

WHITE PAPER

Empowering Students and Families to Address Summer Reading Loss in Greenville, SC and Stoughton, MA 2017

Results Published March 28, 2018

South Carolina



Massachusetts



RESEARCH &
VALIDATION

Introduction

Over the summer, many students and their families lose access to critical resources that keep them engaged in learning, and while this applies to families of varying socio-economic backgrounds, it is especially true for low-income families. In fact, summer learning loss is a primary contributor to the achievement gap, with lower-income students losing two to three months of reading achievement while their higher-income peers may maintain their literacy levels or make slight gains. Each year, this gap increases, such that summer learning loss in the elementary school years alone accounts for at least half of the ninth-grade reading achievement gap (National Summer Learning Association, 2017).

According to the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE), three to four consecutive summers of high-quality learning beginning in pre-kindergarten can help prepare students to read at grade level by third grade, making them four times as likely to graduate from high school. Moreover, engaging students in high-quality summer learning has been shown to improve school attachment, motivation, and relationships with adults and peers (NCASE, 2016). Summer learning loss has garnered national attention, with numerous states recognizing the value of investing in high-quality initiatives to address summer learning loss. In 2017, the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) documented 293 state bills in 40 states affecting summer programs and resources, especially for populations most at risk. In 2017 alone, 22 states passed summer learning legislation (NCASE, 2016). This focus on summer learning loss, and in particular reading loss, sets the context for the research outlined in this paper.

This white paper documents findings from two years of research on Make Summer Count (MSC) in Greenville, SC and one year of research on Summer Reading Spotlight: Stoughton 2017 (SRS). MSC is a summer reading initiative that, since its 2014 launch, has been led, managed, and sponsored by Public Education Partners (PEP) in Greenville County Schools (GCS) in Greenville, SC. PEP, in collaboration with Scholastic, the global children's publishing, education, and media company, provides students and families in GSC with resources and opportunities to encourage reading throughout the summer with the goal of reducing summer reading loss. Building on positive findings from the 2016 MSC study,¹ Scholastic collaborated with Stoughton Public Schools (SPS) in Stoughton, MA during the spring of 2017 to launch a similar and tailored summer reading initiative, and related research, called SRS.

¹ Findings from 2016 can be found in the executive summary and white paper titled "Addressing Summer Reading Loss: A Public Education Partners and Greenville County Schools Initiative" on edu@scholastic, Scholastic's blog about education: <http://bit.ly/MakeSummerCount16>



Together, these two summer reading initiatives demonstrate positive student and family outcomes for a sustainable, accessible model of addressing summer reading loss. Moreover, consistent positive outcomes from MSC over two years highlight the benefit of investment in summer reading over time.

Research Overview

For the second consecutive year, Scholastic collaborated with PEP to determine the impact of MSC on first- through sixth-grade students' and families' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors about summer reading.² MSC consists of two targeted research-based opportunities for literacy engagement:

- **MSC Book Celebrations**, which help students build home libraries by allowing them to select 10 free, high-interest, just-right books to own, take home, and read over the summer.
- **Family Reading Nights (FRNs)**, events where families are invited to learn strategies to support their children's reading over the summer, and where children receive additional books to take home.

The MSC initiative aims to provide students and families in higher-needs elementary schools—defined in this research as schools with 50% of students or more that qualify for Free and Reduced Meals (FARMs)—the resources they need to be able to read all summer long.

MSC, which is currently in its fifth year, has been recognized by its peers from various education and literacy organizations for the impact it has on students and families. In 2017, MSC was awarded the Dick and Tunky Riley WhatWorksSC Award for Excellence for demonstrating successful strategies to help reduce summer reading loss. In early 2018, PEP received the South Carolina International Reading Association's 2017–2018 Literacy Award for its advancement of literacy in local communities or at the state level.

Building on the positive findings from MSC 2016 research, Scholastic sought to explore the impacts of the MSC model on students and families from different regional and demographic backgrounds, and collaborated with Stoughton Public Schools in Stoughton, Massachusetts to implement SRS. Like MSC, SRS consisted of two

² Throughout this paper, grade refers to the grade students were in when they returned to school in the fall of 2017.

targeted research-based opportunities for literacy engagement that included SRS Book Selections and Family Literacy Nights, both of which were very similar to the resources provided for MSC. To further explore the impacts of the model, Scholastic and SPS designed a study in which three schools received support for summer reading at the end of the academic year in June 2017 (the treatment group, also referred to as the “Summer Book” schools elsewhere); and two schools received the same resources at the end of the study in the fall/winter of 2017 (the control group). By designing a study that provided some students and families with resources over the summer and others the same resources at a different point in time, we were better able to determine the potential impact of SRS.

Table 1 shows the different components of the respective initiatives in SC and MA to address summer reading loss and related research.

Table 1. Components of Make Summer Count and Summer Reading Spotlight Initiatives and Research in 2017.

	Make Summer Count (SC)	Summer Reading Spotlight (MA)	
		Treatment schools	Control Schools
# Students	18,000+	1,000+	700+
# Schools	29 higher-needs	3	2
Grades Served	1–6	1-6	K–6 [‡]
# Books Self-selected	10	10	10
Books Received	summer	summer	fall
# FRNs Hosted	27 (summer)	3 (June 2017)	2 (October 2017)
Grades Included in Research			
	3–5	3–6 [§]	
# Surveys Distributed	9,000+ (spring and fall 2017)	1,000+ (spring and fall 2017)	
# Book Logs/Digital Accounts Distributed	18,000+	1,600+	
# Family Surveys Distributed	1,000+	1,000+	

[‡] To encourage reading schoolwide, Kindergarten students and 6th-grade students were also provided books in the control schools in the fall.

[§] These findings comprise responses gathered from students in grades 3–6, excluding those 6th-grade students who did not respond to the survey in the fall.

This dual approach of providing students access to books, and families the tools they need to engage their children, is rooted in research about effective ways to address summer learning loss (Alexander, Pitcock, & Boulay, 2016).

School districts have attempted various approaches to address summer reading loss including providing center-based summer school programs. While it can be effective, (Borman & Schmidt, 2015) this approach is costly and difficult to sustain. Experts theorize that providing access to books over the summer may address summer reading loss in a more cost-effective way (Allington, McGill-Franzen, Camilli, Graff, Zeig, Zmach, & Nowak, 2010). Moreover, strengthening the school-to-home relationship by encouraging family support of summer reading is a key component in ensuring that children read during the summer, and that they read in ways that build understanding (Kim & White, 2011). These principles anchor the goals of both MSC and SRS to provide opportunities for all students to experience rich reading opportunities during the summer.

Findings

The 2017 research across two states highlights promising evidence for a summer reading model that works well *over time*, and in districts with different existing resources. MSC is currently in its fifth year (2014–2018) in GCS, in addition to having served students and families in a slightly different capacity since 2011. The schools reached by MSC are those most in need in Greenville County Schools, and represent a large and diverse district with varying access and resources. Stoughton Public Schools represents a smaller district with greater resources, with fewer than 40% of students qualifying for free or reduced price meals district-wide. Although the district had other family and literacy resources in place to support students, the summer of 2017 was the first time SRS was implemented. **Taken together, the findings from MSC and SRS indicate that investment in building students' home libraries and engaging families over the summer can lead to positive outcomes across sites with different degrees of resources initially available to them.**

Findings for Make Summer Count (MSC) in Greenville, SC

In examining how student and family attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors about summer reading were impacted by the MSC summer reading activities, the biggest takeaway from two years of data (2016 and 2017) is the **consistency of positive findings** seen for students and families.³ **Consistency is extremely important because being able to replicate findings for a second year in the same direction and with the same magnitude strengthens our confidence in findings from 2016 and 2017, and further cements our belief that MSC positively impacts students and families.**

Data from both years lead us to conclude:

- **MSC is meeting its goals of building students' home libraries, engaging families, and providing resources to help reduce summer reading loss.**
- **MSC is a *sustainable and impactful model* for engaging students and families in summer reading activities.**
- **Supporting summer reading initiatives, such as MSC, over consecutive summers will continue to impact students and families in positive ways.**

Specifically, over two consecutive summers, MSC students reported reading just over 14 books each summer, compared to the national average of 12 books.⁴ Students reported reading 14.7 books in 2016, and 14.2 books in 2017.

MSC is also continuing to build students' home libraries with more students across both years reporting that they have more than 10 children's books in their homes. In the spring of 2016, 15% of students reported having 10 or fewer books for children in their homes. In the fall, 9% of those students still reported having fewer than 10 books in their homes. In 2017, 11% of students surveyed in the spring said they had 10 or fewer children's books in their home; in the fall, only 4% of those students were still reporting that they had 10 or fewer books at home.

³ MSC findings are based on survey responses from over 5,000 students and nearly 150 family members. There was not a comparison group of students. Rather, findings represent an analysis of the unique results of all students participating in MSC. Additionally, this research does not account for additional summer learning or enrichment opportunities that students and families may have sought and participated in during the initiative.

⁴ National average based on Scholastic's nationally representative *Kids and Family Reading Report™*, which surveyed kids ages 6–11 [*Kids & Family Reading Report™: 6th Edition, 2017*].



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Massachusetts

In addition, for the second consecutive year, more than 75% of students agreed they were better readers in the fall because of the reading they did over the summer: 83% in 2016, and 79% in 2017. This is a notable cycle to highlight:



Over 75% of students agreed reading over the summer made them better readers.

students who read more are more likely to have higher reading confidence, and higher reading confidence leads to reading more books. This cycle is supported by the 2017 finding in which the 21% of students who disagreed that they were better readers in the fall reported reading fewer books than those students who agreed (11 books vs. 19 books in the last month).

In 2017, 84% of students agreed that reading over the summer is important. Again highlighting the belief-behavior relationship, the students who disagreed that reading was important over the summer (16%) were also less likely to report the benefits of summer reading, and read fewer books than those who held the belief that reading over the summer is important (11 books vs. 19 books in the last month).

It is also important to note that in 2016, when student achievement data was available, 78% of students participating in MSC maintained or increased their reading level from spring to fall.⁵ This positive trend leads us to conclude that MSC is causing a movement in Greenville, SC that includes not only changing students' attitudes and beliefs about the importance of summer reading, but also impacting their school performance, and ultimately their ability to return to school in the fall, ready to learn.

With regard to families, across both 2016 and 2017, more than 95% of families agreed that the books their children received from MSC contributed to their children reading more over the summer. Families across both years also overwhelmingly agreed that reading books over the summer would help their children during the school year, with 98% agreeing in 2016 and 100% agreeing in 2017. This finding points to a growing culture of literacy in Greenville that emphasizes the importance of year-round reading, driven by students reading more, and receiving support from their families.

Exploration of families' attitudes toward the Family Reading Nights was also positive, a consistent finding from 2016. In 2017, we found that families were overwhelmingly positive in their assessments of the summer reading activities and associated effects on

⁵ Due to a shift in the assessments administered in Greenville County Schools from spring to fall 2017, we were unable to explore student achievement outcomes for the 2017 MSC research.

their children. For example, 95% of families agreed that Family Reading Nights were valuable in learning how to support their children's reading. Families also highlighted several ways in which Family Reading Nights helped them: 60% of families agreed they learned ways to talk to their children about books; 56% of families connected with their children about reading; and 51% of families learned the importance of encouraging their children to read during the summer.

Also of note, 46% of families were able to connect with other families at their children's school through Family Reading Nights, building a community of families who have not only MSC to support summer reading in their homes, but each other as well. Thus, MSC is building a *new norm* around the role families play in the literacy lives of their children, especially over the summer.

Families also provided insight about alternate ways they experienced reading and literacy at home, beyond reading books. Families shared that they did crafts or hobbies requiring reading instructions; watched educational shows with their children; read recipes and cooked together; and used e-books or audiobooks. Recognizing that activities beyond reading traditional books are of value to literacy development is an important factor in cultivating strong home literacy environments, and again points to the growing culture of literacy in Greenville, which recognizes important opportunities to expand children's literacy skills through a variety of activities.



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Findings for Summer Reading Spotlight: Stoughton 2017 (SRS) in Stoughton, MA

The study in Stoughton, MA utilized treatment and control schools to examine how student and family attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors about reading were impacted by the SRS summer reading activities.⁶ In addition, we conducted an exploratory review of students' reading levels. For all analyses, we were able to account for other summer learning or enrichment opportunities that student and families may have sought out and participated in during the summer; however, no differences were found.⁷ Additionally, the reading scores of students in treatment and control schools before the summer were equally distributed from well below average to well above average tiers, so changes over the summer may be attributed to effects of the SRS initiative.⁸

Findings from this research highlighted three important takeaways:

- **Summer reading loss can impact students at *any* reading level. Likewise, our findings indicated that SRS positively impacted students who are striving readers as well as those who are advanced readers.**
- **Students across all grades reported positive impacts from SRS; however, it was the rising 3rd graders who showed the most positive impact from the initiative.**
- **Families found considerable value in the Family Literacy Nights held at their schools.**

Specifically, students in the treatment schools with below average *and* above average reading levels experienced less summer reading loss than students in the control schools.⁹ For students in the below average tier, 30% experienced summer reading loss in the control schools, compared to 21% in the treatment schools. For students in the well above/above average tiers, 43% experienced summer reading loss in the control schools, compared to 34% in the treatment schools. In the scientific literature on

⁶ SRS findings are based on survey responses from 575 students and nearly 80 family members.

⁷ Sample sizes were small and impacts may exist, but we were unable to detect them.

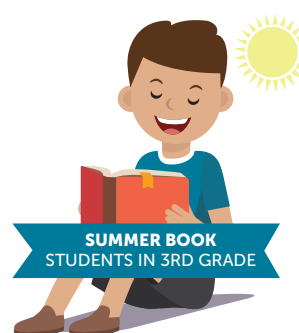
⁸ AimsWebPlus Tiers are defined based on national norm percentile scores for each individual measure, grade and test period (fall, winter, and spring). For example, well above average represents the 90th–99th percentile, and well below average represents the 1st–10th percentile.

⁹ Grade 2–5 students' AimswebPlus score change from spring 2017 to fall 2017. Students in the average reading tier in the spring showed no differences between treatment and control schools, which may warrant future analysis to delve deeper into what might account for this lack of variability.

summer reading loss, summer reading is usually measured in terms of lack of skill loss, rather than objective growth (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2000), with less summer reading loss considered an improvement. It is important to note that SRS impacted students we typically focus on for summer reading loss—those students already behind in their skill level—but also students who were quite advanced readers. Given the gains we saw at both reading levels, this highlights the importance of providing all students, regardless of their skill level, access to resources and encouragement to read all summer long.

One of the factors we believe contributed to less summer reading loss in treatment schools is the act of reading over the summer. It is notable that more students in the control schools than the treatment schools reported that they did not read at all over the summer: 14% vs. 6%.

Third-grade students in treatment schools in particular expressed more positive beliefs about the importance of summer reading than did those in control schools. Specifically, 90% of 3rd-grade students in treatment schools agreed reading over the summer was important, compared to 83% in control schools. Eighty-seven percent of 3rd-grade students in treatment schools agreed they were better readers in the fall because of the reading they did over the summer, compared to 73% of students in control schools. Findings from the 3rd-grade students are important to highlight, as many schools face enormous pressure to have all students reading on grade level by 3rd grade. The National Conference of State Legislatures noted in January 2018 that many states allow or require retention for students not reading at proficiency by the end of 3rd grade, with additional states exploring similar legislation. This demonstrates the national trend toward emphasizing 3rd grade in predicting subsequent school success and graduation rates. “Reading proficiently by the end of third grade (as measured by NAEP at the beginning of fourth grade) can be a make or break benchmark in a child’s educational development.” (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010).



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When exploring families' attitudes towards summer reading and SRS, the findings were overwhelmingly positive, as they were for MSC.¹⁰ When asked about the SRS initiative in general, 87% of families agreed their children were better readers in the fall because of the reading they did over the summer; and 85% agreed that the books their children received contributed to them reading more over the summer. When asked about the Family Literacy Nights specifically, 94% of families agreed they were a great way to connect families and schools; 85% said the events helped them support their children's reading.

These findings are important because they highlight a manageable way to build the home-school connection that can further support reading at home over the summer, as well as year-round. Inviting families and students to the school for a celebration of reading—and providing them with resources such as books and strategies to support their children's reading—are excellent ways to build positive relationships between families and schools so they can work together more effectively to sustain momentum in reading, and to provide additional support when needed.

Looking Ahead

The results from the research on MSC and SRS underscores the importance of providing resources to *all* students to help them engage in reading over the summer, and of empowering families in this effort. With the replication of findings for MSC and the addition of SRS in 2017, we saw that this model of a summer reading initiative—building students' home libraries with free book distributions, and engaging students and families in literacy events—can serve a variety of districts and schools across reading levels, thus providing resources to *all* students to engage in summer reading. The consistency in the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors across two states—taken in conjunction with the positive student achievement findings for MSC 2016 (with 78% of students in MSC schools maintaining or increasing their reading level from spring to fall) and the positive student achievement findings from SRS in 2017 (with fewer students in the treatment schools who were striving and advanced readers experiencing summer reading loss)—led us to conclude that initiatives like MSC and SRS are capable of influencing the academic trajectory of readers who value literacy as a year-round activity, and who can model that behavior for generations to come, and also capable of influencing students' and families' beliefs in the impact of summer reading.

¹⁰ Although all families were offered the opportunity to complete the digital parent survey, over 90% of the responses came from families in the treatment schools. Thus, findings reflect only those SRS families who experienced Family Literacy Nights in June as part of the treatment schools.

The simple and sustainable model of MSC and SRS has shown to have positive effects, even after several years of exposure (four years in total for some MSC students). Thus, annual support of these types of summer reading initiatives will continue to provide return on investment as students return to school in the fall better-prepared to learn. Further, the positive effects include communities' cultural shift to year-round reading that benefits not only those students exposed to MSC or SRS initiatives directly, but also the generations of students who will experience the community's culture of literacy.

As districts look to implement similar initiatives, we encourage an embrace of the model of engaging families, building home libraries, and offering books to students that interest them, and are at the right reading levels. White, Kim, Kingston, & Foster (2014) suggest that providing students with free books alone is not necessarily enough to impact reading outcomes, but that reading books matched to reading levels and interests encourages students to read independently and with understanding. Also, consider providing a means for students to track and celebrate their reading over the summer through methods as simple as using a paper book log. And finally, explore families' needs and tailor family literacy nights or other parent engagement efforts accordingly, in an inviting and purposeful way. Show families the value of their partnership in supporting their children's reading year-round.

The consistent, positive findings from MSC and SRS are inspirational in their ability to affect so many students and families. Students across these initiatives experienced the joy of owning 'just-right' books, and experienced the power that literacy can have on their confidence as well as on academic performance. Students and families, empowered to read and engage in literacy activities, are eager to spread the word about the MSC and SRS initiatives:

- "The Make Summer Count activities are wonderful and I hope they continue."
- "I hope she continues to grow her understanding of the world as she is exposed to new ideas and subjects through her love of reading."

These are just some of the comments parents enthusiastically offered about the initiatives.

Scholastic is proud to partner with Public Education Partners, Greenville County Schools, and Stoughton Public Schools to support summer reading, with our shared mission of empowering and engaging students and families through literacy.



Contact

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