

BookSpring’s Strategy to Combat Summer Reading Loss

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Introduction

All BookSpring educational programs are designed to positively change attitude, knowledge, and behaviors towards reading. Many of these programs evolved from a longstanding collaboration with Reading is Fundamental (RIF) and utilize motivational experiences paired with a free-choice, no-cost book distribution to raise literacy rates among children.

To further expand their educational impact, in 2015 BookSpring decided to focus on a critical, challenging, and recurring period in a child’s educational journey: the summer. The summer can be a difficult time to maintain academic progress for any student, but it is especially challenging for lower income students. These students often lack access to educational resources and learning-based activities and, as a result, experience an erosion of key skills.

This unfortunate phenomenon is known as the “summer slide” and research suggests that over 80 percent of students from economically disadvantaged communities lose reading skills over the summerⁱ. In fact, as much as 85 percent of the reading achievement gap between lower-income students and their middle- and upper-income peers can be attributed to the summer slideⁱⁱ.

Perhaps most concerning is the compounding and cumulative effect that occurs over the course of these students’ elementary education. Not only do they struggle to recoup the skills they lost over, but they will again face the same circumstances the following summer. By the end of 5th grade, students that experience the summer reading slide [can be up to three years behind their peers](#).

Read for Success Pilot (2016 – 2017)

Over their tenure, BookSpring had become increasingly aware of the negative impact that the summer slide was having on students in Central Texas. In fact, Austin Independent School District (AISD) superintendent Dr. Paul Cruz, who has made Beyond the Classroom reading a core part of his [AISD Literacy Plan](#), created an targeted initiative in 2016 to help encourage students to [read over the summer](#) and attempt to mitigate the summer slide.

The summer slide extends well beyond Central Texas, and RIF was also aware of this problem. In 2012, RIF set out to test and confirm the efficacy of a new model aimed at

reducing summer learning loss. The model, which they called “Read for Success”, consisted of various components to help prevent summer reading loss including eight STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) themed books for every student, teacher lesson plans and books, and parent engagement materials.

A two-year evaluation commenced testing the model in 16 states (including Texas) and 41 school districts with more than 33,000 second, third and fourth grade students. The outcomes revealed a near complete reversal of the benchmark 80 percent loss in reading skills over the summer. In fact, on average, 57 percent of students tested showed statistically significant improvements in reading proficiency from spring to fall each yearⁱⁱⁱ.

Invigorated by these promising results, RIF opened the Read for Success to their strategic partners and BookSpring was approved to pilot the program in spring 2016 with two Title I elementary schools in AISD. BookSpring served a total of 185 second grade students and also partnered with AISD’s Department of Research and Evaluation to collect student IStation reading test data pre- and post-summer.

The IStation reading software is available to schools in AISD and features computer adaptive assessments that utilize an animated, game-like interface to engage students and evaluate their reading ability. IStation’s own customized evaluation metric (IStation’s Indicators of Progress, or ISIP) assesses the reader’s ability across a broad spectrum of essential skills and also provides a dynamic grade-level equivalency rating (based on statistical norming from students across the nation). With this platform as an evaluation tool, a preliminary analysis of BookSpring’s year one data showed similarly strong results to the RIF model with 66 percent of students achieving reading gains over the summer.

In the second year of the pilot, BookSpring partnered with a third school - bringing the total number of students served to 401 - and conducted more rigorous data analysis. Not only did BookSpring maintain the gains from the previous year, but they saw a slight increase from 66 percent to 68 percent in number of students that had improved reading scores after the summer.

The year-two program data was also evaluated against a control group of AISD students and normalized for factors such as age, ethnicity, economic status, English language learner status, and whether the child was enrolled in special education programs. These data further supported the efficacy of the program. When analyzing the post-summer score to the pre-summer score (score differential) of both groups, the BookSpring intervention group achieved a 36 percent higher average score (Figure 1). Moreover, after determining no statistical difference in the baseline (pre-summer) average scores between the two groups, BookSpring students saw a significantly higher post-summer average score (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Average Pre- and Post-Summer ISIP Reading Score Differentials

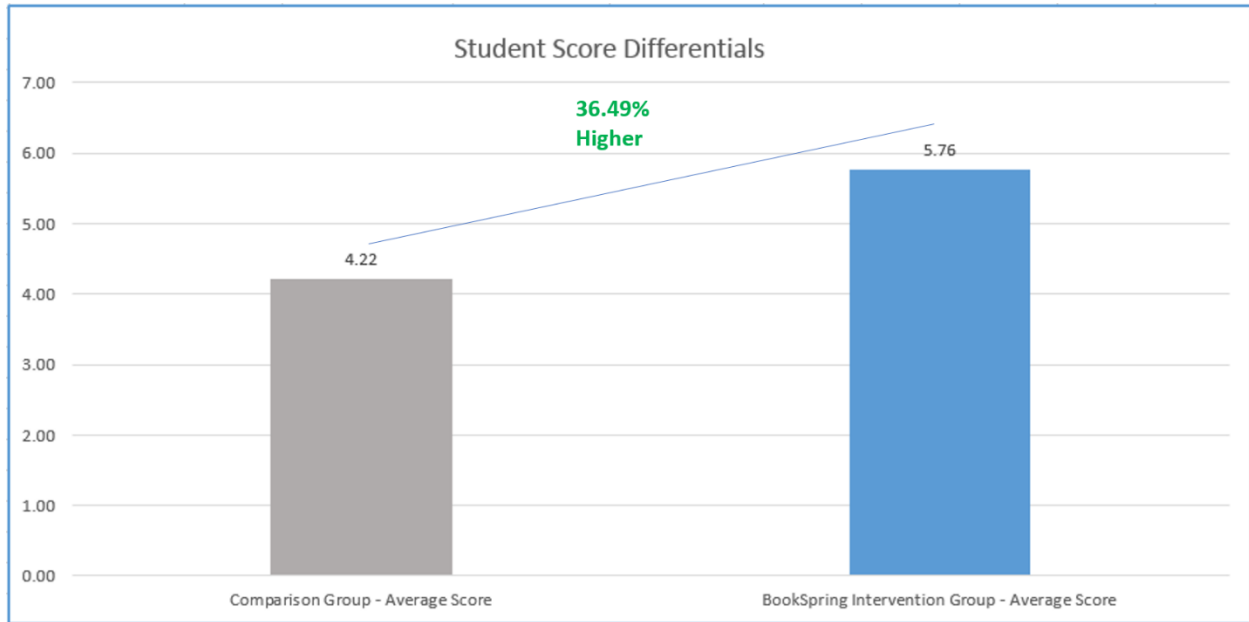
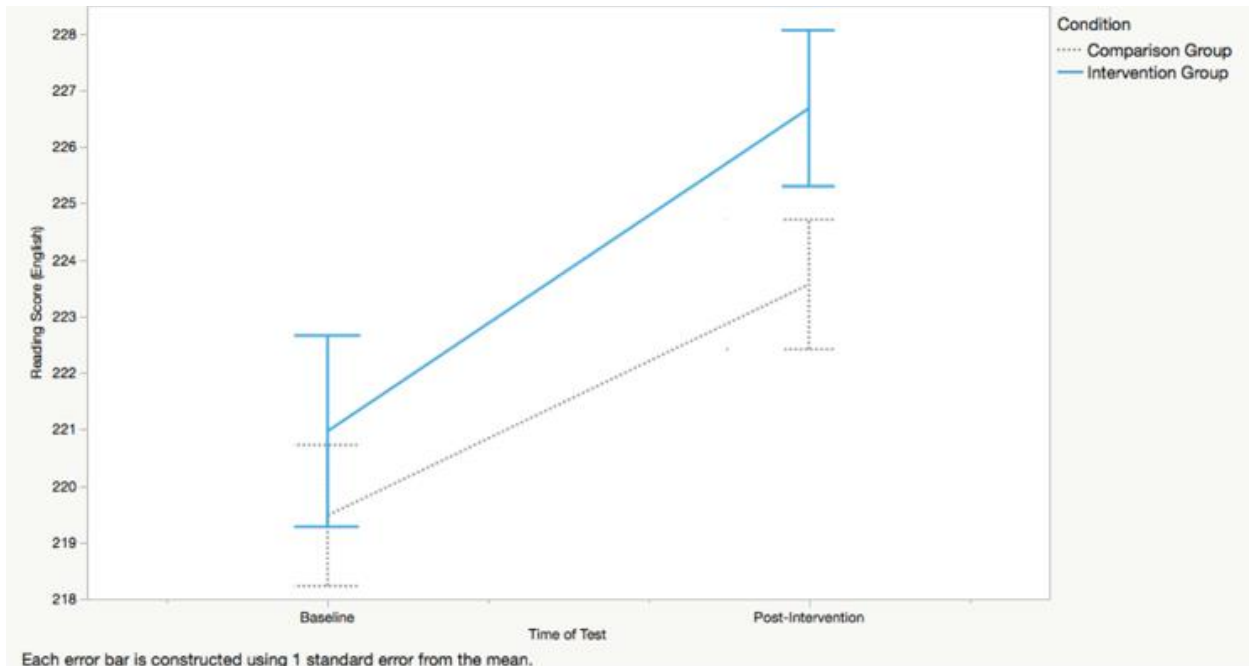


Figure 2. Average Pre- and Post-Summer ISIP Reading Scores



Post hoc comparisons using t-tests indicated that at pre-test, the mean score in the Target group ($M_t = 220.35$, $SD_t = 23.66$) was did not differ significantly from the Comparison group ($M_c = 217.18$, $SD_c = 20.11$), $t(386) = 1.26$, $p = .10$ (one-tailed). However, at post-test, the mean score in the Target group ($M_t = 226.11$, $SD_t = 19.44$) was significantly higher than that of the Comparison group ($M_c = 223.26$, $SD_c = 19.44$), $t(463) = 1.633$, $p = .05$ (one-tailed).

Strategic Review of Read for Success Pilot

The success of the Read for Success pilot and the program's alignment with the BookSpring mission presented an exciting opportunity to evolve the pilot into a full-scale, signature BookSpring program. But before any decision could be made, the BookSpring team needed to thoroughly assess the strengths and weaknesses of the model.

Three clear strengths emerged. The Read for Success model utilized the same core methods to combat illiteracy as all BookSpring programs: increasing access to books in the home, empowering students through book choice, and creating an enduring association with books through a motivational atmosphere. The model even goes further with the inclusion of a 10-week in-school curriculum that is in-part designed to help solidify a habit of reading going into the summer.

The model also possesses value in its clarity of purpose: to reduce the summer slide. Moreover, by addressing reading skills for 1st and 2nd graders, Read for Success is an effective response to the [research](#) and widespread educational standards that designate third-grade reading proficiency as a key educational milestone.

The third strength of the Read for Success pilot was access to relevant, insightful, and quantitative data. Though not a requirement to participate in the Read for Success program, BookSpring's personal relationship with AISD allowed BookSpring to gain unique access to data-driven, in-class reading assessments (Istation tests). This valuable data would continue give the BookSpring the ability to measure the program's impact and ensure that quality is maintained year after year.

However, there were several areas that needed to be addressed before BookSpring could create a full-scale program that was optimally designed for its partners and the community. First, was better alignment with the student demography. The Central Texas region includes a large Hispanic population. In [AISD](#), BookSpring's primary school district, 6 in 10 students are Hispanic and 25 percent enter school as English Language Learners. Read for Success was built for national deployment and the teacher curriculum needed to be better culturally aligned with the demographics of Central Texas.

Similarly, the Read for Success teacher lesson plans do not directly address the Texas-specific state reading objectives and skills (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills - [TEKS](#)) that students are expected to master by the end of each school year. While Read for Success is not designed to integrate with state and national testing standards, this omission could have an impact on school integration and teacher adoption of the lesson plans in BookSpring's primary service area.

The last area that required revision was greater overlap between the curriculum books utilized by teachers during the program and the books selected by the students. BookSpring and many parent readers have observed emerging-readers' preference for

books that are familiar. Among other reasons, this familiarity with a book can reduce the anxiety and intimidation when learning to read. During the pilot, BookSpring observed that this area could be optimized by increasing the quantity of curriculum books available to students during the book distribution.

Summer Success: Development, Launch, and Future

After fully reviewing the strengths and addressing the weaknesses of the Read for Success pilot, BookSpring decided to move forward and develop a full-scale program in early 2017. BookSpring's Summer Success program builds on Read for Success' strengths and better tailors it to the BookSpring core audience in three primary ways:

1. *More Culturally Aligned:* Revised teacher book list that includes more Spanish available titles.
2. *Easier Teacher Adoption:* A new easy-to-implement curriculum with teacher lesson plans that address grade-specific TEKS reading objectives and include creative activities.
3. *Expanded Summer Reading Opportunities:* Raise the overall quantity of student books and availability of curriculum books in the distribution

Additionally, BookSpring broadened the STEAM program theme and book selection to include a “career and jobs” focus that encourages students to answer the question “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

BookSpring also decided to raise the number books that students select from eight to 10 in coordination with its [20 books by 2020 campaign](#), which stems from well-documented research that shows that having 20 or more books at home is a significant indicator of three more years of education for a child.

In the summer of 2017, BookSpring was awarded a multi-year grant to help finalize the development of the program, launch it, and actualize an ambitious three-year growth plan. Over the fall of 2017, BookSpring completed the revision of the curriculum and began reaching out to potential partner schools. And, as of early 2018, BookSpring looks to be on target to add three new partner schools – doubling the number from the previous year and serving an estimated 600+ students.

Much of the future of the Summer Success program will be jointly focused on optimizing the program and adding new partner schools. BookSpring also hopes to build on their relationship with AISD in the joint effort to combat the summer slide. In fact, an exciting potential collaboration has emerged with The AISD Language Arts Curriculum Department which is charged with [enacting](#) the district's bold Literacy Plan. Synergies between the AISD and BookSpring could help bring the power of the Summer Success program to the students across the entire district and even crystalize a model that could be implemented in districts across the state.

The Summer Success program holds great promise and the BookSpring team is excited to see the program grow and evolve. Please stay connected and check in with <https://www.bookspring.org> for the latest news on Summer Success and how BookSpring is helping drive literacy and build a community of lifelong readers.

Key References and Notes

ⁱ Alexander, Karl L., et al. "Lasting Consequences of the Summer Slide." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 72, Apr. 2007, pp. 167–180.

ⁱⁱ Allington, Richard L., et al. "Addressing Summer Reading Setback Among Economically Disadvantaged Elementary Students." *Reading Psychology*, vol. 31, no. 5, 2010, pp. 411–427.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Read for Success: Combating the Summer Learning Slide in America*. Reading is Fundamental, www.rif.org/sites/default/files/RIF-Read_for_Success-Results.pdf.