

# CHILDREN'S SUMMER LIBRARY USE

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Children's use of public libraries during the summer after kindergarten is affected by household socio-economic status (SES) and the availability of a neighborhood library, according to a new *Issue Brief* from the National Center for Education Statistics.<sup>1</sup>

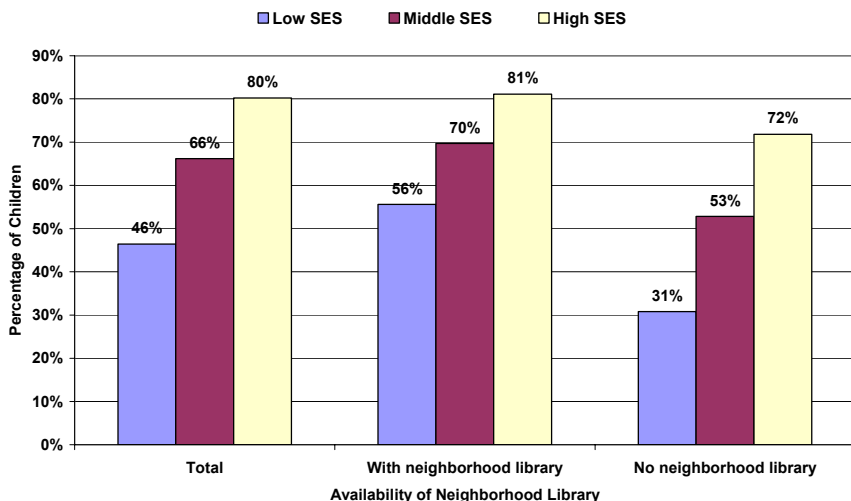
Children from low SES households<sup>2</sup> were less likely than other children to:

- participate in reading events at libraries or bookstores;
- visit parks, museums, zoos, and historic sites;
- attend concerts or plays;
- go on vacation; and
- attend camp.

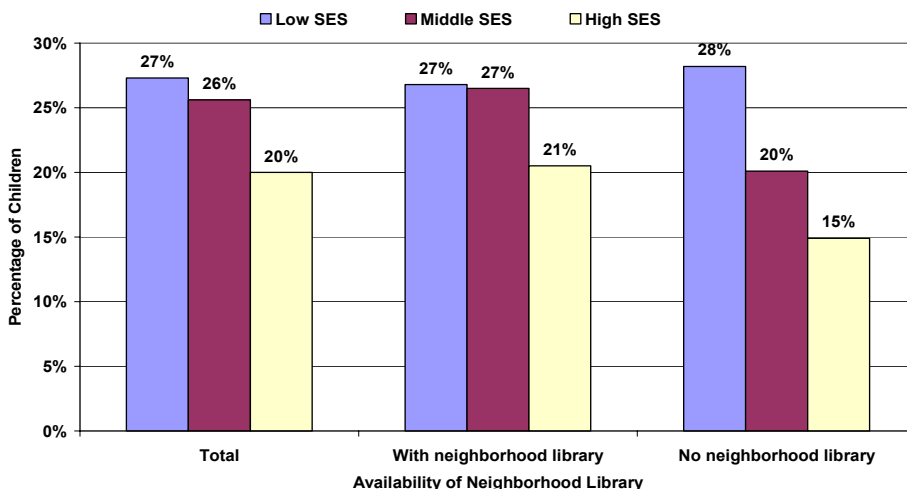
Children from low SES households were least likely to have visited the library during the summer.

- Overall, less than half (46%) of low SES children visited the library during the summer. Low SES children living in neighborhoods without a library fared even worse—less than a third (31%) of them visited a library.
- By contrast, almost two-thirds (66%) of middle SES children and four out of five (80%) high SES children visited the library during the summer.

**Chart 1**  
 Percentage of Children Visiting the Library During the Summer After Kindergarten by Socioeconomic Status (SES) and Library Availability



**Chart 2**  
 Percentage of Children Who Visit the Library in the Summer After Kindergarten Who Attend Story Time by Socioeconomic Status (SES) and Library Availability



In neighborhoods without libraries, more than half (53%) of middle SES children and almost three-quarters (72%) of high SES children still managed to visit the library. (See Chart 1.)



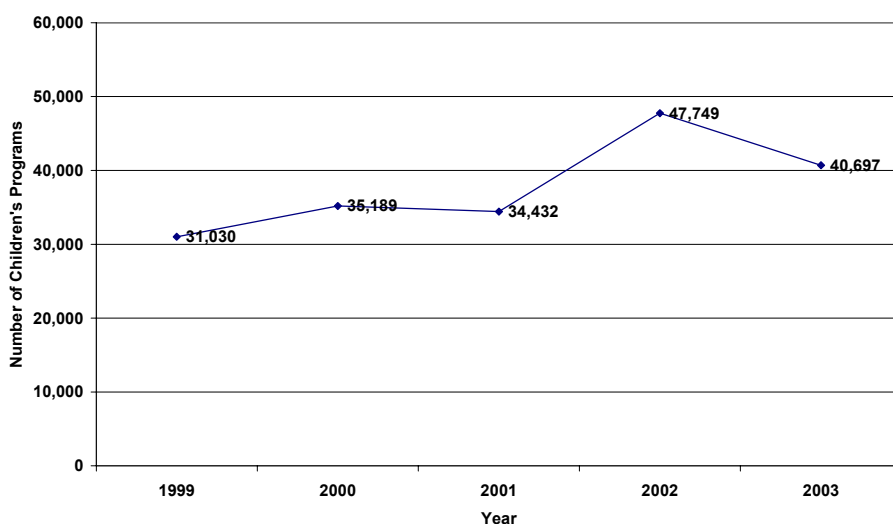
- While low SES children were least likely to get to the library during the summer, they attended library story time at the highest rate.
- Over one-quarter of low (27%) and middle SES (26%) children who visited a library attended story time compared to only 20% high income children.
- For children with no library in the neighborhood the difference was even greater: 28% of the low SES children who went to the library attended story time, but only 20% of middle and 15% of high SES children did so.

This suggests that low SES children and/or their caretakers enjoy and seek out library story times. Public libraries should consider offering more of these types of programs for young school-age children during the summer. (See Chart 2.)

The importance of summer activities to students' success in school has been shown in past studies.

- A 2001 survey in southern California found that according to teachers, summer reading program participants were more likely to read above grade level than non-participants.<sup>3</sup>
- Testing has shown that all children make comparable gains during the school year, but disadvantaged children's test scores fall behind during the summer months.<sup>4</sup> Summer library activities can help head this off.

Chart 3  
Number of Children's Programs Offered at Colorado Public Libraries by Year



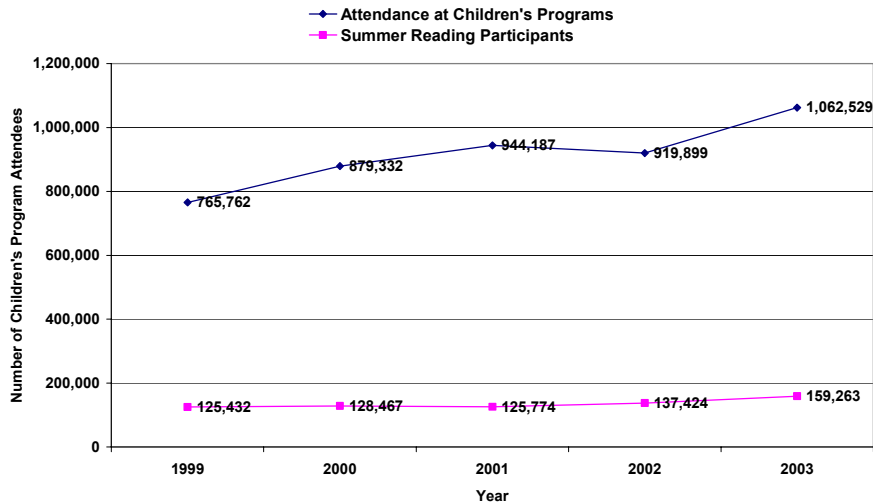
How do Colorado's children use public libraries in the summertime? We don't have specific data about use by socioeconomic group or programming specifically during the summer, but the available data does indicate that Colorado libraries are bringing more children in each year to participate in library activities.

Colorado's public libraries offered fewer children's programs in 2003 than the previous year, but attendance at the programs went up. Attendance at public library children's programs in 2003 was over one million for the first time. (See Charts 3 and 4.) The number of summer reading program participants has also increased in the past five years.

Colorado's public libraries will want to consider the findings about children's summertime library use in program planning. Outreach efforts to bring story times and summer reading programs to children living in lower income neighborhoods, particularly neighborhoods without libraries, will help this underserved group take advantage of library resources. These children will take the benefits of summer library activities back into their classrooms in the fall.



Chart 4  
Number of Children Attending Children's Programs and Participating in Summer Reading Programs at Colorado Public Libraries by Year



#### Footnotes

1. National Center for Education Statistics (September 2004). The Summer After Kindergarten: Children's Activities and Library Use by Household Socioeconomic Status. Accessed 9/14/2004 at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/2004037.pdf>.
2. Household socioeconomic status (SES) is a composite variable used in the ECLS-K study. It is based on parental education, parental occupation, and household income in spring 1999. Low SES and High SES are the bottom and top 20% of the variable's distribution. Middle SES is the middle 60%. See **ECLS-K, Base Year Public-Use Data File, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99: Data Files and Electronic Code Book; (Child, Teacher, School Files): User's Manual** at [http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001029\\_5\\_8.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001029_5_8.pdf) section 7.4.2, page 7-8 for details.
3. Minkel, Walter (2002, February). Study: Summer Reading Helps Students. *School Library Journal*, 48 (2), 24.
4. Johnson, Peter (2000). Building Effective Programs for Summer Learning. U.S. Department of Education. (Citing findings by Karl Alexander and Doris Entwisle from the Baltimore Beginning School Study.)
5. Colorado Public Library Statistics. Available at [http://www.lrs.org/pub\\_stats.asp](http://www.lrs.org/pub_stats.asp)

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