

Literacy Strategies That Work

How Before-School, Afterschool, and Summer Contribute to Higher Literacy Proficiency

1. Individualized Instruction

- » One-on-one tutoring with low-achieving and at-risk students have a strong, positive effect on student achievement in reading.¹
- » Research suggests small-group discussion promotes deeper understanding of text, higher level thinking, and improved communication skills among students.²

Foster Grandparents provide one-on-one reading tutors in Fort Dodge. This strategy has been very beneficial for the students who need additional help with their reading. Fort Dodge students also receive individualized assistance during homework help from afterschool program staff.

Lincoln Academy of the Arts in Davenport has the benefit of employing school-day staff so students have the chance to work one-on-one with their school-day teacher who now has the time to provide the additional support that student may need.

2. Learning Through Play and Performance

- » Story and literature dramatizations give students an opportunity to bring a piece of literature to life. Acting out characters' parts engages students while building memorization, fluency, and comprehension skills.³

At the Galaxy afterschool program in Grinnell, students in grades K-4 participate in Talent Tuesdays. Students create their own plays, writing, producing and performing them for the rest of the program weekly. The students gain confidence and skills by doing repetitive writing and performing in front of others.

3. Reading Aloud

- » Reading aloud is the foundation for literacy development. It is the single most important activity for reading success.⁴
- » Children can listen on a higher language level than they can read, so reading aloud makes complex ideas more accessible and exposes children to vocabulary and language patterns that are not part of everyday speech. This, in turn, helps them understand the structure of books when they read independently.⁵

The Des Moines afterschool program at Meredith has the teacher read through the story first, and then students go through it aloud several times together. They then work through the material with a partner and can perform it aloud. This strategy has been found to increase student literacy as well as piqued their interest in the differing forms of literature.

4. Expanded Exposure over the Summer

- » Low-income students lose more than two months in reading achievement over the summer break, despite the fact that their middle-class peers make slight gains.⁶
- » More than half of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities.⁷

Linn County Extension's S.T.A.R.S. afterschool program in Cedar Rapids implements a family literacy initiative as part of the program's summer camp. Teachers identify books based on student reading levels and choose three for the student to take home, one at a time, over the summer. Once the student and parents have read the book together, each family fills out a postcard, answering questions about the book and if they liked it. Once the postcard is returned, the students receive another book to take home. Several parents indicated that without the program, their children would not have picked up a book at any time that summer.



Iowa Afterschool Alliance
2910 Westtown Parkway, STE 302
West Des Moines, IA 50266
515-243-2000
www.iowaafterschoolalliance.org

Michelle Rich
Network Coordinator
mrich@sppg.com

¹ Literacy in Afterschool Programs, http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/toolkits/literacy/pdf/AST_lit_literature_review.pdf

² Afterschool Lit Review p. 28, http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/toolkits/literacy/pdf/AST_lit_literature_review.pdf

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practice for Children*, Bredekamp, Copple, & Neuman, 2000

⁵ *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for all Children*, Fountas & Pinnell, 1996

⁶ *The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores: A Narrative and Analytic Review*, Cooper, 1996

⁷ *Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap*, Alexander et al, 2007