

Home Libraries

Effective Measures for Improving Reading Achievement

Introduction

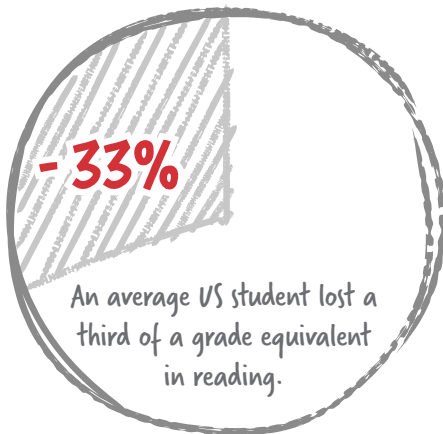
Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, summer learning programs were among the list of critical reading intervention initiatives. Programs were needed to combat the summer slide, where students lose ground on reading skills gained during the school year due to lack of access to books. Reading intervention programs held during out-of-school summer months provided resources to engage students in reading practice, sometimes connected to engaging themes such as STEM or movie tie-ins. With the onset of the pandemic in early 2020, concerns about reading achievement shifted. Reading loss became a problem to address not just during the summer months, but during the school year as well.

The Summer Slide

Concerns about the summer slide were, and continue to be, justified. While many students experience setbacks in the summer months, studies show that children from low-income families are most impacted, primarily because they lack the same access to books as children from wealthier families. The school library is typically closed during the summer months, and in low-income communities bookstores are more limited. Public libraries often lack the resources needed to build extensive children's collections. The net result is that children from low-income families lose approximately two to three months of reading achievement growth every summer while children from wealthier families add about a month of reading achievement. (Alexander et al., 2001).

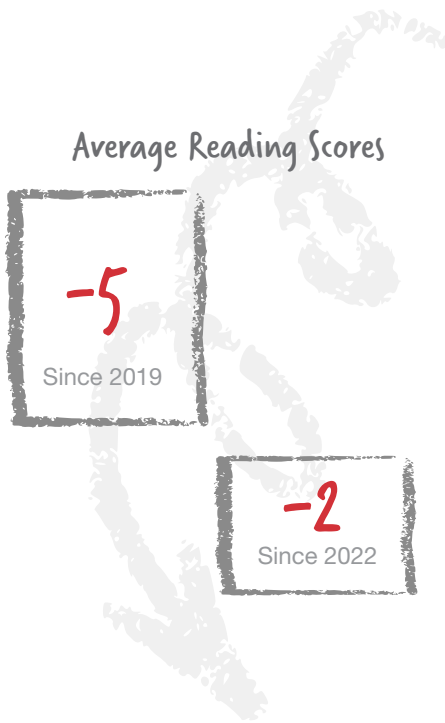
“ Reading is like any other human proficiency—practice matters. Voluntary, engaged reading, in school and out, is powerfully linked to high levels of proficiency.”

(Allington, 2012)



COVID-19 Pandemic

The February 2025 Education Recovery Scorecard – a collaboration of the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University and The Educational Opportunity Project at Stanford University – reports that during the pandemic, the average US student **lost a third of a grade equivalent in reading**. At the same time, children from low-income families were among those most affected. School closures during the pandemic were more common in schools with higher populations of low-income families. For many students in these schools, remote learning was more challenging due to limited access to computers at home and reliable internet service. Children lacked access to teachers and materials for learning, and sometimes suitable environments at home for studying and help with homework.

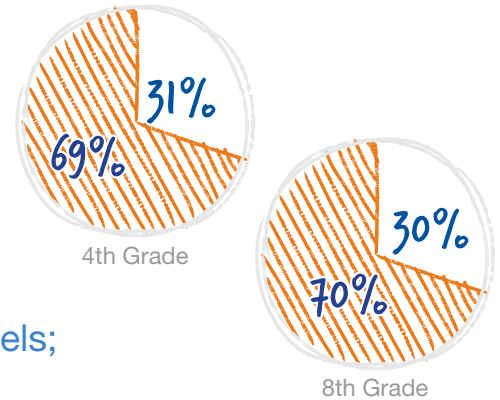


NAEP 2024 Results

The continued impact of the pandemic on student learning is reflected in the most recent reading scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), administered every two years by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Results from the NAEP 2024 assessment show that among **fourth and eighth grade students tested, average reading scores declined** two points from 2022 and five points from 2019. Reading achievement declines were generally driven by students already falling behind in reading – those in the bottom 25 percent of test-takers.

NAEP results are reported by levels of reading proficiency: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. The 2024 assessment indicates that just 31 percent of fourth grade students tested scored proficient or advanced levels in reading while 69 percent performed at basic or below basic levels. Results are similar for eighth grade students tested. Thirty percent performed at proficient or advanced levels; 70 percent performed at basic or below basic levels.

2024 Reading Levels



Lacking Necessary Skills

In other words, **nearly two thirds of students tested lack necessary skills to read** and comprehend texts written for their grade level. Reading intervention strategies and resources are needed year-round to address both the summer slide and continued learning loss after the pandemic.

The Impact of Home Libraries

Resources that have been found to effectively impact reading achievement are books in home libraries. **Expanding a child's access to books increases their reading.** When children read books on a variety of topics, their understanding of the world grows, along with their vocabulary – key components in reading comprehension. Impacts are reflected in reading achievement (Mol & Bus, 2011).

“...having books in the home helps children from families in all walks of life and all around the world go further in school and the beneficial effect is greatest for children from disadvantaged homes.”

(Evans, 2010)

A longitudinal study of 41 third grade children attending inner-city schools found that the number of books in the home predicted reading achievement, even when controlling for the mother's level of education and the child's reading ability (Halle et al., 1997). A study spanning 20 years and 27 nations found that the presence of books in the home has a substantial effect on a child's academic success, regardless of parents' education or economic status (Evans et al., 2010). Finally, a comparative study of 25 countries found that the number of books at home had a stronger effect on reading performance than home literacy activities and parental attitudes toward reading. Additionally, in every country studied, the larger the home library, the better children performed on standardized reading tests (Park, 2008).



Even just a few books make a difference.

“

...providing access to children's books...may do more to promote children's academic achievement than any other achievement-related behaviors”

(Halle et al., 1997)

Studies have also found that books in home libraries have the greatest impact on children from low-income families where access to books is limited. For these children, **the biggest gains come from the first few books** added to a home library, and even a few books can make a difference. Studies of summer reading programs showed that when children had just 10 books to read over the summer, their reading achievement increased. After three consecutive summers, the difference in reading achievement between students with access to 10 books and those without access was almost a full year (Allington, 2024). Most significantly, in their research on school achievement among children from low-income households, Halle et al. (1997) concluded that “providing access to children's books...may do more to promote children's academic achievement than other achievement-related behaviors.”

Importance of Family Engagement

In addition to access to books at home, family engagement in literacy activities impacts student achievement. Children benefit when caregivers engage in activities that support literacy learning such as reading books aloud and talking about books together. Many studies point to the positive impact of parent involvement on student achievement (Koepp et al., 2022; Price & Kalil, 2018; Mocsin, 2025). A research summary by the National Literacy Trust indicates that family involvement with reading activities has a positive impact not only on reading achievement, but also on a child's interest in reading and attitudes towards reading (Clark, 2019). Finally, a study by the American Psychological Association shows that children whose family members are engaged in their learning show higher levels of overall academic achievement.

Conclusion

One of the most impactful measures for improving reading achievement is to provide students with books to read at home. To combat the summer slide and support continued learning recovery after the pandemic – books are needed year-round, not just during the summer months. Additionally, tools that help families engage with children in reading activities further strengthen the impact of home libraries on reading achievement.

How We Can Help

The evidence is clear: consistent access to engaging reading materials at home plays a pivotal role in fostering literacy and lifelong learning. Families need practical tools to turn these insights into action, ensuring that reading becomes a natural part of daily life. To support this goal, we provide resources designed to make at-home reading both accessible and enjoyable, complementing the research strategies outlined in this paper. Explore how these solutions can help you empower families and strengthen reading habits at follett.com/12/link/TAKEHOMEBOOKS.

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