

# The Impact of the PLEASE READ Summer Reading Program on Student Outcomes

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## DEFINING THE NEED

### The Summer Slide

The “summer slide” is a commonly occurring phenomenon in many school-age children where lower academic performance is seen at beginning of the next school year than at the end of the previous year. This is often due to no or limited participation in educational opportunities. This loss is often more salient in vulnerable students at-risk, or already experiencing, academic difficulty (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2018).

### COVID-19 Impacts on Learning

The global COVID-19 pandemic caused heightened concern about learning loss beyond the summer months. At the time of this study (Summer 2020), students would have missed up to six months of typical face-to-face instruction by the start of the 2020-2021 academic year. The pandemic has potential implications for learning challenges year-round.

Some of the populations hardest hit by the changes to educational models were children from low-SES backgrounds. The digital divide has also disproportionately affected these children, causing some not to receive equitable educations. Interrupted learning was named one of the most adverse consequences of school closures (UNESCO, 2020). Several researchers attempted to model expected amounts of learning loss due to school closures (Boa et al., 2020, Kaffenberger, 2020).

### Summer Reading Programs

One mechanism for improving and maintaining literacy skills of students from impoverished backgrounds is summer reading programming (McCombs et al., 2011). Faucet theory (**define**) has been used to explain the disproportionate loss of reading skills for these children (Entwisle et al., 2001). By ninth grade, ~80% of the reading achievement gap can be attributed to accumulating loss of skills during the summers of elementary school (Alexander et al., 2007). Summer programming that occurs in the child’s home is a promising solution.

## THE PROJECT

### Purpose

The purpose of the PLEASE READ project was to implement a summer reading program to minimize the summer slide (and short-term effects of COVID-19), by providing students living in poverty with low-cost, low-technology, educational materials to encourage high-quality language and literacy interactions with their families.

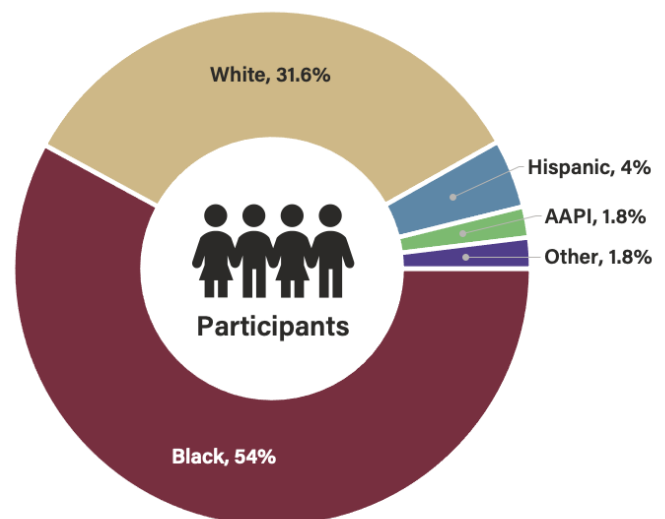
### Research Questions

1. What is the impact of a parent-child summer reading program with family engagement components on rising 1st and 2nd graders’ reading achievement?
2. Does the impact of the program depend on children’s’ achievement in the prior academic year?

### Participants

Participants included rising first (n=116) and second (n=109) graders from seventeen schools in a single district in a mid-sized southern city. Fifteen of the schools were designated as Title I and eleven schools had a 100% free and or reduced lunch rate. 226 children across 215 families were enrolled in the study. The mean age of participants was 6.49 and could be represented in the following categories: 54% Black, 31.6% White, 4% Hispanic, 1.8% AAPI, 1.8% other.

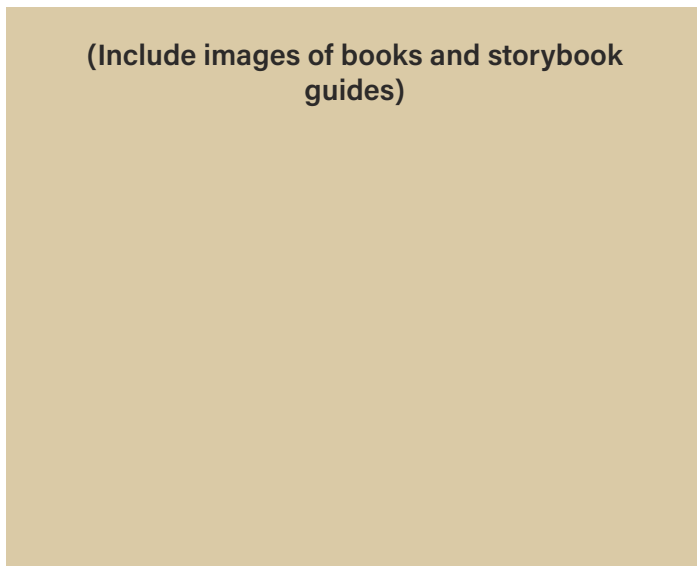
Figure 1. Participant profiles.



Families were recruited through flyers shared electronically by their school administration and were randomly assigned to one of the following two conditions: PLEASE READ family engagement treatment condition (n=111) and the comparison condition (n=115). The study took place from July to August 2020.

### Intervention Design

The PLEASE READ family engagement treatment condition group received five diverse children’s books and aligned storybook guides, 5 printable language and literacy activities, a weekly letter with access to a video demonstration of the activity, and text reminders three times a week.



The comparison group received five diverse children’s books, a letter with access to evidence-based literacy activities, and text reminders only during weeks one and five to complete pre- and post-activities.

### Measures

Literacy scores from Winter 2020 (pre-COVID) and Fall 2020 on two computer-adaptive measures (STAR Reading Assessment, iReady Reading Diagnostic) were used as measures.

## RESULTS

To answer our research questions on the impact of the PLEASE READ program on reading achievement, a multilevel linear regression with maximum likelihood estimation was completed. No significant effects were found, nor were there significant interactions for pre-COVID scores or for grade level. Effect sizes were:

LITERACY MEASURE	EFFECT SIZE
STAR scale score	-0.15
iReady overall scale score	-0.03
iReady PA score	0.17
iReady Phonics score	-0.01
iReady comprehension info score	0.02

Table 1. Mean Performance on Literacy Measures by Condition and Grade

		STAR_W20	STAR_F20	iReady_W20	iReady_F20
1 <sup>ST</sup> GRADE	CONTROL	112.4	269.38	378.35	426.64
	TREATMENT	120.4	208.4	379.54	419.03
	TOTAL	116.4	235.5	378.78	423.24
2 <sup>ND</sup> GRADE	CONTROL	169.87	286.48	416.92	468.97
	TREATMENT	168.84	274.38	419.79	464.94
	TOTAL	169.36	280.33	418.33	466.79
TOTAL	CONTROL	156.22	282.97	397.65	445.56
	TREATMENT	158.53	258.67	405.65	444.41
	TOTAL	157.35	270.37	401.09	444.99

## IMPLICATIONS

Despite the pandemic, learning gains were seen in both groups from Winter 2020 to Fall 2020. Access to books and high-quality literacy materials remains important during summer months. A limitation of this study was the amount of missing data due to the pandemic.

Further research includes continuing to explore how summer reading programs can bolster learning gains, investigating the change in caregiver-child interactions during shared storybook reading pre- and post-PLEASE READ program implementation, and investigating the impact of PLEASE READ on specific components of literacy.

## References

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## Acknowledgements

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## About FCRR

The Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) is an interdisciplinary research center at Florida State University. Drawing from multiple disciplines, FCRR investigates all aspects of reading and reading-related skills across the lifespan. Through rigorous and robust research, innovation, and engagement, FCRR advances the science of reading to improve learning and achievement from birth through adulthood.