children’s

librarians, wrote about vacation reading in one of the essays reprinted in *My Roads to Childhood*.⁶ Writing in the late 1910s, Moore reminisces about her own summer reading as a young girl. She then describes the pleasures books can offer to the New York City kids she serves as a librarian. Specifically, she writes about the value of free reading and talking with children about books they have chosen themselves. “No time is more favorable for such interchange than the rainy morning, the hot afternoon, or the cool night of a summer holiday,” she explains.⁷ She claims that children see summer reading as a pastime that is as fun as any other in her city, and that boys and girls were outraged when the Health Department closed the library for nearly three months during the summer of 1916, presumably because of the rampant influenza outbreak. She quotes one boy as complaining that first they closed the movies, then the libraries. “They’ll be keeping us out of the river next,” he grumbled.

Never one to shy away from offering a strong opinion when it came to children’s books, Moore had undaunted faith in children’s ability to choose good books for themselves, even if that meant skipping the dull parts. She therefore advised parents to let their children choose freely from a large and varied collection of books during the summer, rather than prescribe a course of required reading for them. “This quick sensibility of childhood to great things in life or in literature is too often forgotten by those who would bring them together by a preconceived plan.”⁸

Moore does not give any details about how children using the New York Public Library in those early days were encouraged to stumble upon those great things in literature. Presumably they were not provided with lists of recommended books. She writes approvingly of Caroline Hewins’s reading clubs and vacation reading hours in Hartford, Connecticut, mentioned previously. She praises Hewins for passing on to children “the rare gift of a companionship with books based on friendship rather than on desire for knowledge.”⁹ It is likely, based on Moore’s philosophy and practice of children’s librarianship, that she would rely on informal reading guidance from a knowledgeable librarian who knew how to relate to children.

Libraries continued to adopt summer reading programs after the success of the pioneering efforts was disseminated through journals and conference presentations. An article in *Library Journal* in 1923 referred critically to “the sudden vogue of children’s ‘reading clubs.’”¹⁰ The author questioned the rationale for summer reading clubs, asking if they were “anything more than half-concealed, perhaps only half-realized, schemes to keep our circulation statistics

up over the summer months.” While staff at the Chicago Public Library were beginning to question summer reading program incentives, the Minneapolis Public Library reported in the same year that it was beginning its second year of a “summer honor reading contest.”¹¹ These librarians were quick to state that their system did not spoil the spontaneity of reading for pleasure.

The October 1, 1923, issue of *Library Journal* published two editorials on children’s summer reading clubs. One supported the use of honor rolls, badges, and certificates as devices borrowed from child psychology to foster children’s interest in reading and develop children’s wider tastes and a deeper love of books.¹² The author of the more critical editorial worried that libraries were confusing their goals with those of schools and that children participating in such programs would begin to see reading as a task designed to produce an output rather than a joyful experience.¹³

Jill Locke notes that some public libraries reported having to cut back or make adjustments in their summer reading programs during the Great Depression.¹⁴ Portland, Oregon, for example, reported in 1934 that they had no money to buy the usual printed support materials.¹⁵ They improvised by building a castle out of blocks on which children wrote their names and the title of a book they had read. In Charlotte, North Carolina, the library managed to host a party at the end of the summer for children who had completed the reading program.¹⁶

Programs during the Mid-Twentieth Century

During the years of World War II, many libraries made a special effort to keep children occupied in the summer months while fathers were away and mothers worked in the defense industry.¹⁷ A report of a summer program in 1941 demonstrates another effect of the war.¹⁸ Earlier, this North Dakota library’s summer programs had featured international themes, but in 1941 the theme was focused on the United States in a show of nationalistic patriotism.

The Children’s Services Division (now the Association for Library Service to Children) of the American Library Association provided a mechanism for children’s librarians throughout the United States to network and to learn from each other about approaches to serving young people. At annual and regional conferences and through publications over the years, they developed best practices for such programs and services as preschool storytimes, relationships with schools, and summer reading programs. In 1943 the American Library Association issued *Work with Children in Public Libraries*, an update of a 1930

publication.¹⁹ This new edition reflected current professional concerns about the social aspects of library service to children and the need to work more closely with other child welfare organizations and agencies. It also identified summer reading as a core service.

In 1943, most library summer reading programs were still informal efforts to promote reading during the months when children had more time and leisure. Effie Power suggested that librarians use summer vacation as a time to promote longer books and handbooks on nature subjects. She also warned against using the less busy summer period as a time to catch up on inventory and book repair, noting that this clerical work might spoil the atmosphere in an otherwise attractive children's room. "Summer is the time for leisurely contact with children that leads to deeper understanding of their wants," she wrote.²⁰

Themes and more innovative programming were beginning to be part of summer services at some libraries. Power called attention to a procession of balloons carrying titles of books, traveling around the world through reading, building a library using books as bricks, or planning a library garden. Whatever is attempted should be based on children's initiative, planned thoughtfully, and carried to completion. Specific teaching methods followed by teachers during the winter months should be avoided for obvious reasons. Freshness of approach should be the keynote. Recreation through reading was the aim. Other innovations documented by Power were Saturday clubs organized by the children themselves, and library storytimes in playgrounds and parks. She cautions librarians to avoid contests and competitions, adding her voice to the ongoing controversy on this topic.²¹

By the 1940s, educators were citing the results of various standardized reading tests to document the loss of reading skills over the summer and to evaluate strategies for retention. One particularly interesting study was conducted by Ruth Cathlyn Cook over twelve years, beginning in 1940.²² More than 400 second graders in Mankato, Minnesota, were involved. The Gates Advanced Primary Reading Tests were administered in May and again in September. Four types of summer reading plans were administered during the twelve-year study: reading materials with no work sheets, reading materials with completion exercises, plans using individualized work sheets, and, in 1950 and 1952, library reading plans. The public library's reading plans were similar to many still used today, with children invited to participate for one year in a reading circus and the following year in a reading rodeo. The goal was to read twenty-five books over the summer, at which point the child would receive a certificate.

The results of the twelve-year study showed that participation in any kind of summer reading was better than no reading at all. However, the library reading plans produced the best reading results of any of the four plans. Children improved their reading scores, sometimes dramatically, and the gains persisted into the following January. The author of the study wrote, “If confidences supplied in conferences can be trusted, no summer program for an individual child is superior to one which includes a relaxed child, a good library, a trained librarian, and at least one parent who takes time to listen, to discuss, to supply information, and occasionally to visit the library with the child in search of information or recreation.”²³

By the 1950s, library summer programs had become institutionalized to the point that articles began to appear about how to effectively develop and implement these annual initiatives. Alice Cushman continued to raise the dilemma faced by many librarians: were their summer programs just races to see who could read the most books, or were they designed to teach the fun and importance of reading?²⁴ She acknowledged the problem of small staffs and inadequate budgets, and she suggested that librarians partner with other agencies such as playgrounds and youth groups to meet the challenge of providing good service with limited resources.

Two Washington state libraries partnered with local public schools for their summer reading programs. Seattle and Walla Walla both worked with teachers and with the PTA to promote the library programs. In Seattle, the children in grades four through eight received their certificates for participation in the summer program at school assemblies. The Walla Walla PTA had a special recognition party to honor the children who had gotten involved in the library’s summer program.

Summer Programs in the Late Twentieth Century

One of the authors of this book, Virginia Walter, was working as a children’s librarian at the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) in 1966. By this time, summer reading programs were well-institutionalized at public libraries around the country. The SFPL’s offering was typical of those offered at large library systems at that time. Under the leadership of the children’s services coordinator, Effie Lee Morris, the library offered an elaborate summer reading program that shared many elements with those at other institutions. At this time, each public library mounted its own summer program. At the SFPL, a committee of

children's librarians developed a new theme each year and worked with the staff artists in the library's public relations department to develop the materials that supported the theme. There were book lists, posters, and booklets for children to record their reading. There were no prizes for reaching achievements. However, the names of children who registered were displayed prominently at each library, along with the number of books each child had read. At the end of the summer, a ceremony was held at the municipal auditorium. Certificates were given to each child who completed the required number of books, and children were further honored for their years of participation.

While most libraries continued to include some element of competition in their summer reading programs, there was some pushback. Writing in *The Horn Book* in 1964, Mary Amos McMillan argued against the prevailing structured, competitive summer reading clubs.²⁵ She cited a child who stopped reading after finishing the tenth book because no credit would be given for reading more than that. In 1993 Alfie Kohn's influential book, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*, gave fuel to the arguments of some librarians that external rewards do little to build a lasting reading habit or reading culture.²⁶

Herbert Goldhor and John McCrossan entered the debate with their report of an exploratory study on the effects of library summer programs on reading skills.²⁷ The authors introduced some skepticism about the benefits of summer reading clubs early in their article, reporting other authors who say these programs are among the most controversial activities in the children's library field. Benefits cited include a belief that children develop their reading skills and develop reading interests and good reading habits. Negative effects include the promotion of undesirable competition and the use of these reading clubs as a gimmick to keep up circulation statistics during the summer.²⁸ Troubled by the lack of reliable research to back up librarians' claims that vacation reading contributes to reading retention, Goldhor and McCrossan undertook their own study. The Evansville, Indiana, public schools administered reading tests to all 1,718 fourth-graders in their 35 elementary schools in the spring of 1962 and again in the fall after the children started fifth grade. Of these children, 135 joined the summer reading club and completed its requirements to read one book from at least 16 of 42 subject categories developed by the librarians. The results of the reading tests showed that children who participated in the summer reading club were, on average, approximately seven months ahead of children who did not participate. However, the authors noted several confounding

variables that weaken the causal relationship between library summer reading and reading scores. They encouraged more rigorous research design that would, for example, randomize the selection of children for the experimental group of participants, since self-selection tends to introduce bias.

A study by Barbara Heyns, published in 1975, brought renewed attention to one of the original rationales for library summer reading programs.²⁹ She was able to document the loss in vocabulary experienced by children over the summer in the city of Atlanta. She found that children from high-income families actually gained vocabulary during the summer months while poor children lost ground. A study done twenty-two years later on children in Baltimore yielded similar results.³⁰ This study looked at reading comprehension test results. All children, regardless of family income, made progress during the school year. Children in low-income families, however, experienced loss over the summer months.

Most educational experts agree that more reading is what makes the difference. Obviously, reading requires books, and there is evidence that children from poor families have significantly less access to books than those from wealthier homes. One influential study conducted by Stephen Krashen, Courtney Smith, and Rebecca Constantino looked at the availability of books to children in affluent Beverly Hills and low-income Watts, in Los Angeles.³¹ Children in these two communities were asked how many books they had in their homes that were available to them to read. The average number in Beverly Hills was 200. In Watts, it was less than one—only 0.4 books per household.

Could library summer reading programs be an effective response to this problem? Alleviating what educators call “summer slide” has always been a major rationale for these summer initiatives in libraries. Some research from the education community has supported the value of voluntary summer reading programs, particularly in helping low-income children catch up to their more affluent peers.³² One study showed that giving poor children books that they chose themselves at the beginning of summer yielded positive effects on reading achievement that were equal to attending summer school.³³ Other scholars are more skeptical about the value of public libraries’ drop-in, voluntary approach to summer reading, however. Harvard professor James Kim, for example, has urged teachers’ intervention in order to help lower-achieving children get the most benefit from reading voluntarily over the summer. His studies also showed that children did better when they were exposed to help with reading comprehension strategies.³⁴

Jill Locke's PhD dissertation aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of library summer reading programs.³⁵ She defined a successful program as one that reached more than 8 percent of the child population in its service area. She sent surveys to 500 public libraries throughout the United States and received 200 responses that enabled her to determine the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful programs. By even this limited output measure, only one third of the summer reading programs were effective. The majority lacked goals and objectives, and many lacked any kind of measurement data. Factors that led to success as defined in the study were population size, marketing to schools, and participation of the children's specialist in the design of the program. While this study gave some indication of the relatively narrow reach of library summer reading programs, it gave no data at all about their impact on children's reading losses or gains.

Summer Library Programs in the Twenty-First Century

Fast forward to the twenty-first century. Some things had changed. Libraries were less likely to develop their own theme and create their own artwork, preferring instead to purchase materials from a reliable organization such as iREAD or the Collaborative Summer Library Program. Both offer high-quality resources and products on a new theme each summer. More state library development agencies and state library associations were offering some funding to local libraries that buy in to one of these national summer reading campaigns. In fact, summer library programs are increasingly funded by contributions from local businesses and commercial enterprises. This development has received some pushback from librarians who are concerned about this possible commercialization of a public program. However, few libraries have taken a stand of refusing such sponsorship.³⁶ The use of trinkets and drawings for more substantial prizes has become commonplace, in spite of the pushback from librarians who argued for the more internal reward that comes from reading itself. The age of participants has expanded from the school-age children of earlier programs to include babies, teens, and adults. The Internet has also become a major component of summer programs, with most libraries having a website that promotes summer reading and learning, many with interactive features.³⁷

In Michael Sullivan's guide to the work of contemporary children's librarians, he points out that summer reading programs are now a "collection of pro-

grams that run the gamut of program types, but form a special and distinct experience. . . . Summer reading programs encourage reading for fun and in vast quantities, and the goal is fairly universal.”³⁸ However, the need for research that would document and validate claims for the benefits of public libraries’ summer reading schemes continued to be cited in the library literature. Joe Matthews made a persuasive pitch in 2010, proposing that librarians focus more on identifying the impact of these programs on the lives of participants than on the more usual quantitative counts of books read.³⁹

The Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Dominican University received funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to try to resolve the issue of the effectiveness of library summer programs in reducing summer slide. Dominican University partnered with the Colorado State Library Agency and the Texas Library and Archives Commission to oversee the study, which took place between 2006 and 2009. The Center for Summer Learning was hired to conduct the research. Eleven sites from across the United States were selected as participants. All sites had partnership arrangements between the public library and the local public school. The overarching conclusion was that third-grade students who participated in a public library summer reading program scored higher on reading achievements at the beginning of fourth grade than those who did not participate. It was not all good news, however. The participants who showed these higher test results tended to be girls. They tended to be good readers before summer, scoring higher on spring reading tests than other students. They were already library users who had more books in their homes than non-participants. In other words, library summer reading programs did not seem to be reaching the children who could most use the boost.⁴⁰

Even before the Dominican study, there had been concern among some thoughtful practitioners that summer reading had lost its purpose and freshness. Librarians fretted that they saw the same faces during the summer as they did during the school year. Were we guilty of contributing to summer reading loss among the most at-risk children? The County of Los Angeles Public Library hired a consultant to tease out the role of parents in children’s participation in summer reading. Not surprisingly, parents who were already highly involved in their children’s care and education were most likely to enroll their children in the library’s summer reading program. Parents saw the library’s program as being primarily, but not exclusively, educational. For parents who chose not to enroll their children in summer reading programs, the reasons included paren-

tal discomfort, lack of time or bad timing, and perceived lack of need. Many of the parents expressing their own personal discomfort worried about putting undue pressure on their children or putting them in situations that might make them unhappy. These parents reporting personal discomfort were disproportionately from communities with Families at Risk programs. They were a distinct contrast from the participant parents who enrolled their children even if the latter hated reading.⁴¹

National Organizations Get Involved in Summer Programs

It was in the context of widespread questioning of the effectiveness of summer programs that the major library and educational associations began to launch their own initiatives to rethink and revitalize this traditional library service.

The Urban Libraries Council (ULC) is a membership organization of leading public library systems in North America. Its mission, according to its website, is to develop initiatives that “strategically advance the value that 21st century libraries provide communities in critical areas such as education/lifelong learning, workforce and economic development, public safety, health and wellness, safety, and environmental sustainability.”⁴² The ULC has recently partnered with the National Summer Learning Association to focus on the work that public libraries are doing to provide summer learning opportunities. In a “Leadership Brief” that presents some findings from research performed as part of its Accelerate Summer initiative, the ULC pinpoints the assets that public libraries bring to summer learning:⁴³

- A trusted, inclusive atmosphere with safe and flexible opportunities to read, create, discover, and explore
- Experience delivering summer reading programs
- Access to and experience using diverse learning resources and approaches
- Deep community connections to support summer learning inside the library, at schools, and other accessible places
- Rapport with parents and families to encourage engagement in their children’s summer learning

The “Leadership Brief” goes on to report on nine different public library programs that exemplify innovative and effective approaches to engaging young

people in summer learning activities. These include initiatives that expand traditional summer reading programs through more active follow-through, those that implement skill-based drop-in programs, and those that offer focused enrollment programs.

The ULC also offers five strategies for libraries that want to adopt a summer learning approach:

1. Engage team members across the library.
2. Connect summer reading and other library services.
3. Start planning in September.
4. Initiate and cultivate partnerships with schools, museums, and other partners.
5. Plan programming with clear learning goals.

The ULC Accelerate Summer initiative has focused on preliminary research that identifies the models and strategies being used by effective library programs that emphasize learning. One finding of special interest to us in California was the state of evaluation for those programs that aim to generate learning. Initial findings showed that only half of the libraries surveyed were making an effort to measure the efficacy of the learning gained by participants. Sixty percent of the libraries reported that their primary need for additional resources was for assessment. Libraries did note the use of a few assessment tools, including California's outcomes survey.⁴⁴

The Public Library Association (PLA) has also emphasized assessment in its Project Outcome initiative, which began in 2013 with a Performance Measurement Task Force assigned to develop standardized measures that all public libraries could use. By 2015, the PLA had identified seven key service areas for which four patron outcomes—knowledge, confidence, application, and awareness—could be measured. Those seven areas are civic/community engagement, digital learning, economic development, education/lifelong learning, early childhood literacy, job skills, and summer reading.

The PLA outcome tools for summer reading are three simple surveys, intended to measure outcomes for each of three age groups—adult, teen, and child. The children's outcomes are reported by an adult patron or caregiver. Although the PLA's outcomes focus on the traditional reading component of library summer programs, there is an open-ended question on the children's survey that asks the parent or caregiver, "What could the library do to help your child continue to learn more?"⁴⁵



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