SUMMER MATTERS

MAKING ALL LEARNING COUNT

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and the Chicago Public Library

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Summer in America is a special time. In the best of circumstances, families are able to use the months away from school to rest, relax, and recharge. At the same time, however, the summer months present a unique set of challenges around child health and well-being, the availability of affordable child care, and, of course, the phenomenon that researchers have dubbed the summer slide.

A friend of mine once described summer learning loss as an epidemic. “Think about it this way,” he argued, “millions of American children experience it on an annual basis. It damages academic performance by dragging down skills and test scores. It hits young kids and poor kids the hardest, and it costs taxpayers tens of millions of dollars each year in lost learning.”

It’s a persuasive argument, and he may be right. Indeed, researchers tell us that the learning loss that occurs during the summer compounds year after year—in other words, there is a long-term “drag” that occurs when children fall back summer after summer after summer.

Libraries, of course, have a long and impressive record of championing summer reading. From my own experience, I remember going to the Fairfax County (Virginia) Library on a blistering hot and humid day in the late 1970s because I was excited by the possibility of checking out what my father gently described as way too many books.

Today, more libraries across the nation are running bigger and better summer reading programs than ever before. These programs hold the promise of not simply curbing the problem of summer learning loss but, equally importantly, sparking children’s interest in the pleasures of nonschool reading.

In 2013 the eighty-branch Chicago Public Library System revamped its thirty-seven-year-old Summer Reading Program. Librarian Elizabeth McChesney and
museum educator Bryan Wunar led the effort with innovative thinking, strategic partnerships, and a clear and ambitious vision.

Whereas Liz and Bryan may be too modest to brag about the success of their work, the truth is that their program has proven itself as a model for our field. They established a partnership between Chicago Public Library and the Museum of Science and Industry, incorporated STEM/STEAM activities, created play-based and hands-on learning for students of all ages, made smart use of online technologies, and expanded the role of volunteers.

Today, Chicago Public Library partners with community-based organizations to offer a Summer Learning Challenge in every neighborhood across the city and twenty-four hours a day through online and take-home content—and it is the collective power of partnerships that Bryan and Liz emphasize as the key to their success. I'm proud to say that my organization, the National Summer Learning Association, recognized their program's extraordinary innovation and impact by presenting them with our first Founder's Award for Excellence.

Liz and Bryan have now turned their extraordinary talents toward sharing the lessons they've learned through their work. I am delighted to present this new and important book by them, and I expect that you will find Summer Matters: Making All Learning Count to be both easy to read and useful. As you will discover, the book provides practical, hands-on guidance for both librarians and museum educators. With the Chicago program as a template, the various chapters walk the reader through the ways in which libraries and museums can leverage partnerships to develop sustainable community-wide programs for kids and families and provide readers with dozens of easy hands-on STEM activities that directly link to children's literacy activities.

Enjoy the book—and thank you for the time and effort you are putting into creating innovative, sustainable, and just plain fun summer learning programs.

DR. MATTHEW BOULAY
Founder and Chairman of the Board
National Summer Learning Association
In the summer of 2012, we toured some of our branch libraries during the Summer Reading Program. It was a great experience to see kids reading books, reporting on them, and attending programs. In one branch library, I started asking a group of kids about six years old what they liked to do at their library and what was the most fun for them. One fidgety little boy looked me squarely in the eye and said: “I only want to do what I want to do.” Well, I found that to be a profound truth for our libraries. Kids need and deserve a place to do what they want to do. To read, to discover, to play, to create . . . on their own terms.

And public libraries have long been the place of choice for children in their communities. The library doesn’t tell you what to read or how to read it or even, really, if you should read it or not. We are one of the only places in the community where kids can actually choose their own individual pathways and find collections and activities that match their interests. And as the times change for libraries, so does the definition of choice. Libraries are adding play spaces and maker spaces, and redefining service and programs, but something that will always stay the same is how we keep our patrons at the center of the choice. I love that about public libraries.

I don’t know about you (but I can guess you’re just the same), but in Chicago it has always been important to us to make our libraries as welcoming, joyous, and intriguing as possible. Part of our priority is that we want our libraries’ children’s rooms to not “feel” like a school, but instead to be a noisy and interesting neighborhood learning laboratory where kids and families can cook up all sorts of interesting ideas and projects. We want a place where youth will find inspiration by pursuing their interests and learn for fun or just because the spark of curiosity has
taken hold of them. We recognize that reading is learning and that other learning has been going on in our libraries, too. Learning because it is fun is at the heart of Chicago Public Library’s redesigned Rahm’s Readers Summer Learning Challenge. Our program tagline, “All Learning Counts,” recognizes that every child’s unique path should be celebrated and nurtured. We accomplish this through our partnership with the Museum of Science and Industry (MSI), which introduced informal science concepts and experiential learning into the program. Bryan and the MSI Community Initiatives Team helped teach us how to focus on “one big idea” of science each week, opening doors to learning and experimenting for kids and families. Together, we believe that every child in Chicago deserves high-quality opportunities outside of school time. Aligning our summer program to current research, customer feedback, our library’s own evolving strategy, and a strong partnership between the library and museum was a great place to start. We hope you think so, too.

LIZ McCHESNEY
Director, Children’s Services
Chicago Public Library

BRYAN WUNAR
Director, Community Initiatives
Museum of Science and Industry
LETTER FROM
COMMISSIONER
BRIAN BANNON

Summer is an important time at Chicago Public Library for patrons of all ages. While Rahm’s Readers Summer Learning Challenge is aimed at children, a strong library system recognizes that a well-run summer program impacts most every kind of user we serve. This program is one of the largest of any in which the system will invest, execute, or evaluate. It has a reach that very few other programs in the public library can have: it touches the youngest children through teens and very often features an adult component. It serves parents and caregivers, and teachers and other adult child-care providers in a strategic way. At Chicago Public Library, it has the broadest reach across age groups of any program we conduct.

For us in Chicago, the Rahm’s Readers Summer Learning Challenge became an important tool to signal change in the library. The restructuring of this program underscored the shift in thinking about summer learning in Chicago, and exemplified this shift for both patrons and staff in Chicago’s libraries. For our staff, it was important to focus on twenty-first-century learning skills and experiential learning through library programs, work on the changes as a team, and execute the program. The Children’s Services team continues in its iteration of the process to this day. For our patrons, the beloved Summer Reading Program became a new and even more reinvigorated experience as it was transformed into the Summer Learning Challenge. We asked children for the first time to create their own individual pathways for summer learning success.
Cross-sector support is essential to the strength and success of the Rahm’s Readers Summer Learning Challenge. We receive indispensable support from our city’s mayor, for whom the program is named. Mayor Rahm Emanuel is the biggest champion of our work. Each year he challenges the children of Chicago to a different learning goal. His support and that of the staff at City Hall allows us to be successful. Working within the context of your municipality will help posit your program and library in the citywide conversation.

For us, the relationship with the Museum of Science and Industry is critically important. This partnership gives us the foundation we need to build healthy STEAM habits with our librarians and to implement the best thinking in informal science education in the nation today. The Rahm’s Readers Summer Learning Challenge allows the museum to extend its reach into each of our eighty communities. They take their thinking and best practices and accomplish their own goals within our library system, and therein we also deepen our ability to deliver high-quality STEAM in our communities.

The Rahm’s Readers Summer Learning Challenge would also not be possible without generous private support from the Chicago Public Library Foundation. This public/private partnership allows CPL to use philanthropic donations to leverage public investment, supporting innovative programs like our Summer Learning Challenge. When the philanthropic visions of corporations in Chicago can support our work, we become united in building a stronger city.

The strength of our program also depends on rigorous evaluation, which bears out that participants make academic strides in math and reading through sustained participation in summer reading programs. Program attendance throughout the summer is high and is part of the value proposition of the library within the greater community. Surveys of participants, caregivers, and child-care providers all show an extremely high rate of customer satisfaction in this program. We also know through careful analysis that this is also a program that is fun for staff and good for internal morale. The staff all come together each year around our theme and enjoy decorating their library branches, experimenting with related STEAM activities, and supporting Chicago’s kids. I am sure that the value of a Summer Learning Challenge within your library will be rich and multilayered, too.

BRIAN BANNON
Commissioner
Chicago Public Library
Keeping our children engaged and learning year round is attainable! Summer break is a time of leisure, fun, and relaxation, but it can negatively impact our children's ability to keep up when they return to school if they are not kept engaged in brain-stimulating activities. Summer learning loss can and does happen when children are out of school. It means that kids can lose up to three months of what they learned during the school year. We can do better. No city can afford to have our children slip. We need our kids to make gains, stay engaged, stay encouraged, and be prepared for success when school resumes in the fall.

In Chicago, we've worked to build learning opportunities by maximizing the library system to support children across the city. The strength of our library system has become a powerful way to bridge the learning gap by keeping kids engaged through our award-winning Rahm’s Readers Summer Learning Challenge. The Summer Learning Challenge leverages partnerships with Chicago’s generous cultural institutions and with service providers who help us scale the program in every neighborhood across our beautiful city.

The groundwork for the success of the Summer Learning Challenge was laid in 2013 when Chicago Public Library redesigned what had traditionally been its summer reading program. By developing a partnership with the Museum of Science and Industry, the summer program incorporated STEAM activities, which are geared toward helping students get excited about learning over the summer. Since this redesign, the program has experienced a 50 percent increase in participation, and we're seeing data indicating that the Summer Learning Challenge not only mitigates learning loss, but actually improves academic performance.

A recent analysis by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago revealed that, on average, children participating in the Rahm's Readers Summer Learning Challenge...
have demonstrated 15 percent greater reading gains and 20 percent greater math gains over and above their peers who did not participate in the program.

This sustainable model employs partnerships and relationships that act as a web across our City of Learning and deepen our work on behalf of kids.

Investing in your library's summer program and services to children lays an important foundation in your city. I have taken this step to ensure that summer-time is learning time with this unique and fresh approach to library service. I am proud of our Rahm's Readers Summer Learning Challenge for the way in which it invigorates learning, encourages children and parents to learn together, invests in neighborhood libraries, and engages communities in a way that strengthens our neighborhoods.

Each year I challenge the children of Chicago to read, learn, and create even more than the year before. And each year the kids of Chicago answer that call. Now I challenge all of you to support your own library in this ambitious and worthwhile program for your readers and learners.

HONORABLE MAYOR RAHM EMANUEL
For years, like many libraries across the country, Chicago Public Library enjoyed hosting a popular and successful Summer Reading Program. In its last iteration, the traditional program encouraged children to read either 25 picture books or 10 chapter books over the summer to earn a prize. Each summer, over 50,000 children signed up and read at least one book, and many children reached their goals over the course of the summer. Children’s librarians throughout the system were fond of the program, which functioned as a well-oiled machine, but in the spring of 2012 we began to think bigger.

It started when we took a closer look at the program. We asked ourselves: are we reaching everybody in a meaningful way? This became the central question of the redesign. Sure, the program was successful and well-liked, but how was it impacting kids? What were they getting out of it? Chicago Public Library is a large library system with eighty branch libraries in a diverse city that is changing all the time. How could the program become even more valuable across the city?

At the same time, the effectiveness of traditional summer reading programs had been evaluated in The Dominican Study: Public Library Summer Reading Programs Close the Reading Gap (2010). The study looked at whether public library summer reading programs did in fact reach their stated goals of creating and sustaining a love of reading in children and preventing the loss of reading skills over the summer. The study showed that “students who participated in the public library summer reading program had better reading skills at the end of third grade and scored higher on the standards test than the students who did not participate.” However, and of special interest to Chicago Public Library, “students who participated in the public library summer reading program included more females, more Caucasians,
and were at a higher socioeconomic level than the group of students who did not participate” (Roman, Carran, and Fiore 2010, 1–2). How could Chicago Public Library enhance its program to reach more youth than the traditional summer reading program’s participant demographics?

Representatives of the Children’s Services team at Chicago Public Library had these questions on their minds as they attended the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) Conference for the first time in 2012. Although not many libraries were represented at the conference at this time, they were struck by research surrounding the “summer slide,” which is the tendency for students, especially those from low-income families, to lose some of the achievement gains they made during the previous school year. Our central question resonated even stronger now—might the library’s summer program reach more children in a way that could also help mitigate the summer slide?

As Children’s Services was considering a shift in summer, the senior management team at CPL was working to define the system’s impact and the social enterprise of the library. While CPL’s timeless mission remains unchanged, the strategic plan developed for 2015–2019 would respond to the current and evolving needs of patrons trying to learn, thrive, and grow in the twenty-first century by nurturing learning, supporting economic advancement, and strengthening communities. With the support of the library’s commissioner and a new strategic plan, CPL’s Children’s Services team set out to create a program that would combat the summer slide and thus would better serve children and families in Chicago. Pulling together research and trends from a variety of fields, we began to explore what an effective and engaging summer program should look like.

NATIONAL SUMMER LEARNING ASSOCIATION

Since our trip to the NSLA annual conference proved to be one of the key inspirations in redesigning our summer program, we began our research by looking at their publications and resources. The National Summer Learning Association is an independent organization that provides resources, guidance, and expertise to the summer learning community. In particular, two published reports exploring the achievement gap and youth access to knowledge became invaluable.

In 2009 the NSLA published an interview with Karl L. Alexander, a Johns Hopkins University sociology professor whose research shows that low-income youth suffer significantly from a loss of academic skills over the summertime (see figure 1.1). Summer after summer, as kids’ skills diminished, so did their academic achievement. When asked if summer programs can help close the achievement gap, Alexander stated that he believes children need “strategically planned, structured...
summer experiences, and that’s especially true for those who don’t have access to enriching, home-based learning. . . . Summer programs can be an important part of that strategy by providing a variety of experiences that challenge children, develop their talents, keep them engaged, and expand their horizons” (National Summer Learning Association 2009c, 2).

Also, in a report published by the NSLA in 2009, Susan Neuman discussed how the work she and her colleagues did studying how people access public library resources, including computers, in both low-income and middle-income neighborhoods affects summer programming. Neuman believes “the idea that we can close the knowledge gap by just providing access to computers is a terrible falla-
cy.” Her research indicates that during the school year there’s at least some leveling in terms of technology education, with children from all income groups learning and gaining skills, but during the summertime the gap between these income groups widens even further. In a statement that is all too familiar to those of us working in public libraries, Neuman’s research showed that “low-income youth lack options in the summer, and sometimes come to the library just to hang out or because it’s air conditioned” (National Summer Learning Association 2009a, 2). Neuman’s call for kids to be able to access educational opportunities every single moment of every day, especially in the summer, helped steer the multimedia aspects of our redesigned program.

SUMMER SLIDE

The National Summer Learning Association’s reports inspired us to dig a little deeper into the summer slide (see figure 1.2). As far back as 1996, researchers were looking at the summer slide in relation to socioeconomic factors. That year, Harris Cooper, a professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia, and his colleagues analyzed thirty-nine studies and found that “kids do forget over the summer. Across the board, all kids lose some math skills. In reading, the middle class holds its own, but the poor lose reading and spelling skills, and that pattern emerged as a possible explanation for the academic achievement gap between those who have financial resources and those who don’t” (National Summer Learning Association 2009b, 1).

Eleven years later, Karl L. Alexander and his colleagues showed a direct link between summer opportunities and academic achievement during the school year. “During the school year, lower-income children’s skills improve at close to the same
rate as those of their more advantaged peers. Over the summer, middle- and upper-income children’s skills continue to improve, while lower-income children’s skills do not” (Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson 2007). Alexander and his team point to more opportunities for summer enrichment activities like camps, vacations, and classes for middle-class children compared to their lower-income peers. These early out-of-school summer learning differences substantially account for achievement-related differences in high school-track placements, high school dropout rates, and four-year college attendance.

Thus, research about the effects of the summer slide proves that it affects all children, but children in lower-income families are more severely impacted. About 85 percent of the Chicago Public Schools’ students receive free or reduced-price hot lunches, which is an indicator of poverty. With this in mind, we set out to redesign a program to include more enrichment opportunities that would help mitigate the summer slide for all of Chicago’s youth, using this research to leverage support for the program.

**MUSEUMS, LIBRARIES, AND TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY SKILLS**

Since the start of the new millennium, global leaders have been asking questions about what sort of skills are needed to support productive participation in a new twenty-first-century workforce. Today’s economy requires the ability to perform nonroutine, creative tasks, such as app development or sustainable energy solutions, which has heightened the need for individuals to master twenty-first-century skills like creative thinking and problem-solving. In response, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21), a nonprofit coalition sponsored by education, business, and community organizations, created a widely accepted framework that defines “21st century skills.” The P21 framework has been adopted by numerous states, organizations, and associations, including the National Education Association and the American Association of School Librarians.

Museums and libraries play a critical role in helping build twenty-first-century skills, especially for children. With that in mind, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) considered the list of skills commonly referred to as “21st century skills” and modified it slightly to better align with library and museum priorities:

**Learning and Innovation Skills**
- Critical thinking and problem-solving
- Creativity and innovation
The IMLS also suggested that the twenty-first century has changed how and when we learn, blurring the lines between formal and informal learning experiences. We see this expressed especially in a growing interest in self-directed learning. The IMLS report quotes Dr. Dennie Palmer Wolf, a leading researcher in the area of children’s out-of-school-time learning: “Goal-directed free-time activity in safe, supportive environments with responsive adults and peers makes sizable contributions to learning, social skills, and mental health” (Institute of Museum and Library Services 2009, 11). From this exploration of societal needs in the twenty-first century, Chicago Public Library began to consider a self-directed, goal-oriented model for its summer program.

The IMLS pointed out that patrons now expect higher levels of interactivity and programs specific to their individual needs and interests. In particular, patrons increasingly expect museums and libraries to act as “partners to enhance (in mission-appropriate ways) the learning systems across a community” and create “flexible, co-created, immersive experiences” (Institute of Museum and Library Services 2009, 13). CPL already had a history of successful partnerships with numerous city
Rationale for Change

The IMLS’s stress on twenty-first-century skills heavily influenced CPL’s frame of reference as we looked at shifting from a summer reading program into something more dynamic. The IMLS issues this call to action:

All libraries and museums—and the people they serve—stand to benefit from becoming more intentional and purposeful about accommodating the lifelong learning needs of people in the 21st century, and doing this work collaboratively in alignment with community needs. Therefore, it is critical that we envision, define, and implement library and museum approaches that integrate 21st century skills in more tangible, visible ways.

(Institute of Museum and Library Services 2009, 6)

CPL’s traditional summer reading program was decidedly a twentieth-century program that wasn’t meeting all of the needs of a new generation of children. If the NSLA’s research helped CPL staff prove the need for a redesigned program, it was the IMLS’s 21st Century Learning Skills that provided the spark of inspiration we needed to get going.

Keeping Books and Reading the Cornerstone

We knew that reading would continue to be the cornerstone of the redesigned program. Our traditional summer reading program was well-loved and effective, and a successful redesign that kept some aspects of the old program would stand the best chance of being embraced by families and staff. Also, research shows that reading is a key component in addressing the summer slide. The Dominican Study showed that “students who participated in the public library summer reading program had better reading skills at the end of third grade and scored higher on the standards test than the students who did not participate” (Roman, Carran, and Fiore 2010). Research on information literacy and children’s reading habits helped steer the literacy aspect of the summer program’s redesign.

Research by Dr. Nell Duke in 2000 showed that students have access to a very small amount of informational text, and classroom instruction rarely focuses on informational literacy materials. In the study, 20 first-grade classrooms were observed, 10 from high socioeconomic status (SES) schools and 10 from low SES schools. The amount, type, and use of informational text in low SES schools was significantly
less than in higher SES schools (Duke 2000). In thinking about reaching all of the
children in Chicago, CPL staff considered this disparity in access and exposure to
informational texts and thought a redesigned summer program could be the perfect
place to address this issue.

Informational texts are a key component of the Common Core State Standards
for the language arts. These learning goals outline what a student should know and
be able to do at the end of each grade. The standards were created to ensure that
all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to
succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live. As of this writing,
forty-two states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of
Defense Education Activity have voluntarily adopted and are moving forward with
the Common Core (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016). Common Core
State Standards tie in directly with 21st Century Skills and work together as a stu-
dent progresses through school. Because of this, the standards place emphasis on
students’ exposure to informational texts and media literacy skills.

Dr. Susan Neuman explains that “in our knowledge-based economy, students
are not only going to have to read, but develop knowledge-based capital. We need to
help children use literacy to develop critical-thinking skills, problem-solving skills,
making distinctions among different types of evidence . . . To ensure they are career
and college ready, we have to see students as lifelong learners and help them devel-
opper the knowledge-gathering skills they will use for the rest of their lives” (Sparks
2012). We live in an information age in which most of the reading and writing that
adults do is information-based, so it seemed appropriate to incorporate informa-
tional text into a redesigned summer program. We wanted children to explore and
engage with informational text in the same way that they already did with fiction.

However, how much should participants read? A set quantity of titles? A set
number of minutes spent reading? Research suggests that the more time students
spend reading independently, the higher their gains will be in reading achieve-
ment. Multiple long-term studies have also shown that reading volume is directly
connected to reading success for all students, regardless of ability. Cunningham
and Stanovich note, “Although there are considerable differences in the amount
of reading volume in school, it is likely that differences in out-of-school reading
volume are an even more potent source of the rich-get-richer and poor-get-poorer
achievement patterns” (Cunningham and Stanovich 1998, 4). Researchers analyzed
the correlation between reading percentile, the amount of time spent reading per
day, and the number of words read per year (Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding 1988).
We can see the connection in table 1.1.

Of course, we want to encourage children to spend as much time as possible
reading independently outside of the classroom. However, table 1.1 shows an inter-
esting leveling off of achievement gains when compared to independent reading.
Students who read about 20 minutes per day were ranked in the 90th percentile for student achievement, but students who read more than twice that amount—65 minutes per day—showed only minimal gain in student achievement scores over those who read more than 20 minutes per day. Reading about 20 minutes a day seems to be the perfect sweet spot to encourage children to maximize achievement when reading independently, whether during the school year or in summer.

Thus, CPL planned to keep reading, both fiction and informational text, as the cornerstone of the program and use a suggested amount of twenty minutes of reading per day in the redesigned program.

**REFLECTION: CLOSING THE LEARNING LOOP**

Just as we wanted to keep reading as the cornerstone of a redesigned summer program, we also knew that reporting and reflection would continue to be key aspects of our summer learning program. For many years, “reporting” played a huge role in CPL’s summer reading program. Participants were asked to report back to library staff or a teen volunteer about the reading they did as part of the program. Staff and volunteers asked open-ended questions to help guide the reporting. For example, if a school-aged child shared that she read a *Junie B. Jones* book, staff might ask, “What was your favorite part?” or “Who would you recommend this book to and why?” as opposed to “Did you like it?” For younger children or children who felt shy, we also encouraged reporting in the form of drawing or writing about what participants read. We saw that when children were asked to share more about what they read, it created a deeper and more meaningful summer reading experience.

This type of reporting is a form of reflection, an aspect of learning that scholars cite as a key step in helping youth get into the habit of linking and constructing meaning from their experiences. In the book *Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind*, Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick explain that “reflecting on work enhances its meaning” and “reflecting on experiences encourages insight and complex learning… . . . Reflection was not a time for testimo-
als about how good or bad the experience was. Instead, reflection was the time to consider what was learned from the experience” (Costa and Kallick 2008).

Reflection is also a valuable tool in helping children embrace key aspects of twenty-first-century skills. For example, if a child is participating in a stomp rocket launch challenge and the rocket flies only two feet, the child will need to consider what changes he could make to his rocket to get it to fly further. Reflection factors into this process by helping to redefine and redirect mistakes or failures. “Many of us grow up thinking of mistakes as bad, viewing errors as evidence of fundamental incapacity. This negative thinking pattern can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, which undermines the learning process. To maximize our learning it is essential to ask: ‘How can we get the most from every mistake we make?’” (Gelb and Buzan 1994, 68).

This research on the importance of taking time to think about learning reinforced the value of reflection as part of a summer learning program. Asking youth to think about the reading and learning activities in which they take part throughout the summer allows for opportunities to reflect on failures and successes, make connections to other parts of their lives, and complete their learning.

REACHING DIVERSE LEARNERS

The theory of multiple intelligences encourages us to ask questions about how children think and learn. The theory of multiple intelligences comes from Dr. Howard Gardner of Harvard University. He suggests that the accepted notion of intelligence is too limited. He theorizes that there are eight different intelligences to describe the “human potential” in children and adults. These intelligences are linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, and naturalist intelligence (Armstrong 2012). Gardner explains that “we all have the multiple intelligences. But we single out, as a strong intelligence, an area where the person has considerable computational power” (Gardner 2013).

The theory of multiple intelligences encourages us to learn as much as we can about each child, and teach each individual in ways that he or she finds comfortable and learns effectively. In this way, we can reach youth who have different strengths and build a bridge from what they are interested in to our programming. The theory of multiple intelligences inspired us to think about making a summer program more youth interest-driven. Additionally, it offered a great opportunity to approach this shift with our staff. In asking the staff, “How do you learn? What are your interests? What is your strength? How do you go about solving a problem?” and looking
at how each was different, we were able to set up the idea of making the program more individualized for each of our participants.

**FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**

Parents are often in the library with their children, but our traditional summer reading program did not make family engagement a priority. Would stronger family engagement make our redesign more effective? We looked to research conducted by James Kim, assistant professor of education at Harvard University. Kim looked at different approaches to summer reading and found that voluntary summer reading programs (such as traditional library programs like CPL’s) can work, but they work best when adult caregivers get involved by helping youth to choose appropriate books and employ simple techniques to improve their skill and understanding.

In our first study, we surveyed 2,000 kids in fourth and sixth grade and asked what they read over the summer. We found that the kids who read the most over the summer did better in the fall—but that didn’t tell us why. Do books lead to comprehension or do good readers just have more books? . . . Even having teachers encourage kids to read appeared to have no impact on comprehension. But we saw a significant difference when we provided books and adults were involved to guide reading skills and understanding.

(Kim 2008, 2)

The National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools synthesized additional research. They concluded that no matter what their income or background, when families are involved in their child’s learning, the child will be more likely to

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs
- Be promoted, pass his or her classes, and earn credits
- Attend school regularly
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well
- Graduate and go on to postsecondary education

(Henderson and Mapp 2002, 7)

This research proved the importance of engaged adults (particularly parents and caregivers) in helping combat the summer slide and improve children’s lives in a variety of ways. Clearly, when families learn together, everyone benefits. This re-
search informed new parental engagement components in our redesigned summer program.

SUMMARY

A lot of formal and informal research helped support Chicago Public Library as we began to build a new summer learning program. In looking at all we had reviewed, we knew that our program would need to do the following:

- Align with our strategic plan and city priorities
- Combat the summer slide
- Be self-directed and goal-oriented
- Promote twenty-first-century skills
- Keep reading as the cornerstone of the program
- Enhance access to books that match readers’ interests, including informational texts
- Encourage reading for at least twenty minutes a day
- Help youth participate in individualized ways, with many different opportunities to learn
- Embrace dynamic partnerships with other cultural organizations
- Incorporate opportunities for reflection
- Increase parental and family engagement
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