



# Impact of Virginia Public Libraries' Summer Reading Program

## *Library of Virginia Site Visit Report*

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## Executive Summary

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In April 2013, the Library of Virginia contracted with McREL International to study the impact of the 2013 Summer Reading Program. In addition to studying the program's impact, McREL researchers also examined the implementation of the 2013 Summer Reading Program. This was accomplished through site visits in the summer of 2014 (June/July) at a small number of library buildings for which the staff there agreed to participate in the study. The library systems in which one branch received a site visit were selected to represent different library regions, varying economic conditions across the State of Virginia, urban and rural settings, and had strong participation in its summer reading programs. Branch libraries from the following four library systems were selected by Library of Virginia project staff for inclusion in the site visit observations: Augusta County (Fishersville Branch), Chesterfield County (Meadowdale Branch), Roanoke City (Williamson Road Branch), and Virginia Beach City (Kempsville Area Library). Buchanan County Public Library, also selected for a site visit, is a standalone library.

Three primary activities comprised each half-day site visit: (1) an environmental observation, (2) a group interview with Summer Reading Program staff, and (3) a parent group interview. The observation consisted of a 30-minute review of the library setting, followed by observing any summer reading program activities that were taking place on the day of the visit. A group interview was then conducted with library staff who were involved in the planning and/or implementation of the 2013 Summer Reading Program. The interview was also open for the library system director and branch manager to attend. Finally, McREL researchers conducted group interviews with a sample of parents whose children participated in the 2013 Summer Reading Program. These parents were contacted by each library site and invited to participate in the group interview.

During the interviews, audio files were created and later transcribed to enhance the accuracy of the analysis. Emerging themes were identified and data were summarized by salient and prevalent issues. Findings related to the implementation of the 2013 Summer Reading Program from each of the five libraries were written up in the form of six- to seven-page vignettes. The cross-site themes that emerged from the data collected through the site visits are summarized below.

### Best Practices

**Local School Collaboration.** Library staff described their outreach to and collaboration with public schools in their communities. Across the five libraries, there were variations in the levels of participation of area schools in the summer reading programs, as well as the incorporation of the Virginia Standards of Learning into planned programming. The amount of support from the schools for the summer reading program also varied, although staff members from all of the libraries reported progress in developing these relationships. Examples of collaboration with local schools included librarian site visits to talk directly with students, e-mails to principals and teachers about the summer reading program and other activities being held, and direct mailings to families.

**Local Partner Collaboration.** Local partners that collaborated with the libraries included restaurants, retailers, local artists, local businesses, zoos, and museums. Activities involving local partners included fairs, charity drives, and other community events. For the summer reading programs, local partners often donated resources to the library, such as gift certificates and other items that could be utilized as prizes for the participants. Some staff members also described collaborative efforts with other libraries in their geographic area to divide the fees for special artists and performers for joint events.

**Community Volunteerism.** Both parents and teens were named as the primary community volunteers by library staff. Teen volunteer responsibilities often involved administrative tasks, while parents and grandparents served as chaperones, helped track children's reading, and assisted with arts and crafts programming.

**Provision of Recommended Reading Books for Children.** Some of the library staff members reported that their libraries provided recommended reading books for children. In cases where lists were provided, literature was organized by themes, authors of interests, and/or school reading lists.

**Summer Reading Program Activities.** Activities provided during the summer reading programs varied greatly by theme, age group, and programming. Story hour was a common activity described, specifically for younger children. Other named activities included fairs, arts and crafts programs, reading competitions, and raffles and drawings.

**Parent Workshops to Support Children's Reading Activities.** Most of the libraries incorporated parental involvement in the programs without providing specific training for parents. Few staff reported that parents received training to help support their children's reading activities.

## **Reading At or Above Grade Level Strategies**

A few library staff members described providing resources for parents and children about literature appropriate for children of varying ages and reading abilities. There were also some reports of aligning the summer reading lists by students' grade levels. All of the library staff members interviewed emphasized that reading should be viewed as an enjoyable activity for children.

## **Recruitment Strategies**

A variety of recruitment strategies were utilized by library staff to increase children's participation in the summer reading programs. Examples included booktalks, presentations by library staff in the schools and at school meetings, flyers, e-mails, coordination with school staff, phone call reminders to parents, and automatically enrolling students into the summer reading program when parents did not decline participation.

## **Lessons Learned**

Challenges described by library staff members included gaining buy-in from local partners to participate and support their programming. Staff also noted program management challenges, such as tracking participants and using technology wisely. Teen and parent engagement strategies were an area of concern as well. Heightening participant enjoyment in the program through engaging activities was emphasized so that children do not feel like they were in school. Staff also stressed that advertisements in the schools should be planned and conducted earlier, more thoroughly, and more frequently.

## **Parents' Perspective**

### ***How They Heard About the Program***

Parents with children participating in the library program were often regular visitors of their library and actively involved in library programming. Advertisement methods included social media, family members, school recruitment efforts, flyers and advertisement within the library, and word of mouth.

### ***Primary Reason Child Was Involved***

Parents valued the opportunity to engage in reading with their children throughout the summer. Motivation and achievement in school were described as reasons to continue participation in the summer reading program, especially when there was alignment with reading standards. Programming was described as exciting for children and encouraged reading through prizes, presentations, and opportunities for socialization.

### ***Benefits of the Summer Reading Program***

Parents described library staff as welcoming, accommodating, and informative. Benefits also included opportunities to socialize, accelerated reading growth, decreased summer learning loss, enhanced motivation to read, and better preparation for the upcoming school year. The free resources of programming and books were also appreciated.

### ***Aspects Liked Best/Engaged Child***

Similar themes emerged between the benefits of the summer reading program and aspects liked by parents. Hands-on activities and interactive learning opportunities were enjoyed by the parents and children. Parents found the prizes and free resources to be valuable components of the program. The efforts of the library staff and activities provided during programs were also valued by parents and their children. Home schooling parents appreciated the library resources and opportunities for their children to interact with their peers.

## **Aspects Liked Least/Did Not Engage Child**

Parents described some challenges associated with the summer reading programs. The aspects liked least included the lack of teenage engagement, reading tracking and online platforms, program hours and schedules and presenters' lack of experience with young children.

## **Suggestions**

Parents' suggestions overlapped with the aspects that they liked least about the programming. Suggestions included encouraging teenager involvement in programs and resolving technology issues.

## **Summary**

Across the five libraries, a number of best practices are being implemented as a part of the summer reading program. Examples of collaboration with local schools and other partners were cited; community members (e.g., teens, parents, and seniors) are serving as volunteers; lists of recommended reading books are being provided for children and teens; and an array of engaging activities are taking place. The libraries are utilizing a number of recruitment strategies to encourage summer reading program participation. Overall, parents are pleased with the summer reading program and expressed their appreciation for the library staff and the variety of resources and activities being offered through the program. They shared that their children are motivated by the prizes and they continue to encourage their children to participate in the summer reading program due to its academic benefits.

## Introduction

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To encourage summer reading and prevent the decline of students' reading skills over the summer months when they are not typically in school (i.e., summer reading loss), the Library of Virginia provides support and materials for its Summer Reading Program to each of the 91 public library systems in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Summer Reading Program is offered for four target populations: young children (birth to 5 years), children (6 to 12 years), teens (13 to 17 years), and adults (18 years and older)<sup>1</sup>. The goals of the Summer Reading Program are to:

- encourage children and teens to continue reading during the summer with the hope that they will discover that reading can be fun and enjoyable
- provide safe and fun activities for children and teens to enjoy while they are out of school
- build healthy communities by offering programs and services to develop one of the Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets

In April 2013, the Library of Virginia contracted with McREL International to study the impact of the 2013 Summer Reading Program. Funding for this study is provided by the Library of Virginia through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), which serves as the primary source of federal support for the nation's 123,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. During the summer of 2013, a total of 46 public library systems (20 county, 15 city, and 11 multi-jurisdictional), which include 178 buildings (60 county, 64 city, and 54 multi-jurisdictional), agreed to participate in the Library of Virginia Summer Reading Program study (Table 1).

In addition to studying the program's impact, McREL also examined the implementation of the 2013 Summer Reading Program. This was accomplished through site visits at a small number of library buildings that agreed to participate in the study. These site visits were conducted by McREL researchers in the summer of 2014 (June/July) at five libraries throughout the state. This report details the methods used to collect data during the site visits and the findings. A vignette for each of the five libraries is presented followed by conclusions organized by the key themes transcending the five sites. The primary audience for this report is Library of Virginia staff and partners; other key audiences may include the IMLS.

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<sup>1</sup> Although adults are encouraged to participate in the Summer Reading Program, they are not the main population of interest for this study.

**Table 1. Participating Library Systems in the Library of Virginia Summer Reading Program Impact Study**

<b>COUNTY (building numbers)</b>	<b>CITY (building numbers)</b>	<b>MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL (REGIONAL) (building numbers)</b>
Allegheny County (1) Amherst County (2) Augusta County (5) Bedford County (6) Buchanan County (1) Campbell County (4) Caroline County (4) Chesterfield County (9) Cumberland County (1) Essex County (1) King George County (1) Lancaster County (1)* Orange County (3) Pittsylvania County (5) Powhatan County (1) Pulaski County (2) Roanoke County (6) Russell County (2) Shenandoah County (1) Washington County (5)	Alexandria City (5) Chesapeake City (7) Hampton City (4) Newport News City (4) Norfolk City (12) Petersburg City (1) Poquoson City (1) Portsmouth City (4) Radford City (1) Richmond City (9) Roanoke City (7) Salem City (1) Staunton City (1) Virginia Beach City (9) Waynesboro City (1)	Albemarle County, Greene County, Louisa County, Nelson County, Charlottesville City (8) Brunswick County, Greenville County, Emporia City (2) Clarke County, Frederick County, Winchester City (3) Floyd County, Montgomery County (4) Goochland County, Hanover County, King and Queen County, King William County (10) James City County, Williamsburg City (2) Mecklenburg County, Lunenburg County (2) New Kent County, Charles City County (2) Patrick County, Henry County, Martinsville City (6) Prince George County, Dinwiddie County, Hopewell City (7) Stafford County, Westmoreland County, Spotsylvania County, Fredericksburg City (8)
<b>Number = 20 (60)</b>	<b>Number = 15 (64)</b>	<b>Number = 11 (54)</b>

\* Lancaster County Public Library decided not to continue participation in the study.

## Site Selection and Data Collection Methods

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This section of the report describes how each of the five libraries were selected to be a site visit recipient. Details are also provided on the systematic data collection methods used to gather data during the half-day site visits.

### Site Selection

Branch libraries from the following four library systems were selected for inclusion in the site visit observations: Augusta County, Chesterfield County, Roanoke City, and Virginia Beach City. Buchanan County Public Library, also selected for a site visit, is a standalone library.

The library systems were selected by the Library of Virginia to represent different library regions, varying economic conditions, and urban and rural settings. See Figure 1 for a visual depiction of the five sites. Library systems with a high number of students participating in the 2013 Summer Reading Program were also considered in the site visit selection process. Site visits occurred during a one-month period from June 19 to July 19, 2014.



**Figure 1. Site Visit Locations**

### Data Collection Methods

Three primary activities comprised each site visit: an environmental observation, a group interview with the Summer Reading Program staff, and a parent group interview. All instruments were developed in collaboration with Library of Virginia project staff. During the interviews, audio files were created and later transcribed to enhance the accuracy of the analysis. Emerging themes were identified and data were summarized by salient and prevalent issues. This section further describes the methods used in the site visit observations.

## **Environmental Observation**

As mentioned previously, each site visit included an environmental observation. The observation consisted of a 30-minute review of the library setting and any summer reading program activities that were taking place on the day of the visit. Emphasis was placed on capturing areas cited in the observation checklist (refer to Appendix A, Section 2 of the Site Visit Protocol) via digital photos. Any individuals that were included in the photos were asked to provide a signed photo release form to McREL.

## **Summer Reading Program Staff Interview**

A six-item semi-structured interview protocol was developed for use with individuals who were involved in the planning and/or implementation of the 2013 Summer Reading Program. The interview was also open to the library system director and branch manager. Library staff were asked to provide feedback on their role and involvement in the 2013 Summer Reading Program; approaches, strategies, experiences, successes, and challenges for the best practices in implementing the 2013 Summer Reading Program; strategies for ensuring that 2013 Summer Reading Program participants were reading at or above their reading level; recruitment and involvement of participants; and lessons learned and suggestions for other library buildings in planning and implementing summer reading programs in the future. The library staff interview protocol is included in Section 3 of the Site Visit Protocol, which is included in Appendix A. One face-to-face group interview was conducted at each of the five library sites with four to six library staff represented, including staff from both the building and system.

## **Parent Group Interview**

McREL researchers also conducted group interviews with a sample of parents whose children participated in the 2013 Summer Reading Program using a six-item semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). Each library site was responsible for contacting and inviting parents to participate in the group interview. During the interview, parents were asked to provide feedback on their child's involvement in the 2013 Summer Reading Program and how they heard about the program; their reasons for involving their child in the program; their perceptions of the benefits of the summer reading program; the aspects of the program that their child liked the best or found most engaging as well as the aspects that their child liked the least or found least engaging; and any suggestions for the library in planning and implementing the summer reading program in the future. One face-to-face group interview was conducted at each of the five library sites; each interview included three to eight parents.

## Vignettes

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### Vignette I: Augusta County Library – Fishersville Main Library

Augusta County Library is located in the Shenandoah Valley between Staunton and Waynesboro with a population of 73,912. Based on land area, Augusta County is the second largest in the state. The main library is located in Fishersville with a branch in Churchville and three stations located in Craigsville, Deerfield, and Middlebrook. Augusta County Library has a total of 24 employees who all work to support the summer reading program which begins during the middle of June and runs for six weeks. The program is open to children ages 0 to 18. During the six weeks, those participating keep track of their reading time and receive prizes when they reach 10, 20, 30, and 40 hours of reading. Working collaboratively with Augusta County Schools, the library reports the number of hours that children have read and the elementary and middle school with the most hours is presented with a reading trophy. Additionally, there are ongoing programs offered during the summer such as story times for babies, toddlers, preschoolers, school-aged children, and teens. Special programs offered include a kickoff, teen volunteer orientation, and a finale carnival. Our mission is to support learning and keep youth reading so they go back to school ready to learn. The budget for the Augusta County Library summer reading program is \$3,000, which is funded by the “Friends of the Library” group and grants for which the library has applied.<sup>2</sup>



Retrieved from  
<http://www.augustacountylibrary.org/locationshours/fishersville-library/>

In June 2014, two group interviews were conducted (one with parents and one with library staff) at the Fishersville Main Library, which is a part of the Augusta County Library System. McREL researchers used a semi-structured interview protocol developed for each group. Staff were asked to describe their library’s work involving collaboration with schools and partners, community volunteerism, their incorporation of the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs), recommended reading books, summer reading program activities, parent workshops to support children’s reading activities, strategies to ensure that children are reading at grade level, approaches to recruitment, lessons learned, and suggestions. Parents were asked how they learned about the program, reasons why they involved their child, the benefits, aspects that they liked best and least, and their suggestions for the future. The following is a summary of the staff and parent focus group responses.

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<sup>2</sup> The information presented in the first paragraph was provided via e-mail to McREL researchers from library staff following the site visit.

## Best Practices

**Local School Collaboration.** Library staff members shared that they had prepared a video showcasing the library, its resources, and the summer reading program. Then, local school libraries shared this video with the children at their schools to encourage them to participate in the 2013 Summer Reading Program.

**Local Partner Collaboration.** Staff mentioned a strategy that they developed to encourage reading during the summer months. In this case, the library partnered with the supervisor for language arts at Augusta County Schools and created a competition between area schools at the elementary and middle school levels to win a trophy for the most summer reading.

**Community Volunteerism.** Staff members reported that most of their volunteers were teens from the local community. These teen volunteers assisted with tasks such as puppet shows, created buttons that were used as incentives for participation in the 2013 Summer Reading Program. The library also had a number of senior volunteers, in addition to parent volunteers, who assisted the library staff in various capacities (e.g., crafts and other activities). Additionally, library staff reported that community sponsors brought in food items for the program.



**Incorporation of Virginia SOLs.** According to library staff, the Virginia SOLs have not been deliberately incorporated into program development; however, many of the elements of the summer reading program coincide with the standards.

**Provision of Recommended Reading Books for Children.** Staff members mentioned that they display books in ways that draw children's attention to those on the recommended reading lists. Library staff also make themselves readily available to parents and children who are looking for guidance on which books to read. During the 2013 Summer Reading Program, the library partnered with one of the local schools to track children's book choices through an online platform. From the data, it was determined that the children were reading from the recommended reading lists given to them by their school. Since this was a successful endeavor, library staff are hopeful to try it with more schools in their area. Lastly, staff members mentioned that they held booktalks with their teen population to entice them to read the books being presented and handed out bookmarks with recommended readings.



**Summer Reading Program Activities.** The library’s 2013 Summer Reading Program’s theme was “Dig Into Reading” and was geared towards science. Staff mentioned that they ran several programs for the various participant age groups they serve and had a different activity every week for these participants. Activities included fossils, dinosaurs, metals, rocks, and buried treasure. They also utilized manipulatives for their activities.

**Parent Workshops to Support Children’s Reading Activities.** Library staff indicated that parents help in a variety of ways during the summer reading programs. For example, during the 2013 Summer Reading Program, they brought in materials like rocks and minerals for the activities, tracked hours read for their children, and read to the younger children. Some activities also required parental supervision and, while serving in this capacity, parents were asked to be role models to the children. Staff also reported that they always encourage parents to continue the reading activities at home with their children.

### Reading At or Above Grade Level Strategies

Staff mentioned that their goal was to encourage children to read, especially teens. With the exception of beginning readers, they did not focus on ensuring that participants were reading at or above reading level.

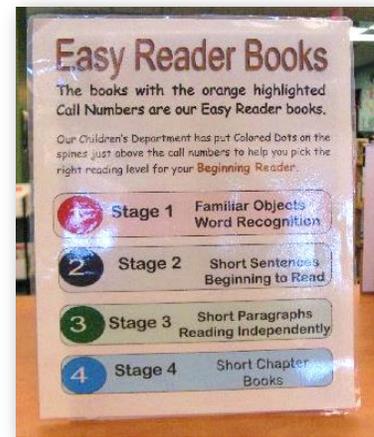
### Recruitment Strategies

Two staff members toured the schools and performed puppet shows to inform the children about the summer reading program and encourage participation. In addition, some staff members mentioned holding booktalks at each school to encourage teens to volunteer and participate in the program. For those teens volunteering at the library, it was also mandatory that they participate in the summer reading program.

To keep participants engaged and motivated to participate in the summer reading program,



library staff members used a variety of age-appropriate prizes, such as building block sets for younger children and a tablet for teens. For every hour of reading, the participants received a raffle ticket to put towards one of the prizes. For 2013, it was the first time that the library tracked reading time online, which meant that parents did not have to fill out paper tickets. Generally, staff members reported that the parents seemed to like the online tracking. However, they also noted that some parents lost interest in the incentive strategy (i.e., the raffle) since their children did not win any prizes, even after reading for many hours.



## Lessons Learned and Suggestions

Library staff make it a regular practice to utilize data from the summer reading programs to inform their decisions for the following year. For example, staff members noticed that participants stopped reading when they reached approximately 30 hours. Thus, they decided to make some informed changes so the children would be inclined to read more – up to 40 hours. While specifics about these changes were not shared, staff did report that they were successful in increasing the number of hours that participants were reading. To further increase participation, one staff member suggested surveying teens to find out why their participation in the summer reading programs is low.

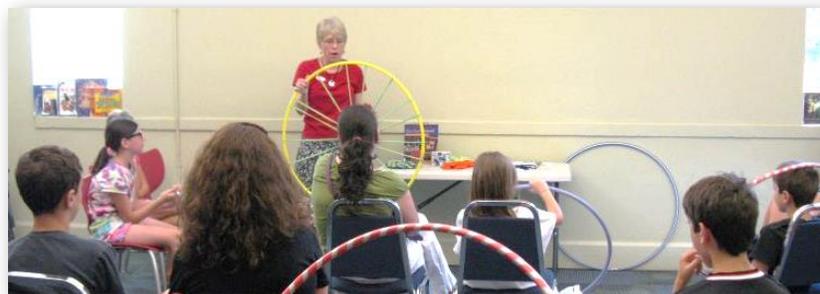
Significant changes in the summer of 2013, as reported by staff members, came through the use of the online tracking system. Library staff reported that receiving buy-in from their colleagues, providing training for those involved with the summer reading program, and knowing the system well allowed them to assist one another throughout the transition. All of the staff members agreed that both parents and students were more likely to show interest in the program when the staff members themselves showed enthusiasm for the program and offered assistance in all capacities.

Another staff member mentioned that they need more library staff to help facilitate the summer reading program. Although, it was also suggested that building relationships with parents is a critical component of the program that can help to provide additional volunteers for the summer reading programs. Yet another staff member suggested that community partnerships with the library worked very well for them.



## Parents' Perspective

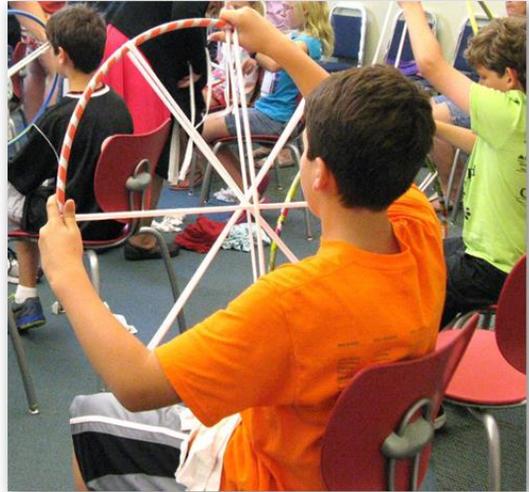
**How They Heard About the Program.** Seven parents participated in the focus group and reported various ways in which they learned about the 2013 Summer Reading Program. One parent indicated that since her family had already been attending the library's reading programs, she was aware that the library was going to offer it again in the summer of 2013. For a family that visits



the library frequently, they noticed the signs posted. Another parent reported searching for summer reading program information on the library's website. The library also distributed brochures about the program and that is

how one family found out about it. Families sometimes find out about the library's summer reading program by the schools distributing information on it or through library staff visiting the schools and providing information about it during puppet shows. Yet another parent reported that library staff members verbally remind her of the programs that are planned for the upcoming summer.

**Primary Reason Child Was Involved.** Parents noted that the reading program was “fun to get involved [in] and to come to all of the activities.” One parent commented the “continuity and the themes” made it enjoyable for her children. The practice of having participants earn tickets for raffle prizes based on the time spent reading seemed to be a polarizing one among the parents interviewed. Some parents noted that the prizes worked well as incentives for increased reading time, while others suggested that the practice served as a demotivator since their children rarely or never actually won a prize. There were also pros and cons of the actual use of tickets. Some parents appreciated that the online system eliminated the need for paper tickets; yet others noted how much their children liked the tangible act of filling out the tickets, “it was exciting [for them] to stick them in the box, so technology in this instance is not necessarily a great thing.”



**Benefits of the Summer Reading Program.** Several benefits of the summer reading program were reported by the parents interviewed. One parent mentioned that the children “get the reading bug,” which she appreciates. Another parent indicated that her children want to participate in the summer reading program's activities so they can visit their friends who are also involved. The use of reading CDs provided by the library was noted by one parent as a benefit because it helped her child learn the correct pronunciations of words in text. Two parents reported that as their children are getting older, the school books and schedules are more challenging; thus, their children use the summer reading program as downtime and a time to “relax with the books they like.”



Lastly, another parent reported that the summer reading program allowed her other family members to go to the library at the same time to borrow books for themselves.

**Aspects Liked Best/Engaged Child.** Parents appreciated the gift certificates earned through participation in the program. Two parents reported that the chance to win money was a strong motivator for their children who were participating in the young adult reading program. For another parent, participation in the program helped her “make time”

for reading. Two parents indicated that their children liked the projects that were incorporated into the program. Specifically, the projects heightened their children's interest in reading and their children tended to choose books about projects they worked on. Parents reported that the librarians who delivered the programs were instrumental in engaging the children in reading. One parent stated, "The librarians make it special," and another added, "They are very personable . . . they are really wonderful people . . . we love the librarians here."

### **Aspects Liked Least/Did Not Engage Child.**

For some children, as indicated by their parents, the gift certificate incentive was disappointing given the scarce chance of winning one. For instance, two parents reported that their children had been participating for years in the summer reading program and have only won once. Another parent indicated that reading for an hour was difficult for her children because they were young (3, 4, and 5 years old). She stated, "They only got one ticket for an hour and there was no way they were going to win a prize, so they hated the tickets." One parent suggested that the summer reading program was tailored for children from kindergarten to fifth grade and that it was difficult for children under 5 years old to participate in.



**Suggestions.** Parents offered two suggestions for improving the summer reading program during the focus group. One parent stressed the need to incorporate more strategies to engage teens in the summer reading program. Secondly, parents reported that the online tracking system could be improved, particularly the way the link is accessed to record their children's reading.

### **Summary**

Local schools collaborated with the Fishersville Main Library by sharing the informational video prepared by the library's staff about the summer reading program. Augusta County Public Schools also worked with the library to create a competition between the students at the elementary and middle school levels to encourage summer reading. Community volunteerism was mainly in the form of teen volunteers, followed by seniors, parents, and local businesses who provided food for the library's activities. The Virginia SOLs are present in several elements of the summer reading program, but were not deliberately incorporated. Along with displaying the recommended reading books in the library and providing bookmarks with the recommended readings on them to teens, the library



partnered with one local school to track students' reading online and whether reading was from the recommended reading lists. Program activities occurring weekly during the 2013 Summer Reading Program focused on science, utilized manipulatives, and varied depending on the participant age group. With the exception of beginning readers, reading at grade-level was not a focus during the program. In order to increase participation rates, the library focused heavily on their recruitment efforts and included strategies like touring the local schools, presenting booktalks with teens, utilizing a raffle-prize incentive system for reading, and tracking reading online. The library staff offered several lessons learned and suggestions from their summer program. Specifically, they suggested better utilization of data to make informed changes to the program, continued use of the online tracking system, and administration of a teen survey to better understand low participation in this age range.

Parent participants in the summer reading program shared that they heard about the program through their active involvement in the library, posted signs at the library, their local schools, puppet shows run by the library at their children's schools, and reminders from library staff members. Primarily, involvement in the program was attributed to prizes acting as motivators and the activities that occur during the summer reading program. Several benefits of the summer reading program were cited by the parents interviewed, including building a lifelong interest in reading, providing more opportunities for their children to socialize with their peers, correcting the pronunciation of words through listening to books on CDs, and using time spent reading during the summer as downtime (i.e., a break from the demands of school and their children's schedules). Parents noted that while they liked the gift certificates, their children were disappointed by their lack of opportunity to



win the prizes. For the young adult program, parents indicated that they appreciated the prize money offered, the projects undertaken, and the library staff involved. Overall, parents expressed their belief that the summer reading program catered specifically to children from the K-5 age group and encouraged more teen involvement in the program. In addition, they suggested resolving the technological issues encountered with the summer reading program's online platform.

## Vignette 2: Buchanan County Public Library

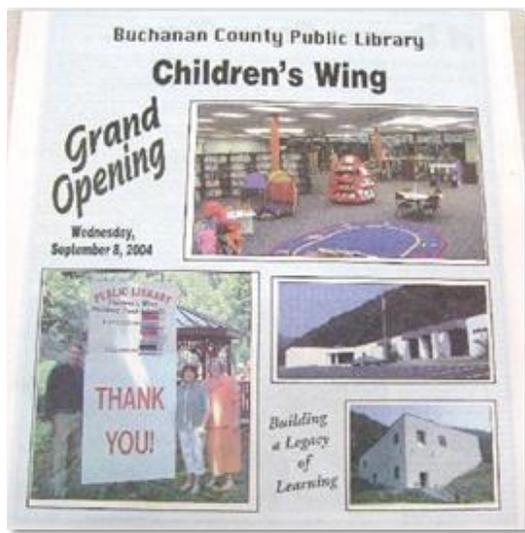
The Buchanan County Public Library is the county's only public library and is centrally located at the county seat of Grundy in a land area of 504 square miles with a total population of 23,597.

Buchanan County's economy is tied to natural resources, namely coal and timber, which has led to a boom-bust financial base, a high poverty rate (~40%), and limited opportunities for employment. However, it has also fostered a desire for more diversified opportunities, a strong family orientation, and the idea that education is a way to improve not only the person receiving the education, but also the community as a whole, which helped to make the library's children's wing addition possible. The desire to build a better future for the children of Buchanan County fueled the community's efforts to bring a Walmart to Grundy with a multifloor design only used in one other location in the United States.

Committed to serving Buchanan County's citizens, eight full-time and three part-time staff members at the Buchanan County Public Library provide strong summer reading programs that encourage people of all ages to read and to participate in healthy activities. Specifically, the children's librarian spends approximately 30 hours a week on the program for toddlers through 5th graders while the director spends about 10 hours a week on the teen and adult programs. Of course, both spend time planning, purchasing, creating, and scheduling leading up to the summer reading program. The director sets up the online component, then the full-time circulation staff runs the online component, awards teen and adult prizes, and handles promotions for upcoming programs. Everyone on staff assists with weekly and final programs including costume assistance, food prep, clean up, and traffic control.



Retrieved from <http://www.bcplnet.org/>



Buchanan County Public Library Children's Wing newspaper insert

The children's program runs five weeks from the third week of June through the second week of July. Each week's programs are divided by age groups (i.e., two and three year olds, four and five year olds, grades K-2, and grades 3-5) to take part in crafts, stories, music, and video clips. A final special event, such as a concert, marionette show, or magic show, is held on the last day and is open to everyone. The teen summer reading program (grades 6-12) and the adult summer reading program (age 18 and over) begins the fourth week of June and runs five weeks through the third week of July. A program is offered each week that focuses on a "do/create/enjoy" activity. Static and interactive displays are shared in

the teen and adult areas. A final special event is held for the teens and adults and is open to everyone. Every Friday, a family-friendly movie is shown.

Summer reading prizes and incentives depend on that year's theme. With "Dig into Reading," a prize cave was created, complete with nature sounds, dim lights, and a digging area. After reading the goal number of minutes (20 minutes a day/140 minutes a week), participating children could visit the cave. Inside the cave, there were projects and prizes which each child could select. The teens and adults had the same reading goals as the children and participants could earn books, small prizes, and chances on larger prizes such as an Android tablet. With the theme "Groundbreaking Reads," library staff set up a 1960s bomb shelter and drive-in showing *Blast From the Past*, serving hamburgers, fries, sodas, and fancy coffee.

The budget for all of the summer reading programs held annually at the Buchanan County Public Library is \$1,000. This is supplemented by \$500 from the "Friends of the Library" group, which is used to pay for the final event entertainment for the children's program. The books used as prizes are donated and up to \$100 is donated for the teen program from community sources. This brings the total budget for everything to \$1,600.<sup>3</sup>

In June 2014, two group interviews were conducted (one with parents and one with library staff) at the Buchanan County Public Library. McREL researchers used a semi-structured interview protocol developed for each group. Staff were asked to describe their library's work involving collaboration with schools, community volunteerism, their incorporation of the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs), recommended reading books, summer reading program activities, parent workshops to support children's reading activities, strategies to ensure children reading at grade level, approaches to recruitment, lessons learned, and suggestions. Parents were asked how they learned about the program, reasons why they involved their child, the benefits, aspects that they liked best and least, and their suggestions for the future. The following is a summary of the staff and parent focus group responses.

## Best Practices

**Local School Collaboration.** Library staff reported that they have great relationships with their local schools, including partnerships with seven schools during the summer of 2013. When faced with the challenge that local schools would not be able to have field trips to the library due to budget restraints, library staff opted to bring information about the program to the schools. Staff members also communicated with the local schools about any special programs they may be having via fax, e-mail, and their Facebook page. In addition, they noted that utilizing the Facebook page has allowed them to reach out to various populations. Specifically, one staff member stated, "We've reached a whole different group of people very quickly." Staff also shared details on partnerships formed between the local schools and the library as a result of the summer reading program. One

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<sup>3</sup> The information presented in the preceding paragraphs was provided via e-mail to McREL researchers from library staff following the site visit.

staff member mentioned that the schools post the summer reading program advertisements, hand out brochures to the students, and invite library staff to give presentations at the school. They reported that during the 2013 Summer Reading Program, one school's library was made available for Buchanan County Public Library staff to run their summer reading program in the school's library.

**Community Volunteerism.** Staff reported that they have been successful in attaining a diverse group of community volunteers, including members of the “Friends of the Library” group, which are the most active volunteers. As one staff member commented, “We are truly blessed by having people that think that the library is important to the county.” Library staff shared the following examples of how community members are involved with the library: Financial contributions being regularly provided by community members; businesses and organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, posting the library's program posters; library board members volunteering to help with the program; the sheriff's department including the library's website in the weekly *Sheriff Notes*; town police helping to provide transportation to the library; local restaurants donating gift certificates; and Walmart, Subway, and the Humane Society through donations, both monetary and food based, as well as employees' time.



Buchanan County Public Library Children's Wing newspaper insert

**Incorporation of Virginia SOLs.** One staff member indicated that library staff try to stress “little things” from the Virginia SOLs to the extent that they can without “overloading” the children. While they believe the SOLs are important, library staff members emphasized that their goal, especially with teens, is to help children develop a genuine interest in reading.

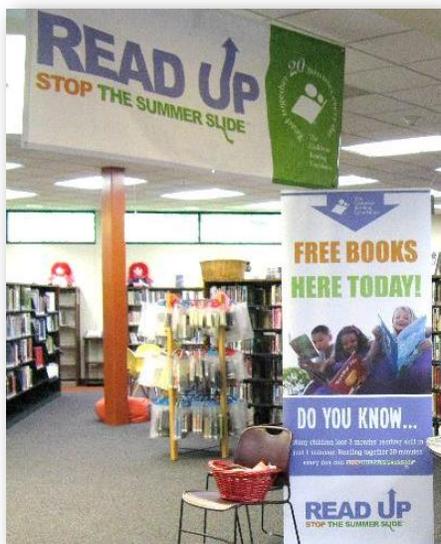


Another staff member mentioned following the advice of the Children's Reading Foundation by encouraging parents to read 20 minutes every day with their children. This library staff member indicated that he or she would explain to the parents that reading should be “family time” and that children should understand that it is “not just something you do because you're young, but it's something that needs to carry [on] throughout your life.”

**Provision of Recommended Reading Books for Children.** As explained by a staff member, the library has a list of recommended reading materials available for children and parents. Another staff member added that featured books are also on display in the library. For children under age 5, the library carries brochures that list 100 books they should read before starting kindergarten. For the teens, a short list of recommended books is provided; however, the teens generally read by choice. To increase the number of teens reading from the recommended list, one staff member mentioned that they were given extra prizes for reading five books from the recommended list and heard comments from several teens indicating that they would never have read the book if it were not on the list.



**Summer Reading Program Activities.** Library staff indicated that the summer reading program had a different theme each week along with activities tied to that theme. For the younger children, the staff implemented a process called, “Read, Do, and View,” which involved reading several books on the theme, viewing a corresponding movie or video, and doing a craft or singing and dancing. In addition, staff reported that a family movie event was hosted every Friday at the library. For the teen programs, staff members solicited input from the teens on what they would like to experience in the program. Based upon this input, staff developed a theme-related program, which included props and decade displays. They also held a closing program which incorporated a coffee shop, a “drive-in” movie, and a bomb shelter from the *Blast to the Past* movie. Additionally, staff reported that they provided activities for special groups, such as home school groups and the children from the Family Preservation Group, as well as hosting adult disability workshops.



**Parent Workshops to Support Children’s Reading Activities.** Staff described ways in which parents supported children’s reading activities. With the younger children, library staff reported that parents stayed during the workshops and helped out with the craft activities and by cleaning up their materials afterward. One staff member indicated that another staff member facilitated workshops with three- to five-year-old children and their parents to help them prepare for kindergarten. Library staff also distributed book lists and information on the importance of reading. One staff member collected parents’ contact information and provided them with information and materials on their *Ready for Kindergarten* class.

## Reading At or Above Grade Level Strategies

For teens and adults, library staff provided reading lists categorized into low, mid, and high reading levels. Prizes were provided when readers showed progress in reaching a high level reading book or based upon their reading time rather than the number of books read. Staff also recommended books to readers based on their interests and previous book choices. For younger children, library staff members would encourage them to choose chapter books once they noticed an appropriate level of reading proficiency. Parents were also provided with a list of a variety of books based on their child's interest.

## Recruitment Strategies

At the Buchanan County Public Library, the circulation staff conducted all recruitment efforts and other aspects of the summer reading program, including advertising the program, maintaining the website's information, providing technical support, entering participant information, reminding participants of the activities and events, recommending books based on patrons' interests, and offering prizes for reading. In addition, to ensure there was no wait time, library staff made the prizes available at the circulation desk. Staff also shared that they provided sign-up sheets for all age groups in the summer reading program. To promote family participation in the summer reading program, the library provides a "family plan" with all family members having a shared password for the online program. Library staff members further noted that they kept the dates for the adults, teens, and children's summer reading programs and related activities in close proximity so participants would be more likely to sign up as a family. Staff also ensured potential participants that they would not be penalized if they missed some of the reading sessions because they had other summer plans (e.g., going on a vacation).

## Lessons Learned and Suggestions

Library staff strongly suggest that the theme of the summer reading program should be exciting for the participants. It should not make the participants feel like they are "going back to school."

## Parents' Perspective

**How They Heard About the Program.** The eight parents who participated in the focus group reported that they heard about the summer reading program through a variety of means, including their friends, regular story times, the library's Facebook page, postings in the local newspaper, their schools, and direct mailings from the library.





**Primary Reason Child Was Involved.** Parents stated that they involved their children in the summer reading program primarily because they want their children to be motivated to read. They attributed their children’s enjoyment of the program to the dedication of the library staff. As one participant stated, “The program is fun, enlightening, and educational, and [the children] look forward to the summer program.”

**Benefits of the Summer Reading Program.**

One parent mentioned that the summer reading program improved her child’s motivation to read. Another participant shared that her daughter, “was encouraged to read stuff that maybe wasn’t on her level, but they will recommend books, save books back for you if they think you are going to want it, and just kind of go the extra mile.” Yet another parent reported that the program provides an opportunity for her child to socialize with peers.

Two parents indicated that library staff are very welcoming and cater to children from different age groups and needs, including those with special needs. The summer reading program also provides support to two other parents’ children who are participating in the accelerated reading program at school. One parent mentioned that when her child started school, she was able to acclimate very easily because of the programs they attended at the library. She stated, “Her confidence I know is because of the programs that we come to.” One parent, who is also a local school teacher, mentioned that she notices a student in her class “who has been here throughout the summer and who has kept it [reading] up for the year – for the summer.” Another parent attested to the value of the program by stating that her children “have always been consistently at a higher reading level when they do all of the testing when they do start back to school. So just from reading to them and having them participate in the program, it is definitely a help to their reading level.”



**Aspects Liked Best/Engaged Child.** Parents shared examples of the summer reading program that best engaged their children, and noted that the children liked the hands-on activities the best. They indicated that their children still remembered summer reading program activities



from past years, including reading Clifford books, playing putt-putt, making sand art, digging up fossils, making a paper dinosaur, “fishing” for books, constructing a wooden 3-D

puzzle, and playing Plinko. In addition, parents recalled the “cave” that children were allowed brief glimpses into throughout the summer, culminating in a journey into the cave at the end of the program. One parent commented, “There was a lot anticipation with that, just because they had to wait for so long.” Another added, “They were really thrilled to do it when they finally did get to go in it.”

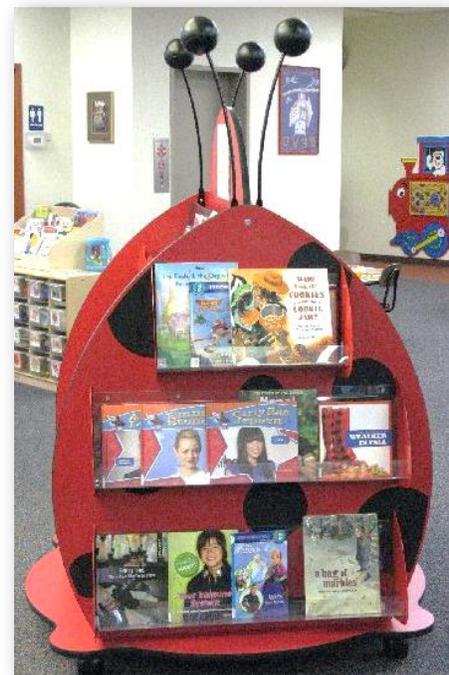
All of the parents made positive remarks about library staff members’ delivery of the program. They cited several staff traits including knowledge of books appealing to appropriate age groups and addressing participants’ needs at the library.

**Aspects Liked Least/Did Not Engage Child.** The only complaint that the parents reported was that they did not like tracking the summer readings online, citing technical issues such as logging in and having to switch between different family member’s accounts.

**Suggestions.** Parents did not have suggestions for improving the summer reading program. In general, they perceived the program to be excellent. As one participant stated, “I think the thing is that it is so diverse. Every year, [the library director] always puts so much of every little thing in so there is really nothing lacking. I don’t think anything is getting more attention than anything else. Everything just seems so really even and nicely done.”

## Summary

The library collaborated with seven local schools during the summer reading program. Community volunteerism was also strong at the library through involvement by the “Friends of the Library,” as well as both monetary and non-monetary contributions from local business organizations and restaurants, the Sheriff’s Department, town police, and others (e.g., Walmart, Subway, and the Humane Society). Although library staff recognized the importance of the Virginia SOLs, they mentioned that it was not their primary goal to incorporate the standards in their program. To aid children from all age groups in finding books available on the recommended reading lists, library staff set up displays of the recommended books, carried the lists from the local schools for all school-age children, and kept brochures of recommended readings for the younger patrons. The activities were varied during the summer program and were based on themes for all age groups. Parents supported their children’s reading activities in ways such as contributing to the workshops, helping the children clean up, and helping to organize activities. The library provided prizes for teens and adults when they reached a high reading level and encouraged the parents of younger children to read chapter books once



they noticed that their child was reading well. Staff utilized recruitment strategies such as providing technical and phone support, sending reminders, advertising the program, recommending books, providing a family plan, and ensuring participants of no penalization for missing some days of the program.

Parents reported that they heard about the program through venues such as the library's regular story times, the library's Facebook page, the local newspaper, their friends, and direct mailings from the library. They involved their children in the program to motivate them to read and because they recognized the value of the program and its supportive staff. Specific benefits noted by parents included the increase in their children's motivation to read and to prevent summer reading loss, as well as providing an opportunity for their children to socialize and receive help with accelerated reading. The parents shared several examples of activities that engaged their children in learning, in particular, hands-on activities. Some parents noted that they disliked the online tracking of reading due to difficulties in using the online platform. Overall, all parents reported that the program was excellent.

### Vignette 3: Chesterfield County Public Library – Meadowdale Branch

Chesterfield County Public Library’s (CCPL’s) mission is “to help transform information into usable knowledge” for the more than 327,000 residents of Chesterfield County. Covering 437 square miles, CCPL offers nine (soon to be 10) branch facilities (Bon Air, Central, Chester, Clover Hill, Enon, Ettrick, LaPrade, Meadowdale, Midlothian, and soon, North Courthouse Road) where citizens can apply for jobs online, communicate with friends and family via e-mail and social media outlets, access databases, attend programs, work in the small business resource center, create in the library’s makerspaces, and engage with professional library staff to find answers and discover solutions. In a recent survey conducted by CCPL, 70% of respondents said they come to the library to learn. All programs, services, and spaces have been developed to help library users create learning outcomes.



Retrieved from <http://www.librarything.com/venue/55777/Chesterfield-County-Public-Library-Meadowdale-Branch>

The summer reading program is usually offered mid-June through early September, in partnership with the Chesterfield County Public Schools. The budget for grand prizes, weekly incentives, publicity, and programming is approximately \$20,000. This includes the printing of an additional 35,000 copies of the CCPL’s *Loud and Clear* magazine that goes into every elementary student’s backpack during the last week of school. Most of this money is kindly donated to the library system by the “Friends of the CCPL.” The system has approximately 190 full- and part-time employees. Many staff members work on the summer reading program, with the effort being coordinated centrally through the library’s Community Services department in conjunction with the Programming Council.

The programs are designed to encourage summer learning and integrate the concepts of “maker” and/or community engagement. Branch management teams make it a priority to learn about their community, thereby creating more opportunities for tailored programs and services. Community demographics; whiteboard feedback; meetings with stakeholders, and staff feedback from all levels of the organization are taken into account when deciding how to allocate valuable resources. CCPL’s summer programming in 2014 included STEM programming like “Engineering for Kids: Build Your Own Flashlight” and “Hurray for Honey Bees!” where kids could learn what bees do every day, make a bee craft, and taste honey made from three different types of flowers. Arts and cultural programs were offered, such as *Alice in Wonderland* being performed by the Chesterfield Children’s Theater. Teen Studio programs included workshops about felt sculptures, creative clothing construction, and an introduction to manga. Author Matt Holm, co-creator of the BabyMouse and Squish series, was featured with an author talk and book signing event, which was so well-attended that the event had to be moved to a nearby school to accommodate all of the attendees. In addition, kick-off festivals are held at every CCPL branch, where staff play games and

encourage summer reading sign-ups. All participants who complete the program help to earn meals for animals at the county's shelter, courtesy of Southern States<sup>®4</sup>

In June 2014, two group interviews were conducted (one with parents, including a daycare provider, and one with library staff) at the Meadowdale Branch Library, which is a part of the CCPL system. McREL researchers used a semi-structured interview protocol developed for each group. Staff were asked to describe their library's work involving collaboration with schools and partners, community volunteerism, their incorporation of the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs), recommended reading books, summer reading program activities, parent workshops to support children's reading activities, strategies to ensure children are reading at grade level, approaches to recruitment, lessons learned, and suggestions. Parents were asked how they learned about the program, reasons why they involved their child, the benefits, aspects that they liked best and least, and their suggestions for the future. The following is a summary of the staff and parent focus group responses.

## Best Practices

**Local School Collaboration.** When asked how the library collaborates with local schools, one staff member described conducting presentations in the school auditoriums using images that appeal to children, such as super heroes and cartoon characters, to generate interest in the library



and was available after these presentations to answer students' questions. The staff member also used a display of new graphic novels to attract attention. Another staff member reported e-mailing librarians, assistant librarians, and reading specialists in the area elementary, middle, and high schools to offer presentations that advertise the library's summer reading program and received several requests as a result. In addition, a Title I school asked library staff to come speak to a group of parents and their children about the

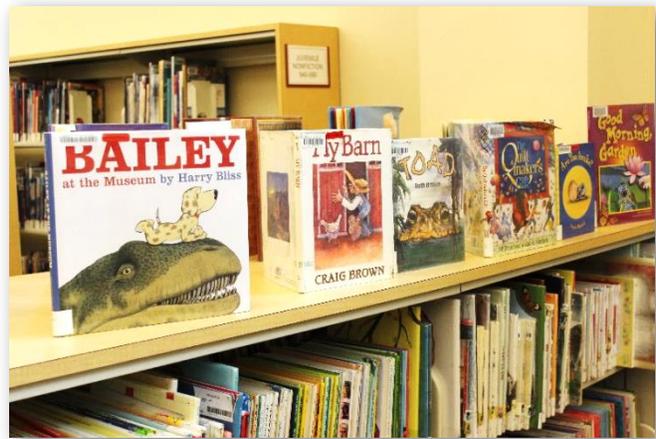
summer reading program. At a different school, a library staff member presented at a meeting of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) to between 80 and 100 parents. In a third school, a staff member dressed as a popular storybook character and skateboarded into a gymnasium filled with students and emphasized the prizes that students could win while participating in the summer reading program. Another staff member spoke at one school to approximately 800 middle school students, as well as a select group of students at another middle school. The staff members reported that they went to almost every school in the district to speak about the summer reading program.

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<sup>4</sup> The information presented in the preceding paragraphs was provided via e-mail to McREL researchers from library staff following the site visit.

One staff member also reported going to the school librarians' meetings at the end of the school year to demonstrate their summer reading program module.

In working with the schools to try to involve every student in the summer reading program, one staff member described the successes and challenges. Letters were sent to parents about the registration process along with a privacy statement to allow parents the opportunity to decline their child's involvement. Children whose parents did not decline their participation were automatically registered for the program. In this process, it was the responsibility of the schools to provide student data to the library and then library volunteers would enter the data into their system. However, due to miscommunication, time, and capacity constraints, not all children were registered for the 2013 Summer Reading Program. This staff member hopes to build more collaborative relationships with the schools in future years to minimize the challenges faced during 2013.



Another staff member described hosting open houses at the library and inviting school stakeholders to attend so more information could be shared about the library's services. While these open houses were geared towards children and their parents, staff reported that members of the library and school communities and school board members attended as well.

**Local Partner Collaboration.** One staff member described a Food for the Animals effort, which was offered in coordination with Southern States<sup>®</sup>. Based upon how much reading was completed by participants in the summer reading program, Southern States<sup>®</sup> would donate dog food at the end of the summer to the local animal shelter. According to staff, other library branches were also involved in this collaborative effort.



**Community Volunteerism.** A library staff member reported having about 30 volunteers, most of whom were high school students, to help with the library's activities, events, and other functions. The staff indicated that they regularly organize a volunteer roster for activities requiring additional assistance.

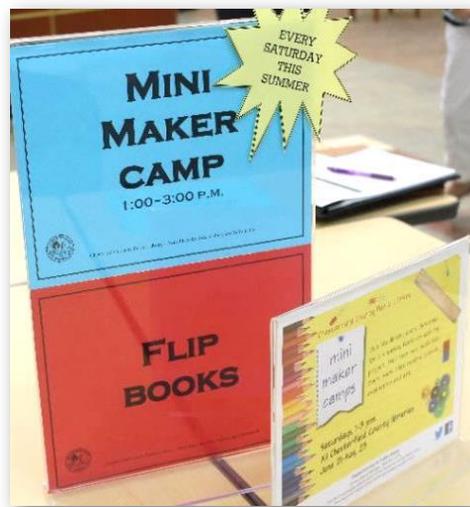
**Incorporation of Virginia SOLs.** One staff member indicated that program presenters described components of the summer reading program at various grade levels that link to the Virginia SOLs. As reported by another staff member, the

library is using “Live Binders,” an online resource that each school system is using to show the curriculum schedule, to better align its programming with the school curricula. For example, the schools will be focusing on Native American studies in November, which one staff member noted that if they were going to do any programming during that time of the year, they would try to incorporate that topic.



**Provision of Recommended Reading Books for Children.** According to one library staff member, participants enjoyed receiving the reading lists; this past year, the reading list referenced authors’ names, rather than specific books. Another staff member described the challenge of schools creating their own separate reading lists and the library struggling to make those books available. Parents not wanting to deviate from the school lists was also described by library staff as a challenge because the parents thought it was what their children were required to read rather than consider it suggestions for reading.

**Summer Reading Program Activities.** One staff member indicated that story times occur twice a week while daycare story times occur once a month at the library. Another staff member described preschool and early literacy programs, as well as efforts to encourage more grandparent and great-grandparent involvement. Library staff noted that the summer reading programs involved a theme each year to organize the available books for children, and sometimes have crafts or giveaways that accompany the program.



**Parent Workshops to Support Children’s Reading Activities.** While staff agreed that there were no programs specifically designed to engage parents in supporting their children’s reading, one staff member did mention speaking at a PTA meeting about the Every Child Ready to Read program.

## Reading At or Above Grade Level Strategies

One staff member described the challenge of needing to be familiar with the different reading level systems that area schools were using (i.e., Developmental Reading Assessment levels and the Lexile® ratings of books) to be able to help a child find books for their reading level. Yet another staff member reported that he or she guides a child through a “reference interview” to

determine the reading level of the child. In addition, the library has a number of tools that staff can use to determine a child's level and then guide them to the appropriate level of books.

## Recruitment Strategies

Where the library had existing relationships with local schools, one staff member described visiting those schools to share information about the summer reading program. The staff member also reported that the schools have helped to promote the reading program with their students.

## Lessons Learned and Suggestions

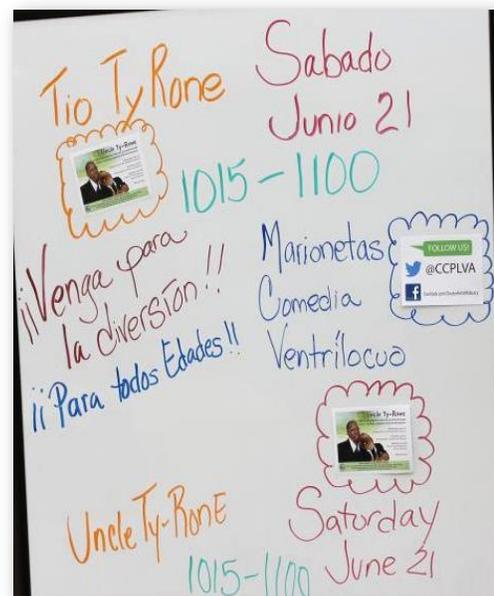
It was recommended by one staff member that more incentives should be provided for the summer reading program. Another library staff member described challenges in identifying prize winners when the users do not log into the online tracking system to check their statuses because library staff cannot see the winners' names. A third staff member suggested having a more elaborate and exciting sign-in station available when recruiting participants. Generally, staff members agreed that the online registration process has become easier as parents and children have become more familiar with the system.

## Parents' Perspective

**How They Heard About the Program.** Three parents in the focus group have had their children involved in the summer reading program for many summers. For these families, it has become an annual activity and one in which their children look forward to being a part. One parent explained, "I can always tell in the car when we've gone to the library because I don't hear anything because they are so eager to look into their books and start reading."

**Primary Reason Child Was Involved.** One parent described wanting her children to surpass their grade-level in reading, which she believes is accomplished through sustained reading at home and frequent visits to the library. Another parent indicated that her children's school reading program emphasizes the value of visiting the library. One parent noted that participating in the reading program has been enjoyable for her children and that they have won awards in the program drawings. Another parent stated that the prizes help incentivize reluctant readers.

**Benefits of the Summer Reading Program.** One parent indicated that she encourages her child to read throughout the summer in order to prepare for the upcoming school year and the summer reading program provides a way to do just that. Another parent reported that her child



reads above grade level because he enjoys reading, which is partly attributable to the reading resources available at the library.

**Aspects Liked Best/Engaged Child.** One parent expressed her appreciation for the different components of the program because they were exciting for her children, particularly the



fact that they could win prizes and feed animals based on their amount of reading. This parent also liked that the summer reading program aligned across the county so that families could go to other libraries if they so choose. In addition, the use of a treasure chest was described as a “good idea” because children could select a prize from it if they accomplished their reading goals.

**Aspects Liked Least/Did Not Engage Child.** The lone daycare provider attending the focus group stated that she would like to see more daycare providers utilizing the library due to the benefits that it provides the children. None of the parents reported aspects about the library that they did not like.

**Suggestions.** A suggestion by one parent would be to space out the milestones to encourage children to participate in the reading program throughout the entire summer. Another parent mentioned posting children’s names as they achieve milestones to continue to motivate them. Advertising the library’s services at kindergarten registration to encourage early library use was also suggested.

## Summary

Collaboration and recruitment efforts with local schools emerged as a major theme among the library staff members. In particular, staff mentioned talking with parents at PTA meetings as well as presenting to large groups of students in auditoriums and other settings in an effort to spread the awareness of the summer reading program. These activities also involved talking to select groups of students and faculty members at the local schools. Library staff members also reported e-mailing librarians, assistant librarians, and reading specialists at area schools to increase awareness of the summer reading program and build stronger relationships. In addition to collaborative efforts with local schools, staff explained how the library coordinated with Southern States<sup>®</sup> to allow the summer reading program participants to earn and collect food donations for animal shelters. While implementing the summer reading program and other library activities and events, staff members mentioned that high school students are their largest group of library volunteers.

Library staff spoke at length about the program’s alignment to the Virginia SOLs, recommended reading materials, and activities associated with the summer reading program. With

regard to SOLs, staff members acknowledged the alignment of the summer reading program through presentations and the use of “Live Binders.” As for reading lists developed and supported by the library, staff mentioned authors’ names, rather than book titles, were used in the current program. However, a major challenge noted in developing and maintaining the reading list was in collaboration with the local schools. Specifically, because some of the local schools had different reading lists, it was difficult at times to have all of the titles available. Despite these difficulties, the summer reading programs involved a themed organization of available books along with related crafts, activities, and prizes. For the prize component of the program, one staff member did recommend that more prizes could help to increase participation. Other staff members noted that having an efficient system for tracking those who won prizes would help, as the current online tool created some difficulties for library staff in determining the winners.

Parents participating in the focus group reported that they knew about the summer reading program due to the frequency with which they visited the library. As for why they chose for their children to be involved in the program, parents explained that some of their children were already reading at a higher grade level and the summer reading program could help maintain their child’s progress. Others discussed how the prizes helped to motivate their children to read more than they otherwise would have on their own. Some parents also indicated that they valued the alignment of the programs with the Virginia SOLs. Additionally, having gone to the library as children themselves, many of the parents had fond memories of those summers, which motivated them to pursue the library’s activities for their children.



## Vignette 4: Roanoke City Library – Williamson Road Branch

The Roanoke Public Libraries includes one main library, five city library branches, one law library, and two e-branches. The library system serves the City of Roanoke, a municipality located within the borders of Roanoke County in southwestern Virginia. In 2014, 43 library staff members offered 912 summer reading program activities for young people from birth to age 17, reaching over 10,300 youth during the six-week program (June 16 through July 26).

Children signed up for the summer reading program via paper registration/book log sheets or through the online tracking system. The registration form and book log were combined into a simple, one-sided flyer that provided directions to participants on what to fill out for registration, where to record books they read, and where to submit the completed book logs to receive a prize.



A partnership with Roanoke City Public Schools Plus (RCPS+), a program developed to provide hands-on learning experiences during summer school, also allows the libraries to work closely with the students attending the program. The libraries provide the schools with curriculum resources, free programming, and reading logs and most students register for the libraries' summer reading program. Through 21st Century Community Learning Center grant funding, eight literacy teachers are placed at the RCPS+ sites. These teachers are employed by the library and help provide assistance to students who are struggling with reading over the summer.

The summer reading program consisted of themed weeks of special programs relating to the "Paws to Read" theme: dinosaurs, farm animals, jungle animals, desert animals, mythical creatures, and pets. These themes were broad enough to incorporate everything from a *Where the Wild Things Are* story time for young children to a teen craft program on making clothes for pets. Visits from local organizations such as Star City Greyhounds, Salem Red Sox Baseball, Little Critters Petting Zoo, local artists and musicians, and rescue dog organizations were featured along with out-of-town traveling performers and groups, such as Matt Sandbank's Shadow Factory, Animal Antics, Rainbow Puppets, and "Stuntologist" Sam Bartlett. Library staff planned and presented story time and craft programs for all ages as well as age-specific sessions that focused on reading, writing, and creative exploration. The budget for the summer reading program in 2014 was \$8,500.<sup>5</sup>

In July 2014, three group interviews (two with parents and one with library staff) were conducted at the Williamson Road Branch Library, which is a part of the Roanoke City Library System. McREL researchers used a semi-structured interview protocol developed for each group. Staff were asked to describe their library's work involving collaboration with schools and partners,

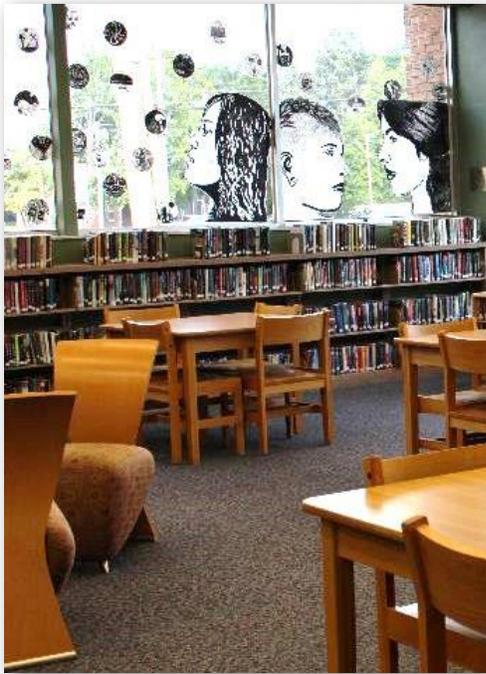
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<sup>5</sup> The information presented in the preceding paragraphs was provided via e-mail to McREL researchers from library staff following the site visit.

community volunteerism, their incorporation of the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs), summer reading program activities, parent workshops to support children’s reading activities, approaches to recruitment, lessons learned, and suggestions. Due to time constraints of library staff, questions pertaining to strategies to ensure that children are reading at grade level were not asked during the interview. Parents were asked how they learned about the program, reasons why they involved their child, the benefits, aspects that they liked best and least, and their suggestions for the future. The following is a summary of the staff and parent focus group responses.

## Best Practices

**Local School Collaboration.** Library staff reported that they maintain good working relationships with the schools in their community. One staff member described the connection between their Star City Reads program and Roanoke City Public Schools as a strong relationship that involved planning and applying for the National Civic League’s All-America City Award. Incidentally, in 2012, the city of Roanoke was awarded the All-America City Grade Level Reading Award by the National Civic League for its work in improving literacy rates. The library staff member reported improvement over the years in working with the schools since two of the school superintendents have supported more collaboration. One particular success noted was the RCPS+ program, a reading-focused summer school for 300 children that provides transportation, field trips, and food for students. The library staff member said that when children who participated in the program returned to school, their test scores improved which prompted continuation of the program for a second year. However, the staff member also indicated that collaboration with schools can be complicated due to administrator and faculty turnover.



A second staff member reported working closely with the school librarians. For example, he or she traveled to the local schools to read to students and urged the school librarians to advocate for students’ participation in the library programs. The staff member affirmed that teachers were the strongest library advocates.

Another library staff member reported providing outreach through story times in the Tap Head Start Center and local elementary schools. If time allowed, the staff member also brought book deposits and crafts for the children. In one school, the staff member worked with a reading specialist to obtain library cards for the entire school over a nine-month period.

**Local Partner Collaboration.** In addition to collaborating with area schools, staff members reported working with local partners such as the science museum, the zoo, and a few local restaurants. The “Friends of the Library” chapter is also a very active supporter of this library branch. One staff member reported that most of the restaurants donated prizes that were used to reward children who excelled in the summer reading program. The library staff member also reported providing story time in a local Chick-Fil-A® restaurant, which sponsored the event through food and coupons.



Festivals at the library supported by local partners (e.g., Father’s Day Fest) were held leading up to the summer reading program, where people could learn about the program and get registered. The program was also supported by a Kid’s Fest fundraising campaign for the Star City Reads initiative and a health fair held at the library, which provided families with program awareness and sign-up opportunities. Another staff member reported outreach activities taking place at area Head Start centers, preschools, and daycares to



enroll students for library cards and other library programs. A local website called Macaroni Kid®, as indicated by one staff member, was being used to advertise library events along with other community events. Another staff member mentioned a Roanoke family magazine entitled *Growing Up In The Valley* that promoted the library’s full summer schedule and gave the library a discount on a full-sheet spread about the library renovations.

**Community Volunteerism.** Library staff agreed that fostering and maintaining close relationships with the community is critical for improving library interest and attendance. According to one staff member, community volunteers often donate books and their time to the library. Another staff member described benefiting from the skills of members of the community, such as those with expertise in information technology, to help shape the library programming.

**Incorporation of Virginia SOLs.** One library staff member reported that the Library Lab program focuses on the Virginia SOLs through a variety of activities. Another staff member indicated that programming is based on the standards’ concepts of science; however, the standards do not inform the design of their programming. The staff member further noted that he or she does not know how to use the SOLs as well as classroom teachers and therefore cannot ensure alignment of the program activities.

**Summer Reading Program Activities.** Throughout the focus group, staff members described summer reading program activities such as interactive learning and presentations, crafts, and story time. Examples of program activities included presentations by Roanoke's Celtic-American bagpipe band; staff and animals from Healing Strides, where participants learned how therapeutic riding can assist those with personal challenges; and Stuntology, a program where participants explore the mysteries of our universe through the use of everyday products. Crafts during the summer reading program included button bracelets, easy DIY pet accessories, and marbled pots; story time included a shadow puppet show.



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**Parent Workshops to Support Children's Reading Activities.** Workshops designed for parents to support their children's reading activities were not specifically described by the staff members. Two staff members did note that parents of teenagers are typically not involved in the library's activities. Staff members agreed that parents of younger children are more likely to visit the library with their children and encourage other parents to participate as well.

### Recruitment Strategies

One staff member reported that they recruited participants by maintaining relationships with teachers and librarians within the area schools. Library staff provide calendars of events, brochures about upcoming activities, and send special invitations via e-mail to the teachers and school librarians. Another staff member worked to provide individual attention and information to the children and parents who visit their library. This staff member also called people who signed up for the program to remind them of the program details. A third staff member reported collecting e-mail addresses from parents to provoke interest, make them feel included, and advertise special library events, such as the Stuntology program mentioned earlier, Dungeons and Dragons programming, and an art program called Pathfinders.



## Lessons Learned and Suggestions

Staff members agreed that by beginning to plan in December and starting to advertise in January contributes to successful programming. One staff member conveyed that providing several smaller programs using local vendors is a more successful strategy than providing a small number of expensive programs. This staff member was disappointed when an expensive event only attracted a few children and expressed his or her belief that it was not a good use of resources. In this staff member's opinion, local artists are easier to build relationships with and procure for an affordable price. Another staff member advocated for "keeping the program fresh" by not booking the same



person two or three summers in a row. A third staff member described the possibility of booking performers at multiple library branches to save money and provide families with the opportunity to see performances they may have missed at their local library. One staff member mentioned a meeting in March for library branch managers and their assistants to learn about upcoming programs in hopes that it would generate interest and more collaboration with the other libraries.

## Parents' Perspective

**How They Heard About the Program.** The six parents participating in the focus group remarked that they became aware of the summer reading program through the regular visits they made to the library. One parent shared that when she was a child, she remembers participating in the library's summer reading program so she wanted her children to have the same experience. Two parents shared that they learned about all of the library's programs, including the summer reading program, through conversations with branch staff. Another parent shared that she homeschools her children, so she utilizes the library and all of the offered activities as supplemental learning material. She also mentioned that branch staff were always discussing upcoming activities when her family visited the library every couple of days.

**Primary Reason Child Was Involved.** One parent stated that her child enjoyed meeting some of the authors who visited the library to provide readings and engage in discussions.



Another parent said that her child enjoyed the reading groups, which encouraged continued involvement. A third parent appreciated the intellectual stimulation and entertainment that the program provided to children while they were out of school for the summer.

**Benefits of the Summer Reading Program.** One benefit of the program mentioned by a parent was that her children talk more about books as a result of their time spent in the summer reading program. Two other parents reported that their children enjoyed interacting with their peers throughout the summer when not in school as well as the variety of activities offered by the program.

**Aspects Liked Best/Engaged Child.** One parent reported that her child looks forward to the summer reading program each year and that the experiences provided by the library are



enjoyable for both children and parents. As mentioned previously, another parent reported that she uses the library to help with her homeschooling curriculum. Yet another parent noted that she enjoyed becoming friends with other parents while her child also became friends with other children at the library. Three parents reported that their children enjoyed the interactions with animals and other hands-on activities (e.g., arts and crafts). Two parents appreciated that the library's activities were appropriate for a wider age range of children, especially when parents

have children of diverse ages. Finally, one parent indicated her appreciation for the online calendar, which allowed her to easily schedule her family for the summer activities.

**Aspects Liked Least/Did Not Engage Child.** Expressing her disappointment, one parent mentioned how the change in the times of activities no longer worked well for her family because they now often overlap with either her children's supper or nap time. Another parent wished that the program would incorporate more writing activities. A third parent reported that some of the presenters showed a lack of experience with child audiences.

**Suggestions.** To increase enrollment in the summer reading programs, one parent suggested that library staff should encourage the spread of information via word-of-mouth among parents. Another parent shared that they had friends (in other states) who received flyers and notices from their child's local elementary school advertising the summer reading program.

## Summary

Library staff readily discussed the collaborative relationship shared with Roanoke City Public Schools. In particular, this partnership fosters a high level of engagement among students through field trips offered as part of the RCPS+ program and has reportedly resulted in an increase in student test scores in past years.

Thus, library staff felt that collaboration with local schools is critical to the development of students' literacy skills. This collaborative effort also involved library staff visiting local schools to build relationships with librarians and students. During these visits, staff also brought along reading materials and crafts to engage the students and share a little experience with the library's services. It was hoped



that these efforts would result in a stronger relationship between the schools and the library staff. Staff also explained that a phone and e-mail campaign was used to boost awareness of the program.

Library staff also described partnerships with other local entities such as the zoo, the science museum, and local restaurants. These partnerships helped build community awareness of local educational resources and activities. In addition, restaurants offered prizes and sponsored events at the library. During fundraisers held at the library, such as Kid's Fest and Father's Day Fest, staff could spread the word about the summer reading program.

Regarding the summer reading program itself, staff explained that the program utilized interactive learning activities and presentations, crafts, and story time. However, staff did explain that while the program aligned in part to the Virginia SOLs, it was not developed with the standards in mind.

When asked how the program might be improved, library staff offered a few suggestions. Specifically, one staff member suggested greater collaboration with local performers, entities, and events as locally based attractions would be more cost effective. The staff member explained that if events are more cost effective, the library can provide a larger number of events to the community during the summer reading program.

Parents reported that they heard about the summer reading program from the staff during their regular library visits. Their children were engaged in the program because they had opportunity to meet some of the authors and were able to join the reading group. As a result of their

participation in the program, parents expressed that their children developed an interest in books and had an opportunity to socialize with peers. The positive aspects of the program cited by parents included help with homeschooling curriculum, socialization, interactions with animals, and hands-on activities, including arts and crafts. Areas of improvement according to parents include times of the summer reading program activities, lack of writing activities, and lack of experience of some program presenters with children. Increasing word-of-mouth information about the summer reading program among parents was suggested as a way to increase program enrollment.

## Vignette 5: Virginia Beach Public Library – Kempsville Area Library

Located in the southeastern corner of the state and comprising 248 square miles along the shores of the Atlantic Ocean and Chesapeake Bay, Virginia Beach is home to more than 440,000 people. A community anchor for more than 50 years, Virginia Beach Public Library (VBPL)

includes a central library, a joint-use library in partnership with Tidewater Community College, seven area libraries, and a public law library. The library system employs about 300 full- and part-time staff. Services being provided by the VBPL system include workforce development and job-search support, small business resources, computer and technology classes, early literacy classes and outreach, and local history archives and programs. In addition to books, music, magazines and movies in tangible and digital formats, the library system also provides online research tools accessible from home or work and a variety of specialty collections.

In particular, VBPL's annual summer reading challenge encourages children, teens, and adults to read for fun during the summer while providing them with the opportunity to earn incentives along the way. The 2014 program was an eight-week event running from Monday, June 16 to Saturday, August 9. The program was a resounding success, attracting 14,500 participants – 64% increase over 2013, thanks in part to the VBPL's excellent working relationship with Virginia Beach City Public Schools. For the first time, 36 of 50 Virginia Beach elementary schools, including 11 Title 1 sites, adopted the VBPL's reading program as their summer reading initiative.

Beginning in 2013, VBPL and Virginia Beach City Public Schools partnered to bring the library's summer reading challenge and activities to students at six Title 1 schools. After participating in the eight-week program, students' fall Developmental Reading Assessment scores were compared with their end-of-year scores from the prior school year. In 2014, 60% of the children maintained or improved their reading skills, and in 2013, an amazing 77% maintained or improved these scores.

The summer reading program is planned and implemented by the Youth and Family Services Manager, the Teen Librarian, and the Adult Services Librarian. The event is coordinated across the VBPL system by nine youth librarians, four early literacy outreach staff, and approximately 20 staff members from the teen and adult programming teams. During the program, VBPL provided 56 weekly early literacy-based story times, live animal programming, movies, crafts and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics) based events.



Retrieved from <http://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/libraries/locations/Pages/Locations-and-Hours.aspx>

The Friends of the VBPL and the Virginia Beach Library Foundation together provided more than \$32,000 in 2014 to support incentives, including new books and weekly programs at all library locations. Additional incentives were provided by local businesses and organizations.<sup>6</sup>

In June 2014, two group interviews were conducted (one with parents and one with library staff) at the Kempsville Area Library, which is a part of the VBPL system. McREL researchers used a semi-structured interview protocol developed for each group. Staff were asked to describe their library's work involving collaboration with schools and partners, community volunteerism, their incorporation of the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs), recommended reading books, summer reading program activities, parent workshops to support children's reading activities, strategies to ensure children reading at grade level, approaches to recruitment, lessons learned, and suggestions. Parents were asked how they learned about the program, reasons why they involved their child, the benefits, aspects that they liked best and least, and their suggestions for the future. The following is a summary of the staff and parent focus group responses.

## Best Practices

**Local School Collaboration.** Library staff reported that a team of people worked to build partnerships and coordinate activities with the schools. One staff member noted that elementary



school partnerships were easier to build than those with the local middle and high schools. Another staff member indicated that library staff recently spoke at a middle school award ceremony to communicate information about the summer reading program. In addition to elementary school visits, e-mails were regularly distributed for large events, information was incorporated into the morning announcements at the schools, and informational flyers were sent to school libraries and

school administrators. Two schools were visited by library staff to provide small presentations in English classes across the grade levels about the summer reading program. Additionally, a full-time professional librarian was hired to work specifically with the teen population.

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<sup>6</sup> The information presented in the preceding paragraphs was provided via e-mail to McREL researchers from library staff following the site visit.

With the elementary schools, one staff member described the partnerships that began in 2013 as a “continuity of collaboration throughout the year,” which made the communication more familiar for students. A VBPL staff member said that the goal at the system level was to present at all 56 elementary schools before the summer reading program begins. The designated Title I schools were reported to be the most common type of school where collaborative efforts were taking place during the summer program. In six of these schools, the library held the summer reading program at the school to accommodate communities who may not have access to the libraries but do have access to the school. This reportedly contributed to 77% of the students who participated at these events remaining at their reading level or progressing ahead in 2013. In 2014, the library expanded to 11 of the 13 Title I schools and worked with elementary school principals to increase student participation in the summer reading challenge. One staff member reported that 32 of 56 elementary schools used the summer reading challenge and marketed the program through school media channels. The staff member expressed his or her excitement about the program’s growth.



**Local Partner Collaboration.** System-level staff described the city’s Historic Education Resource Outreach (HERO) team as a group that distributes information to various city agencies, such as Historic Houses, the Virginia Beach City Media Center, and Parks and Recreation. Schools also reportedly have school administration level representatives on the HERO team, who then receive information about the summer reading program and bring it back to their schools.



**Community Volunteerism.** Two staff members indicated that teens perform most of the library’s volunteer work during the summer reading program. One staff member stated, “We really do focus on the teens being the community presence in the library.” A third staff member described community donors that provided incentives for the summer reading program. Yet another staff member mentioned the library’s goals for establishing partnerships with colleges in the future.

**Incorporation of Virginia SOLs.** Library staff reported that they based the summer reading programs on

the Virginia SOLs and STEAM principles. In planning, high-interest subjects that tie into the SOLs became the focus to engage kids and work on their literacy skills. Interactive and exploratory programs were used to supplement classroom lessons.

**Provision of Recommended Reading Books for Children.** Staff reported that they did not provide a recommended reading list. However, 32 of the 56 area elementary schools were using Virginia Beach’s summer reading challenge.

### Summer Reading Program Activities.

Staff shared that they provided multiple activities a day for the summer reading program, including Every Child Ready to Read® (ECRR)<sup>7</sup> and STEAM programming. ECRR is a story time presentation that uses a “define-model-assign” structure to help parents build skills around story time at home. STEAM programming uses hands-on science learning.



**Parent Workshops to Support Children’s Reading Activities.** All of the activities mentioned in the “Summer Reading Program Activities” section above included descriptions of parental involvement. In addition, staff indicated that they regularly utilize modeling to include parents in the learning and knowledge growth of their children; such modeling may include how to create reading comprehension or how to foster learning. Workshops are also held for parents but one staff member reported that these are less common.

### Reading At or Above Grade Level Strategies

Library staff reported that they did not use specific strategies for any of the age groups being served to ensure that summer reading program participants were reading at or above their grade



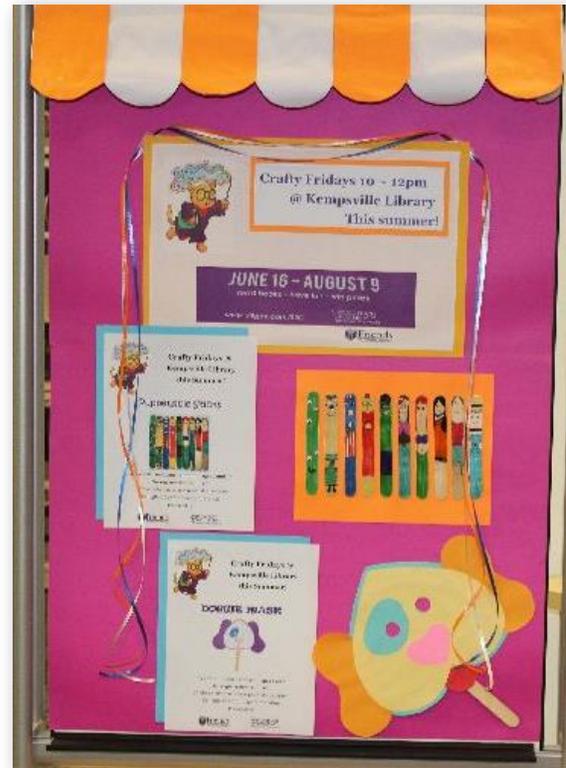
level. Staff explained that their emphasis was to promote reading as an enjoyable activity for summer and not as a chore. They expressed their belief that once participants started to enjoy reading, they would be motivated to read more often and start reading at their grade level and at advanced reading levels. With their parent reading program, the emphasis was to promote reading as a family activity. One staff member explained that parent

<sup>7</sup> Every Child Ready to Read® @ your library® (ECRR) is an education initiative of the Public Library Association, a division of the American Library Association. More information on this initiative can be found at <http://www.everychildreadytoread.org/>

participants shared that they had insufficient time to read full-length books and library staff members' strategy was to explain to parents that they do not necessarily have to read full-length books; rather, any reading they do would count towards their reading activity. Another staff member summarized this by commenting, "We are talking about a magazine, a newspaper, all of these things you are reading and you are showing your child that you are reading something."

## Recruitment Strategies

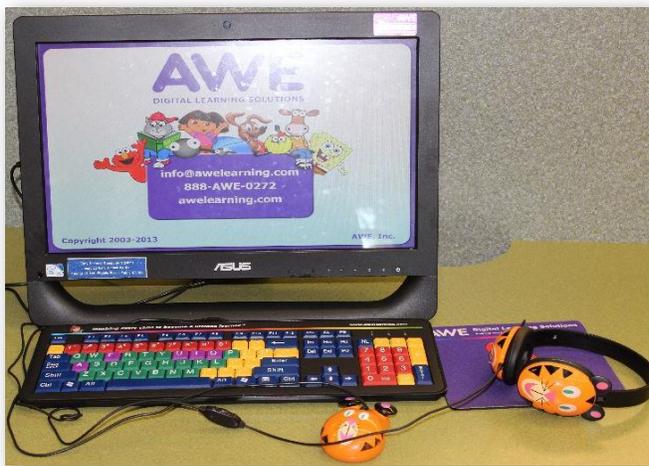
Library staff used various recruitment strategies for the summer reading program. For the preschool program, staff utilized their early literacy outreach department and partnerships with the preschools to recruit participants. Through the library's early literacy outreach department, a bookmobile visited the preschool classes in the area and registered them for the program. Staff encouraged teen volunteer participation by adding prize wheels to the program so that when children came to the library to spin the prize wheel, teen volunteers were able to engage with the children. Teen volunteers were also signed up for the summer reading program themselves so they had a sense of involvement and were given a book to read as soon as they signed up. Instead of giving away community passes as prizes, staff implemented a raffle ticket system with teens, which provided a raffle ticket for every book read that could then be used for higher-end prizes. Library staff also made special flyers targeted towards teens that are clearly distinguishable from the other age-group program flyers. For both adults and teens, banners were used to encourage participation in the summer reading program. Additionally, staff regularly e-mailed the local schools to inform teens about the library's programs. Following all of the concerted outreach efforts to teens, staff reported that they were noticing higher reading completion rates by teens this year in comparison to last year. One staff member reported that last year (2013), they had a 46% reading completion rate for teens during the entire summer. This year (2014), they already had a 30% reading completion rate in only the second week of the summer reading program. For the adult summer reading program, library staff also used the raffle ticket system and made parents the initial account holders for families instead of having individual accounts for each person in the household.



For all age groups involved in the summer reading program, library staff switched their program from being focused on reading for time to reading for book titles. By implementing this change, staff noted that they received positive feedback as most participants prefer to participate in the program by logging each book read as opposed to reading for a certain amount of time.

## Lessons Learned and Suggestions

Library staff voiced several suggestions based on their experiences with the past summer reading program. First and foremost, they expressed their belief that the program should be fun to be involved with and not too challenging for participants. For the teen and parent summer reading programs, staff members suggested emphasizing to teens and parents that any material read counts as reading. It was also recommended that communications be made with parents participating in the summer reading program to stress that staff recognize the value of their time and appreciate it and that one way of recognizing this would be to reward them with raffle tickets. Staff members also suggested using strategies like the spinning prize wheel, raffle tickets, and teen volunteer participation to encourage participants to go to the library. For adults who are intimidated by the



computer system for tracking their reading, staff stated that alternative tracking systems, like a bingo game sheet could be used. Staff suggested emphasizing a positive message of participating in the summer reading program and allowing for participation to be simple. For example, making the program broad enough that families can set their own reading goals within it and communicating a message that says “read books versus read hours.” The program should be engaging and should cater to the different age groups being served in special and specific ways.

Lastly, staff mentioned that library staff should also be allowed to participate in the summer reading program so they feel connected to the program and are able to speak knowledgeably about the program to other participants. It was also suggested that marketing efforts needed to happen earlier in the year at the middle and high school levels to ensure incorporation into school calendars, even as far as a year in advance.

## Parents’ Perspective

**How They Heard About the Program.** All three parents who participated in the group interview reported that they became involved with the library many years ago through family members.

**Primary Reason Involved Child.** Parents described the library as an enjoyable place for their children to learn, read, and socialize. The library’s story times were noted as an engaging opportunity for children to be exposed to reading and peers. One parent reported that the library’s summer reading program gets her children excited about reading. Parents also noted that the program helps to ensure that their children are reading year-round.

**Benefits of the Summer Reading Program.** As indicated by parents, the summer reading challenge makes reading fun and exciting for their children who feel included in a big project. They also expressed excitement around the fact that the books are free. One parent described story time, in particular, as a highlight for her child because it made the child feel independent to be able to attend without her in the room.

**Aspects Liked Best/Engaged Child.** Parents reported that the summer reading program made an impact on their children as they noted that their children loved going to the library for story time and the reading program and that it helped their children develop a deep appreciation of reading. One parent noticed that the reading program allowed for growth and independence in her child and this has been invaluable for him or her. Another parent noted that the several children in her family have been enrolled in the summer reading program with one child being enrolled in the program for six years. This parent elaborated that all of the incentives in the program make the children in her family excited, quoting specific examples like the marine science museum tickets and selecting a book. Yet another parent said that she liked the aspect of logging books because she could enter the data online at the end of the day. It was acknowledged by one parent that the reading program is conceptually well done and that she appreciates the interactions of the teen volunteers with the participating children because she believed that the relational aspect of the program made it successful. Another parent reported that she liked the structure of the program and that changes made from previous years were beneficial and contributed to her family's retention in the program.



**Aspects Liked Least/Did Not Engage Child.** One parent noted that in previous summer reading programs, the children had to record time spent reading. She thought that doing this built discipline as compared to the current year's summer reading activity where children had to read five books but did not have to record their reading time.

**Suggestions.** No suggestions applicable to the summer reading program were made by the parents in the focus group.

## Summary

Staff reported that they collaborated with local schools in several ways. Marketing efforts included flyers, school visits, e-mails, and school media channels. Six of the area schools accommodated the community by serving as sites for the summer reading program. For the library's summer reading program, teens performed most of the volunteer work while community donors and the Friends of VBPL provided incentives. Staff further indicated that while summer reading

programming was based on the Virginia SOLs and STEAM principles, recommended reading lists were not provided to participants and no strategies were used to ensure that participants were reading at or above their grade level; instead, the emphasis was on reading as an enjoyable family activity. To make it easy for families' busy schedules, the summer reading program provided multiple activities during the day and all of the activities involved parents. Recruitment strategies were focused on registering preschool children through the bookmobile visits to the local preschools, utilization of a raffle ticket system and gift cards to encourage teen and adult participation, special flyers targeting teens for registering, e-mailing schools with information about the program, and allowing parents to maintain one "family" account for logging summer reading. Lessons learned and suggestions for improvement included making the program fun and not too challenging, using strategies like raffle tickets and prizes, having alternative tracking systems available, and allowing library staff to participate in the program.

Parents indicated that they heard about the summer reading program from their family members and involved their children for several reasons, such as having an opportunity to learn, read, and socialize. Participating in the summer reading challenge was fun and exciting for the children and free books were noted as benefits of the program. The summer reading program had an impact on the children as they loved going to the library to participate in the program and they developed an appreciation of reading. The incentives in the program, interactions of the teen volunteers with children, and the structure of the program were some of the aspects of the program noted as most liked by the parents.

## Conclusions

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In the summer of 2014, McREL researchers conducted site visits to four branch libraries and one standalone library in Virginia as a part of a study for which McREL was contracted to conduct by the Library of Virginia. The overarching purpose of the study is to examine the impact of the 2013 Summer Reading Program, but part of the study also entailed examining the implementation of the program for these libraries. Group interviews with library staff and parent participants were conducted as a part of the half-day visits. The cross-site themes that emerged from the data collected through the site visits are summarized below.

### Best Practices

#### *Local School Collaboration*

Library staff described their outreach to and collaboration with public schools in their communities. Across the five sites, there were variations in the levels of participation of area schools in the summer reading programs, as well as the incorporation of the Virginia SOLs into planned programming. The amount of support from the schools for the summer reading program also varied, although staff members from all of the libraries reported progress in developing these relationships. Examples of collaboration with local schools included librarian site visits to talk directly with students, e-mails to principals and teachers about the summer reading program and other activities being held, and direct mailings to families.

#### *Local Partner Collaboration*

Local partners that collaborated with the libraries included restaurants, retailers, local artists, local businesses, zoos, and museums. Activities involving local partners included fairs, charity drives, and other community events. For the summer reading programs, local partners often donated resources to the library, such as gift certificates and other items that could be utilized as prizes for the participants. Some staff members also described collaborative efforts with other libraries in their geographic area to divide the fees for special artists and performers for joint events.

#### *Community Volunteerism*

Both parents and teens were named as the primary community volunteers by library staff. Teen volunteer responsibilities often involved administrative tasks, while parents and grandparents served as chaperones, helped track children's reading, and assisted with arts and crafts programming.

#### *Provision of Recommended Reading Books for Children*

Some of the library staff reported that their libraries provided recommended reading books for children. In cases where lists were provided, literature was organized by themes, authors of interests, and/or school reading lists.

## **Summer Reading Program Activities**

Activities provided during the summer reading programs varied greatly by theme, age group, and programming. Story hour was a common activity described, specifically for younger children. Other named activities included fairs, arts and crafts programs, reading competitions, and raffles and drawings.

## **Parent Workshops to Support Children's Reading Activities**

Most of the libraries incorporated parental involvement in the programs without providing specific training for parents. Few staff reported that parents received training to help support their children's reading activities.

## **Reading At or Above Grade Level Strategies**

A few library staff members described providing resources for parents and children about literature appropriate for children of varying ages and reading abilities. There were also some reports of aligning summer reading lists by students' grade levels. All of the library staff interviewed emphasized that reading should be viewed as an enjoyable activity for children.

## **Recruitment Strategies**

A variety of recruitment strategies were utilized by library staff to increase children's participation in the summer reading programs. Examples included booktalks, presentations by library staff in the schools and at school meetings, user experience support through technology, flyers, e-mails, coordination with school staff, phone call reminders to parents, and automatically enrolling students into the summer reading program when parents did not decline participation.

## **Lessons Learned**

Challenges described by library staff members included gaining buy-in from local partners to participate and support their programming. Staff also noted program management challenges, such as tracking participants and using technology wisely. Teen and parent engagement strategies were an area of concern as well. Heightening participant enjoyment in the program through engaging activities was emphasized so that children do not feel like they were in school. Staff also stressed that advertisement in the schools should be planned and conducted earlier, more thoroughly, and more frequently.

## **Parents' Perspective**

### **How They Heard About the Program**

Parents with children participating in the library program were often regular visitors of their library and actively involved in library programming. Advertisement methods included social media,

family members, school recruitment efforts, flyers and advertisement within the library, and word of mouth.

### **Primary Reason Involved Child**

Parents valued the opportunity to engage in reading with their children throughout the summer. Motivation and achievement in school were described as reasons to continue participation in the summer reading program, especially when there was alignment with reading standards. Programming was described as exciting for children and encouraged reading through prizes, presentations, and opportunities for socialization.

### **Benefits of the Summer Reading Program**

Parents described library staff as welcoming, accommodating, and informative. Benefits also included opportunities to socialize, accelerated reading growth, decreased summer learning loss, enhanced motivation to read, and better preparation for the upcoming school year. The free resources of programming and books were also appreciated.

### **Aspects Liked Best/Engaged Child**

Similar themes emerged between the benefits of the summer reading program and aspects liked by parents. Hands-on activities and interactive learning opportunities were enjoyed by the parents and children. Parents found the prizes and free resources to be valuable components of the program. The efforts of the library staff and activities provided during programs were also valued by parents and their children. Home schooling parents appreciated the library resources and opportunities for their children to interact with their peers.

### **Aspects Liked Least/Did Not Engage Child**

Parents described some challenges associated with the summer reading programs. The aspects liked least included the lack of teenage engagement, reading tracking and online platforms, program hours and schedules, some presenters' lack of experience with young children.

### **Suggestions**

Parents' suggestions overlapped with the aspects that they liked least about the programming. Suggestions included encouraging teenager involvement in programs and resolving technology issues.

### **Summary**

Across the five libraries, a number of best practices are being implemented as a part of the summer reading program. Examples of collaboration with local schools and other partners were

cited; community members (e.g., teens, parents, and seniors) are serving as volunteers; lists of recommended reading books are being provided for children and teens; and an array of engaging activities are taking place. The libraries are utilizing a number of recruitment strategies to encourage summer reading program participation. Overall, parents are pleased with the summer reading program and expressed their appreciation for the library staff and the variety of resources and activities being offered through the program. They shared that their children are motivated by the prizes and they continue to encourage their children to participate in the summer reading program due to its academic benefits.

# Appendices

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# Appendix A: Site Visit Protocol

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# Library of Virginia Site Visit Protocol

Summer 2014

A McREL evaluator will observe the library setting for approximately 30 minutes. This observation protocol is intended to be completed by the McREL evaluator during the observation period. Emphasis should be placed on capturing areas cited in the observation checklist via digital photos. The photos will be an important part of the vignettes developed for each library site visited. Any photos that include individuals will require a signed photo release form.

## Section 1: General Information

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Library: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer: \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 2: Observation Checklist

	Present/ Observed	Not Present/ Not Observed	Comments
There are enough tables and chairs for library patrons			
Child-sized tables and chairs are available, allowing the children's feet to touch the floor when sitting			
There are alternative seating options available (e.g., beanbag pillows, soft cushions, rocking chair, or sofa)			
All furniture is sturdy and in good repair			
There are other furnishings to make the library feel inviting (e.g., area rugs, carpeting, and cushions)			
There is enough shelving for toys, books, and other materials			
The books are attractive and in good condition			
Sufficient space is available for several activities to go on at one time and traffic patterns do not interfere with the activities			
Arrangement of the room(s) makes it possible for library staff to provide visual supervision			

## Section 2: Observation Checklist

	Present/ Observed	Not Present/ Not Observed	Comments
The library is organized to emphasize open space			
The library is divided in smaller sections by activity			
The library is divided in smaller sections by age groups			
The library has a room where the summer reading programs are held			
Areas are clearly defined throughout the library			
Areas are clearly labeled with pictures/words throughout the library			
There is easy-to-read and highly visible signage to aid patrons in finding materials			

### Additional Observation Notes:

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### Section 3: Individual or Group Interview Questions

**McREL Evaluator:** Individuals who were involved in the planning and/or implementation of the 2013 Summer Reading Program need to be interviewed. Additionally, it is likely that the library system director and branch manager will be in attendance for the interview and may also have responses to offer on some of the questions.

**Overview:** McREL International is working with the Library of Virginia to study the implementation and effectiveness of the Summer Reading Program held during the summer of 2013. As part of the study, we administered a survey in the fall of 2013 to collect information related to best practices that support early literacy and reading outcomes of youth patrons from various age groups, including young children, children, and teens. Examples of best practice areas include collaboration with schools or districts, parents and community volunteer involvement in activities, utilization of Virginia Standards of Learning in the summer reading program planning, provision of workshops for parents of children to support reading at home, and so on. In addition, you may have experiences with other best practice areas that are not covered by our interview protocol. If you do, after going through our interview protocol, I would like to hear your feedback related to these areas as well.

1. Please describe your role and involvement in the 2013 Summer Reading Program.
2. Below is the list of best practice areas we are interested in. **Please share your approaches, strategies, experiences, successes, and challenges in these areas when you implemented the 2013 Summer Reading Program.** If your building did not implement a particular best practice area during the 2013 program, please share why.

	Best Practice Area	Approaches, Strategies, Experiences, Successes, and Challenges	If not checked, what are the reasons?
<input type="checkbox"/>	My library building has a strong collaborative relationship with one or more local schools.		
<input type="checkbox"/>	My library building collaborated with local partner schools on the 2013 Summer Reading Program.		
<input type="checkbox"/>	My library building invited parents to assist with program activities and events at my library during the 2013 Summer Reading Program.		
<input type="checkbox"/>	My library building had a large number of community members (at least 50 volunteers) who assisted with the 2013 Summer Reading Program.		

	<b>Best Practice Area</b>	<b>Approaches, Strategies, Experiences, Successes, and Challenges</b>	<b>If not checked, what are the reasons?</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	My library building incorporated the Virginia Standards of Learning in the 2013 Summer Reading Program planning and programming.		
<input type="checkbox"/>	My library building provided a list of recommended reading books for children from various age groups as part of the 2013 Summer Reading Program.		
<input type="checkbox"/>	My library building had activities for 2013 Summer Reading Program participants at least every other week.		
<input type="checkbox"/>	My library building provided workshops for parents of children who participated in the summer reading program to support children's reading activities at home.		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:		

3. What were your library building's strategies to ensure that the 2013 Summer Reading Program participants were reading at or above their reading level, if any?
4. What are some strategies for the 2013 Summer Reading Program that you used that may be either considered unique or worked really well for the following two areas:
  - a. Recruiting participants
  - b. Ensuring that all participants were actively involved in the activities and events
5. Were there any other strategies or practices that your library building implemented during the 2013 Summer Reading Program that we have not yet discussed?
6. What are the lessons learned from your experiences with the 2013 Summer Reading Program? What are your suggestions for other library buildings in planning and implementing summer reading programs in the future?

## **Appendix B: Parent Group Interview Protocol**

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**Library of Virginia Summer Reading Program**  
**Parent Interview Protocol**  
**Summer 2014**

**General Information**

**McREL Evaluator:** A sample of parents whose children participated in the 2013 Summer Reading Program should be interviewed as a part of the study that McREL is conducting for the Library of Virginia. You should plan to conduct one group interview. Each library site is responsible for contacting and inviting parents to participate in the group interview.

**Overview:** McREL International is working with the Library of Virginia to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the Summer Reading Program held during the summer of 2013. We would like to hear your perceptions of the summer reading program and your child's (children's) experiences. As an appreciation of your time and feedback, the Library of Virginia is providing refreshments.

**Group Interview Questions**

1. Please describe your child's involvement in the 2013 Summer Reading Program. How did you hear about the program?
2. What was the primary reason you decided to involve your child in the summer reading program at this library?
3. Based on your experiences, what were the benefits of the summer reading program for your child? Did you see any difference in your child's reading behaviors or reading abilities? Describe the differences.
4. What aspects of the summer reading program did you or your child like the best or seemed to engage your child the most? Why did your child like these activities?
5. What aspects of the summer reading program did you or your child like the least or seemed to engage your child the least? Why?
6. What suggestions do you have for your library in planning and implementing the summer reading program in the future?