

# Assessing High School Students' Reading Motivation in a Voluntary Summer Reading Program

**One urban high school made significant progress encouraging students to read over the summer by providing free, high interest books for all its students.**

Julie M. McGaha | L. Brent Igo

**I**n 2006, as an assistant principal at a large, socially and economically diverse high school in the southeastern United States (hereafter referred to as South High School), Julie was tasked by her principal with developing a schoolwide summer reading program. Summer reading programs are common in both schools and public libraries, most often used as an extension of the academic year and to help reduce summer learning loss.

A number of studies suggested that although students, irrespective of academic ability or socioeconomic status, experience the same amount of academic growth during the school year, lower income students and those of lower academic ability are more likely to experience summer learning loss (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 1997; Heyns, 1978; Kim, 2004, 2007). Alexander et al. (1997) suggested that this gap is cumulative and widens as students progress through school; a gap that amounts to 1.5 years of reading between first and sixth grade (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, & Greathouse, 1996) and is responsible for the majority of the achievement gap between higher and lower income students by the time they enter high school.

Julie began to explore summer reading programs in other area schools and found that of the 35 high schools within an hour drive of the school, 27 had schoolwide summer reading programs. Most of those schools had similar procedures for their programs. Students selected books from a list and completed some type of test or reading log, which they turned in when school began in the fall.

Accountability plans varied from a grade in a particular class to no accountability procedure. If books were available from the school they had to be returned; otherwise students were responsible for obtaining the books on their own. While there were some instances of more modern works, most of the book lists reflected titles from the traditional literary canon. Many schools created multiple lists organized by grade and in some cases English level (College Preparatory, Honors, and Advanced Placement).

**Schools often do not provide reading material that appeals to adolescents.**

Disappointed, Julie reflected on the purpose of the summer reading program. Certainly the administrative team wanted to improve reading skills and decrease any summer learning loss, but was it the only focus? What about those students that did not experience summer learning loss or those students that had reading skills at or above high school level? If the focus was achievement, how would this be measured? It seemed

doubtful that reading a book over the summer would be enough to document significant gains in reading achievement without supportive instruction.

The administrative team, which consisted of the principal and three assistant principals, decided to focus on promoting leisure reading in hopes that if students had success reading over the summer, they would be more likely to read during the academic year. Further, they decided the program should be schoolwide rather than delineated along grade lines or ability levels.

Any program would not be valuable or successful, however, if students did not participate. What factors were important to encourage student participation? In order for students to participate, they needed to be motivated to read over the summer. How could the school motivate students to read during their summer vacation?

If the school wanted to motivate students to read over the summer, they needed to develop a research-based program consistent with literature related to reading motivation. After an exhaustive Internet and journal search, Julie was only able to find information relating to summer library programs (Celano & Neuman, 2001), elementary school programs (Kim, 2004, 2007; Shin & Krashen, 2008), or those that targeted specific groups of students and focused on reading remediation (Lawrence, McNeal, & Yildiz, 2009; Malmgren & Leone, 2000).

Julie shifted her efforts to general reading motivation. Taboada, Tonks, Wigfield, and Guthrie (2009) identified the following five components of reading motivation among young children

(elementary and middle school): (1) interest, (2) perceived control, (3) self-efficacy, (4) involvement, and (5) social collaboration. Pitcher et al. (2007) found similar results among secondary students. These concepts formed the basis of the schoolwide summer reading program.

## **Year 1 Summer Reading Program**

Schools often do not provide reading material that appeals to adolescents. However, when schools do provide material of interest to students, they are more likely to engage in voluntary reading (Gottfried, 1985; Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2005; Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). Although the principal asked for teacher input in selecting books, few faculty members initially suggested titles. Discouraged but determined to carry on, the administrative team selected books based on titles from state reading lists and college summer reading lists. The administrative team suggested a tentative list of 20 titles and made several copies of these titles available for teachers to preview.

After receiving teacher feedback, the school's book selection included *Monster*, by Walter Dean Myers (2001); *The Things They Carried*, by Tim O'Brien (1990); *The Schooling of Claybird Catts*, by Janis Owens (2003); *Fallen Angels*, by Walter Dean Myers (1998); and *Seven Laurels*, by Linda Busby Parker (2004). Once the school selected those titles, the administrative team contacted Janis Owens and Linda Busby Parker and asked them to participate in the program.

Each first period teacher received a selection of books and briefly discussed the program and book selections with students in their classes. Students then picked up their books the last week of school.

Consistent with existing research, students had a choice in their reading material (Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Pitcher et al., 2007; Turner, 1995), rather than assigning a specific book by grade or class. The school used state incentive money to purchase the books so that financial barriers would not prevent students from participating.

Providing students with instructional situations that encourage reading is important, particularly opportunities that allow students to discuss reading material (Pitcher et al., 2007). The school hosted a Literacy Day when school began in the fall. Students heard two of the authors discuss the books used in the program; and later in the day, students participated in small book discussions led by a certified staff member and, in some cases, parent and community volunteers.

Each staff member, including teachers, administrators, and counselors, participated in the book discussions. These activities provided students the opportunity to discuss their books and hear their classmates' and teachers' interpretations.

Determining a plan for accountability was difficult. Some staff members did not want the program to be punitive and were adamantly opposed to any type of test to evaluate students. They also did not feel journal or reading logs were sufficient to document participation.

Other staff members, however, considered a summer reading program with no accountability to be a futile exercise. Given the expense that the school was willing to spend to fund the program, it seemed like a waste of money not to hold students accountable.

After considerable discussion, one staff member suggested using extra credit. An extra credit option ensured that the program was voluntary and not punitive. It also solved problems associated with students that enroll in school shortly before or after the academic year began.

If students participated in the book discussion and completed a project based on their book, they earned a certificate worth four extra credit points, which they could apply to their final average in any one class at the end of the first grading period. Along with their books, students received a list of options for book projects. Book projects varied and included options such as a character analysis or book summary.

However, students also had the opportunity to be more creative. For instance, students that read *Monster* could compile songs appropriate for a soundtrack of a movie adaptation, including a rationale for why they chose a song and how it related to the story.

Students that read *Seven Laurels*, a novel about an African American man in rural Alabama at

the beginning of the Civil Rights movement, could collect primary source documents related to events referenced in the book or research how the local community and school district addressed desegregation. Students had one month to turn in their projects after school started.

The administrative team acknowledged that, with a month to turn in projects, it was possible that some students might wait to finish their book after the next school year began. They found this an acceptable alternative to a punitive measure. Book discussion leaders graded the projects based on the following criteria: (a) content appropriate, (b) neatness, (c) accuracy of ideas, and (d) overall effort. The administrative team stressed that "effort" was the most important element of criteria and urged teachers to keep in mind that the goal of the program was to encourage leisure reading rather than to be specifically focused on the book assignment.

At the end of the Literacy Day, during the book discussions, each facilitator administered an informal survey, containing one question and one prompt: "What was the best thing about summer reading?" and "Suggestions for next year." All participants completed the survey. Students had approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey. Each facilitator collected the surveys and returned them to the principal. Although not used in this particular research, administrators considered students' suggestions for the following year, such as increasing the number and genre of book selections.

Our team reviewed the responses and found that students overwhelmingly made comments that were in line with essential program elements. We transcribed 1,133 student responses exactly as students wrote them and without separating comments if students made multiple comments.

The team then sorted student responses according to like statements. For example, we grouped student comments such as, "We got a free book" and "We got to keep our book"; together as receiving a free book. We grouped comments such as, "I liked that we weren't assigned one book to read" and "I liked that I got to pick my book" together as choice.

Once our list was complete, we kept comments that appeared at least 20 times, ultimately keeping

**Table 1** Program Concepts Identified From Open-Ended Student Responses

Program concept	Number of responses
Receiving extra credit	48
Receiving a free book	41
Not normally reading over the summer	125
Reading a different kind of book	31
Interest	226
Learning	63
Choice	22
Self-pace	27
Character identification	184
Peer connection via book chats	22
Connection through sharing	183

11 program concepts (Table 1). The extent to which students made positive comments was overwhelming. One student wrote, “Summer reading gives you something to do when you are bored.” Another student said, “When you don’t have anything to do; then you can read your book.”

We also found students made comments that were specific to the books they read. One student wrote, “I don’t usually like war books, but *Fallen Angels* is now one of my favorite books.” Regarding *Seven Laurels*, a student wrote, “I can’t believe growing up during that time (1950s/1960s) was like that. I felt so bad for Brewster (main character). I didn’t know Black people were treated like that.”

We did not include comments such as “I liked getting out of class” or “I liked that I didn’t get any homework today,” as they did not reflect what we considered the academic components of the program. Ninety-two comments reflected students who wanted to discontinue the program because they did not want to read, they did not like to read, or felt they did not have time to read. We did not discount the comments. In fact, we felt that out of more than 1,100 comments, such a small of a number of negative reflections was actually a sound endorsement of the program.

## Instrument Development

Based on the specific program elements and the information obtained through the open-ended survey,

our team developed items for a summer reading motivation survey. We developed items addressing each of the 11 essential program concepts. Ultimately, we narrowed the items to 22, with two items for each of the 11 concepts.

Retaining two items to help ensure better reliability for this current scale and to allow for later modification of the scale. We used a survey with a 6-point Likert-scale, with ratings of (1) completely disagree, (2) strongly disagree, (3) somewhat disagree, (4) somewhat agree, (5) strongly agree, and (6) completely agree.

## Method

### *Year 2 Materials and Procedures*

The school used a similar plan for the program in 2007. They continued providing books free and used the extra credit incentive for participation based on the book discussion and completion of a project. To create ownership for the program, the school changed the procedure for selecting books the second year. The administration created a summer reading committee made up of teachers, community members, district office staff, and students that made suggestions for books.

For the 2007 program, book selections were *The Water Is Wide: A Memoir*, by Pat Conroy (2002); *The Pact: Three Young Men Make a Promise and Fulfill a*

*Dream*, by Samson Davis, George Jenkins, Rameck Hunt, and Lisa Page (2003); *Slam*, by Walter Dean Myers (1996); *The Bridge*, by Doug Marlette (2001); *7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, by Sean Covey (1998); *The Secret Life of Bees*, by Sue Monk Kidd (2002); *Into Thin Air*, by Jon Krakauer (1992); and *The World Made Straight: A novel*, by Ron Rash (2006).

Because a few parents and teachers expressed concern the previous year over some of the content and use of harsh language (particularly in *Fallen Angels* and *The Things They Carried*), the school included a “neutral book,” *7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*.

Teachers that taught students in self-contained special education classes incorporated this text and parts of *The Pact* into their curriculum adding a strand for those students into the existing program. The school continued the Literacy Day program and three authors were able to attend that year. Doug Marlette, who planned to attend, was tragically killed in a car accident before the start of the academic year. Janis Owens (who attended the previous year) and columnist Kathleen Parker attended in his place. Ron Rash, author of *The World Made Straight*, also attended.

### Participants

In 2007, South High School served approximately 1,600 students in grades 10 through 12. Approximately

65% of the students were African American, 30% were Caucasian, and 5% were Other. Approximately 12% of students received special education services in a self-contained environment. For students in grades 11 and 12, this would be their second year of participation in the program.

At the end of the Literacy Day, during the individual book discussions, students who were enrolled in regular high school classes completed the Summer Reading Survey. Our team received 1,180 student surveys from the school, and we were able to use 953 surveys after removing those surveys with fewer than 10 responses or surveys that reflected the same response throughout.

We also eliminated 72 surveys from students that said they did not read, ultimately eliminating 227 surveys of the original 1,180 surveys that we received. Because our purpose was to develop an instrument to measure the extent to which students were motivated to read and participate in the program, we did not explore interactions as they related to demographic information.

### Results

Our team loaded all 22 items into Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). All items had scales of 1 to 6 and each concept (free book, interest, choice, etc.) had two items (see Table 2). We added like items together

**Table 2 Year 2 Program Concept Means and Standard Deviations**

Meaning program concept	<i>M</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>SD</i>
Extra credit	6.86*	3.3
Free book	8.0*	2.99
Not normally read	6.64*	3.62
Different kind of book	7.46*	2.76
Learning	7.72*	2.96
Interest	8.09*	3.05
Choice	9.24*	3.26
Self pace	9.48*	2.65
Character connection	7.11*	3.19
Connection to peers	6.08	2.92
Connection through sharing	6.63*	3.03

<sup>a</sup>Like items were added together for a total score of 2–12.

\**p* < .001.

for a total score ranging from 2 to 12 with a test value of six and an  $\alpha$  of 0.05. We conducted 11 one-tailed *t*-tests to determine the extent to which students agreed or disagreed with each program concept.

Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability for the survey was 0.87 ( $N = 953$ ), indicating an acceptable level of reliability. Table 3 notes the means and standard deviations for survey items. Our team found that students agreed with 10 of 11 program concepts. We noted extremely high means for items that reflected the autonomous nature of the program, such as choice and being able to read at their own pace. We also noted high means for items related to the cognitive aspect of the program, such as interest and learning.

Students responded positively to all other concepts (free book, leisure reading, and extra credit) except

feeling connected to their peers during the book discussions. We felt the survey results confirmed the essential elements of the program as well as the results from the informal survey that we analyzed at the end of the first year of the program.

## Survey Refinement

After analyzing results from the second year of the program, the team began refining the original scale. Although students disagreed with one of the concepts (connection to peers), we decided to leave a related item in the survey because that notion was previously so prominent.

Our original survey had 22 items with 2 items per program concept. After determining the mean

**Table 3** Year 2 Means and Standard Deviations for Survey Items

Survey item	<i>M</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>SD</i>
Receiving a free book made it easier for me to read over the summer. <sup>b</sup>	4.15	1.81
The book I read this summer was different than what I normally read. <sup>b</sup>	4.03	1.76
Without this program, I would not read over summer.	3.24	2.06
Being able to keep the book was important to me.	3.84	1.75
Before the summer reading program, I rarely read a book during break. <sup>b</sup>	3.4	2.02
I feel closer to the students at my school because of the summer-reading program. <sup>b</sup>	2.78	1.69
The main reason I participated was to receive extra credit.	3.64	1.9
I was motivated to keep reading because the book was interesting. <sup>b</sup>	4.04	1.75
I would not have participated without receiving extra credit. <sup>b</sup>	3.18	1.87
I liked that I could read my book at my own pace. <sup>b</sup>	5.01	1.42
This program turned me on to new a kind of book.	3.44	1.71
I felt connected to my peers when we talked about our book. <sup>b</sup>	3.33	1.64
Having an interesting book kept me motivated.	4.07	1.67
Being able to choose my own book made me more likely to read it.	4.59	1.64
I was motivated to keep reading because I was learning new things. <sup>b</sup>	3.83	1.6
Reading the same book as other students made me feel more connected to them.	3.3	1.67
Having a choice of book was important to me. <sup>b</sup>	4.52	1.6
I could see myself in one of the characters from my book. <sup>b</sup>	3.51	1.81
Knowing that I could read at my own pace made it easier for me to keep reading.	4.52	1.6
I felt a connection to one of the characters from my book.	3.57	1.72
The things I was learning from my book made me want to keep reading it.	3.88	1.65
I felt more connected to my peers after hearing their ideas about our book.	3.27	1.71

<sup>a</sup>The mean for each item is based on a scale of 1–6. <sup>b</sup>Item used in final scale.

value for each concept, we eliminated the item closest to the mean, keeping 11 items in the final survey. We continued to use the same 6-point Likert-type scale for each item.

## Method

### **Year 3 Program Materials and Procedures**

The school used the same procedures as in the previous years: free books, extra credit, book projects, and the Literacy Day concept with book discussions in the afternoons. They also continued with the practice of using a summer reading committee to select books. For the 2008 program, book choices were *Clover*, by Dori Sanders (1990); *The Camel Bookmobile*, by Masha Hamilton (2007); *Night*, by Elie Wiesel (2006); *Uglies*, by Scott Westerfeld (2005); *American Born Chinese*, by Gene Luen Yang (2006); *The First Part Last*, by Angela Johnson (2003); *The Greatest Generation*, by Tom Brokaw (1998); *Cuba 15*, by Nancy Osa (2003); and *Knights of Hill Country*, by Tim Tharp (2006). Masha Hamilton attended the school's Literacy Day.

### **Participants**

Enrollment in 2008 was approximately 1,420 students, a decline of approximately 180. The decline was largely due to a countywide change in attendance zones for four neighborhoods. Demographic information regarding student ethnicity and the number of students receiving self-contained special education services, however, remained roughly the same. This would be the second year that students in grade 11 participated in the program and the third year in the program for students in grade 12.

At the end of the Literacy Day, during the book discussions, South High School students who were enrolled in regular high school courses completed the Summer Reading Survey. As in the previous year, students not seeking a regular high school diploma did not complete the survey and instead their teachers used *The Greatest Generation* as part of an individual curricular lesson.

We received 969 student surveys. We were able to use 656 surveys after removing those surveys with fewer than five responses or reflected the same response throughout. We also eliminated 64 surveys

from students that indicated they did not read, ultimately eliminating 313 surveys from the original 969 surveys that we received.

### **Results**

The administrative team loaded all 22 items into SPSS. All items had scales of 1 to 6 and a test value of three with an  $\alpha$  of 0.05. We performed 11 one-tailed *t*-tests to determine the extent to which students agreed or disagreed with each survey item. Reliability analysis as noted by Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.62 ( $N = 656$ ).

Although the reliability for the  $\beta$ -version of the survey was lower than the previous scale, we found this one to be easier to administer with fewer items. We have noted descriptive statistics in Table 4.

Results were similar to those in the second year. Students agreed again, with a high level of significance, with 10 of 11 program concepts and peer connection was again the only item in which students disagreed.

Similar to the previous year, students expressed strong levels of agreement with receiving a free book, personal choice, and being able to read at their own pace. Student responses regarding book interest were higher in the third year, possibly an indication that the school was becoming more skilled at book selection.

### **Discussion and Implications**

This article provides an overview of the journey one school has taken to develop a schoolwide voluntary summer reading program. We attempted to determine the conditions under which students would participate in such a program. We also wanted to develop a survey that could provide a valid and reliable measure of student reading motivation in a voluntary summer reading program.

We feel we have a better understanding of the complex elements of adolescent reading motivation related to voluntary reading, especially in this context. We found that the conditions that motivate adolescents to read during the summer are the same conditions that motivate them during the regular academic year.

When our administrative team set out to develop the program, we found little empirical research related to secondary summer reading programs focused on

**Table 4** Year 3 Means and Standard Deviations for Survey Items

Survey item	<i>M</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>SD</i>
Receiving a free book made it easier for me to read over the summer.	4.2*	1.64
The book I read this summer was different than what I normally read.	3.95*	1.65
Before the summer reading program, I rarely read a book during break.	3.41*	1.95
I feel closer to the students at my school because of the summer reading program.	2.62*	1.39
I was motivated to keep reading because the book was interesting.	4.51*	1.53
I would not have participated without receiving extra credit.	3.23*	1.78
I liked that I could read my book at my own pace	5.16*	1.19
I felt connected to my peers when we talked about our book.	3.56*	1.52
I was motivated to keep reading because I was learning new things.	4.47*	1.52
Having a choice of book was important to me.	4.9*	1.4
I could see myself in one of the characters from my book.	3.45*	1.74

<sup>a</sup>Survey items based on scale of 1–6.

\**p* < .001.

leisure reading. After reviewing existing research on adolescent reading motivation, we decided to create a program that provided students with the choice of high interest, relevant reading material, and providing opportunities for academic growth situated within instructional practices that fostered social collaboration.

We also felt it was imperative that if we wanted to promote leisure reading, we would provide appropriate incentives to encourage reading while limiting the punitive nature of the program.

Students responded favorably to receiving free books; however, the extent to which they responded favorably suggests access to reading material is not completely an issue of financial need. Instead, we feel that providing reading material has benefits that extend beyond financial ones and is important in promoting leisure reading. We also agree with work by Marinak and Gambrell (2008), which suggested that providing literacy incentives (in this case, a free book) have a positive influence on reading motivation.

Students responded positively regarding the autonomous nature of the program. We were especially struck by how strongly students felt about having personal choice in their reading material and the ability to have time to read over the summer. We agree with Ivey and Broaddus (2001) that voluntary

reading programs, independent of specific content or curriculum, should take on a larger role in schools.

Our team also concluded that summer reading programs can be beneficial in promoting leisure reading for students that otherwise may not read over the summer. Several students made comments that lead us to believe the program had been successful in promoting leisure reading. In the opened survey given the first year, one student noted, “Usually the books for school are rather boring and are drag to read, but this one I really enjoyed.” Another student agreed and said, “I don’t normally read over the summer, but this book (*Monster*) was really good.”

Many students noted that their involvement in the program had been the first time they had read or engaged in any type of academic work over the summer. A source of further investigation would be to explore students’ reading motivation before and after such a program to determine the extent to which a program with these aspects has a positive effect on reading motivation.

Our administrative team believes that one of major reasons the program was successful is that each year the students were able to choose from books that were interesting and relevant to their lives. One student wrote, “The best part of summer reading is that the overall themes in the books were amazing. They all taught you something about real life.”



Because this program centered on a common or shared experience among students, the school limited book selection to facilitate discussion. Selecting books, however, was not an easy task. During the first year, the administrative team selected books for the program due to the lackluster response of teachers in suggesting titles. Not surprisingly, a few teachers and some parents disagreed with including contemporary titles, arguing that there was more value in traditional literature.

There was also some objection to some of the themes presented in the books. Despite criticism, the administration stood firm on the book choices and the importance of using contemporary titles. They did make one concession: If a parent or student objected to all the books on the reading list, the student could select any book they had not previously read and use it for their summer reading book. The school agreed to pay for the book and a staff member would discuss the book with the student. Interestingly, not one student took advantage of the offer.

Student response to items related to their experiences with the book discussions was lower than we expected in both years. We decided to keep these items because so many students expressed the importance of “sense of community” after the first year.

We still believe these interactions are important, despite of our findings. We feel the book discussions are a critical component to this concept and point to the extensive body of research supporting instructional practices, such as book discussions or clubs, that contribute to adolescent reading motivation (Guthrie et al., 2005; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Pitcher et al., 2007).

We also suggest further investigation into the dynamics of the book discussions. Although the school provided support for teachers on how to lead a book discussion to facilitate discussion, only a few teachers participated. It is possible that teachers needed more training on how to properly lead a book discussion.

We also feel the wording of the survey item related to the book discussions may have confused students. Initially we wanted to explore the sense of community within the book discussions; however, this concept was perhaps too abstract for students, and instead we feel that an item related to students’

reactions to their peers’ opinions about their books might be more beneficial.

South High School used a variety of approaches to fund their summer reading program. The first year the school was able to use state incentive money to purchase books. They also worked with publishing companies and the local library to purchase the books at considerably lower costs than traditional bookstores.

As more parents became involved, they were able to help provide financial support either by direct donation or through their employers. In fact, parents started a monetary fund, managed by a local bank, so that businesses and community members could donate to purchase books in future years, making the program a permanent part of the school and community tradition. South High School’s success might seem out of reach for many schools, however, booster clubs, community agencies, and the local businesses are all sources of funding.

While obtaining financial support for the program was important, community support was crucial in making the program sustainable. In addition to the monetary funds, several community members, including the mayor and a few television personalities, led book discussions with students, and a local business donated use of their billboards between May and August to promote the program.

Over the summer of the first year of the program, the school arranged for students reading *Monster* to meet with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to hear about careers in criminal justice. During the book discussion on Literacy Day, officers from both local police departments assisted teachers as book facilitators. The effort did not go unnoticed, as one student wrote, “It was great to see the whole community do this together. It was like, wow, the whole town is here reading our books.”

On a classroom level, teachers can use similar strategies to promote reading. Teachers may be able to work with school media specialists to order several copies of specific texts. Parents, PTA, and local bookstores may be willing to donate or purchase books at a reduced rate. Used bookstores are often great resources for teachers. Julie recently visited a used bookstore and found three copies of *Fallen Angels* for \$1 each. After telling the owner she was buying

the books to use in a classroom, the owner agreed to call her if they received additional copies.

Using accurate, interesting, and relevant reading material can provide an ideal vehicle for engaging students. For example, when studying the early 20th century, a teacher could use novels on World War I, the influenza pandemic in 1918, the Harlem Renaissance, prohibition, or women's rights, rather than one book assigned to the entire class. In this case, not only would students be able to pick something that matched their interests, they would be exposed to a greater variety of material as their classmates discussed their books.

## Take Action!

Developing a summer reading program can be a great experience for a school and community.

1. To begin, gather a group of stakeholders, teachers, administrators, parents, and students to discuss the desired outcomes and parameters of the program.
2. Encourage those individuals to suggest books that will be of interest to students that maintain academic merit. You may want to provide suggestions from professional organizations and book award lists.
3. Seek funding for the program through school and community organizations such as the public library, booster clubs, Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), and local businesses. This will encourage community ownership in the program and add to students' personal libraries. Students are also more likely to read if they do not have to obtain the books themselves.
4. Promote the program throughout the community and encourage parents and community agencies to read with the students over the summer.
5. Invite community partners and parents to attend a schoolwide celebration on reading during the school year.

McGaha is a clinical faculty lecturer at Clemson University, South Carolina, USA; e-mail [mcgaha@clemson.edu](mailto:mcgaha@clemson.edu).

Igo is an associate professor at the University of Auckland, New Zealand; e-mail [doc.igo@gmail.com](mailto:doc.igo@gmail.com).

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## More to Explore

### ReadWriteThink.org Lesson Plan

- "Authentic Persuasive Writing To Promote Summer Reading" by Traci Gardner

### IRA Book

- *Literacy Tutoring That Works: A Look at Successful In-School, After-School, and Summer Programs* edited by Janet C. Richards and Cynthia A. Lassonde

### IRA Journal Article

- "The Leisure Reading Habits of Urban Adolescents" by Sandra Hughes-Hassell and Pradnya Rodge, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, September 2007