



EQUITY AND ACCESS FOR ALL

A TITLE I DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT FOCUSED ON
ACCESS TO BOOKS, KINDERGARTEN READINESS,
AND MITIGATING THE SUMMER SLIDE

Family Engagement Aligned to Instructional Goals



A Three-Pronged Approach to Supporting Literacy at Home

Former Title I Coordinator Dr. Kelli Cedo is passionate about making sure that every student from a low-income family in her district has abundant access to books all summer long and throughout the school year as well. Working in partnership with **Scholastic's Family and Community Engagement (FACE)** team, Cedo has implemented a three-pronged approach to filling the homes of her Title I students with books. Drawing from three decades of convincing research, she sees this as the best way to boost students' reading proficiency, increase their engagement with books, and prevent the summer reading slide.

Core Beliefs that Serve As the Foundation for the Increasing Equity and Adequacy:

- Education should be equitable and adequate.
- All children should have access to high-quality resources and experiences.

TITLE I DISTRICT PROFILE

TOTAL SCHOOLS:
13 Schools

GRADES:
PreK-Grade 12

TOTAL ENROLLMENT:
3,000 students

FREE & REDUCED
LUNCH POPULATION:
72%



"Providing appropriate books for families to enjoy together connects parents to the school and helps build a love of reading at home. This program is a wonderful way to build parental involvement while bringing families together through books. Research indicates that students who spend time reading at home make more gains in reading than those who do not have that opportunity. I really like partnering with the public library so that families understand the variety of programs the library offers in addition to supporting and reinforcing what children are learning in school." —Sheila Wynn, Title I principal

The Plan

To design a scaffolded program integrating Title I and curriculum teams focused on increasing access to books year round, stimulating kindergarten readiness, and supporting family literacy in the home.

Title I federal funding has many purposes in the district. One purpose is to close the achievement gap by mitigating the effects of poverty due to access and resources and curbing the summer backslide by providing families access to great literature.

Cedo and her team work to ensure that all Title I students:

1. Have access to books of their choice throughout the summer months
2. Build a home library through a quarterly book distribution program
3. Participate in their first book distribution when they register for kindergarten

With 13 Title I schools in her district serving more than 3,000 students, it was important for Cedo to partner with local organizations to get the support she needed. Cedo provided professional information about family engagement to each Title I school with the help of Scholastic's *Read and Rise* program. She also partnered with the local public library to establish a summer reading program for Title I children and their families that features weekly themes, lessons, and fun activities.

Cedo uses Title I funding to give all Title I families access to high-quality children's literature. Research has shown that a lack of access to books over the summer months is academically devastating for lower-income students, the population that Title I serves. By the time these students reach sixth grade, they are reading at a level that is two or more years behind their more affluent peers who have to access books year round. Literacy researchers Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen maintain that a lack of reading material over the summer months is responsible for 80% of the achievement gap between children of means with year-round access to books and children who are cut off from books when schools close for the summer (2013).

Summer reading loss is cumulative. Children who missed out over the summer months don't "catch up" in the fall. By the end of sixth grade, children who have repeatedly fallen behind in reading skills over the summer are two years behind their classmates. It is for this reason that researchers estimate that two-thirds of the achievement gap for diverse students living in poverty is the result of summer learning loss. (Alexander et al. 2007; Cooper et al. 2000; McGill-Franzen and Allington 2013)

Increasing Access to Books

Year-Round Book Distributions

Rooted in research, the district implemented a year-round book distribution strategy connected to social and emotional themes. Two books per quarter were distributed to all K-5 students in Title I schools. Books were specifically chosen to highlight:

- Sharing
- Feeling
- Respect
- Acceptance/differences

There was more to the program than just books. This was a scaffolded approach, per James Kim's research. Teachers were given the same titles to create classroom libraries and conducted read alouds. Librarians also worked with the same titles to facilitate book chats. These strategies fostered the school-to-home connection.

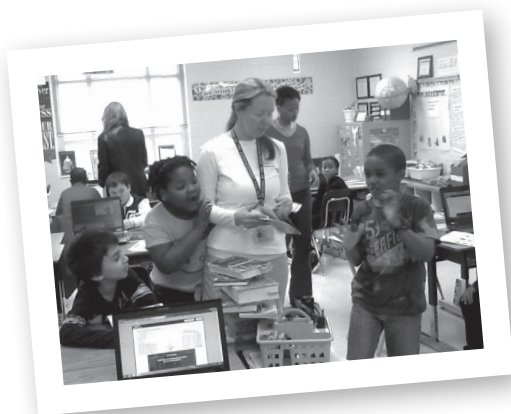
Incoming Kindergartener Book Distribution

This strategy was another collaboration designed to support school readiness. The Title I office partnered with teachers to confirm appropriate high-interest kindergarten readiness titles.

As families registered for kindergarten they were greeted with a set of five new books for their child. The front office staff were encouraged to read all books prior to registration so they could engage parents in a discussion about the books and motivate them to read with their child. This strategy sends a clear message that literacy is important in the district, and that the work starts at home.

In order to estimate the budget and number of books needed, Cedo partnered with the district administration to forecast the number of incoming students based on enrollment history. Diversity was another key element. By partnering with the district demographer, Cedo was able to have a better understanding of the families being served. This information helped her choose diverse books.

Finally, periodic phone calls were administered throughout the summer to reinforce key instructional tips.



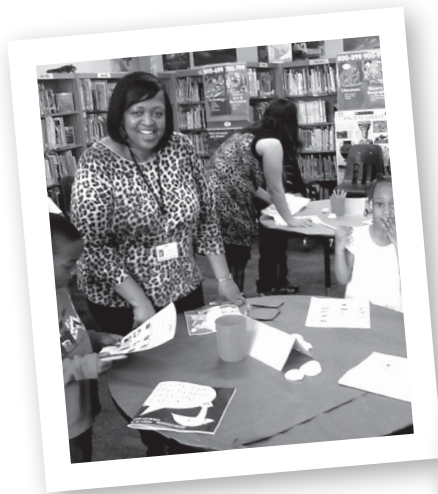
Inspiring Summer Reading

The district's goal was to help the community understand the critical relationship between student book selection and motivation to read: self-selected reading is twice as powerful as teacher-selected reading in developing motivation and comprehension (Guthrie and Humenick 2004).

After some discussion, the community decided that students should be able to choose the books they would read over the summer. The teachers helped refine the list of books for each grade level so that students would have 20 to 30 books to choose from.

In partnership with Scholastic the district launched a customized summer reading program.

- Every grade level had its own book list (20–30 titles).
- The titles were based upon level, genre, interest, and the following year's content.
- Scholastic created a custom order form to allow students to choose their books. Teachers helped students choose from a variety of books by author, genre, interest, etc. Therefore we had to give Scholastic the number of students in each class so they could customize and ship the forms.
- One copy of the book was shipped to each school for students to review during book selection.



Increasing Access to Books

Book distributions must not overwhelm schools. As Cedo's district distributed books each quarter, they needed a plan to handle book distribution. Cedo explains her detailed and thoughtful approach:

"We worked with each school to develop a distribution process. Because we sent books home quarterly, schools let us know whether they had space for book storage during the year. Most schools did not have the requisite storage space. Therefore we had to work with another department to figure out book storage and determine how the schools would arrange for shipment of books to their school during the corresponding quarter. This worked because we had buy-in from central office leadership and they supported the storage process that we developed. Schools helped us decide how to package the books for summer based upon the possible selections from Scholastic."

Finally, Cedo reminds us that it's important to take the time to get logistics feedback from the participants at each school. As Cedo notes, you'll want everyone involved to greet each new delivery of books with enthusiasm because they've had a hand in helping to create an efficient, functional plan for receiving, sorting, and distributing the books. It's a process of continuous learning; every year Cedo and her team learn something new that they incorporate into next year's book distribution plans.

Self-selected reading is twice as powerful as teacher-selected reading in developing motivation and comprehension.

(Guthrie and Humenick 2004)

Sample District-Wide Book Distribution Plan

An easy distribution during a very busy time of year!

- Adapt to reading abilities and interests by working with Scholastic to create customized student selection forms with titles based on level, genre, and interest.
- Deliver one copy of each book to each school for students to review when they select their books.

Each school decides on a student self-selection plan:

Example 1: Grade-Level Rotation

The books can be rotated through the grade level. The reading specialist helps the teacher introduce and "book talk" each book. The specialist also helps the students choose their books.

Example 2: A Summer Reading-Themed Distribution Party

The school works with the library and PTA to decorate the library and provide snacks. The reading specialist schedules classes to come to the library to choose their books.

- After students fill out their selection forms, the school collects the forms and ships them back to Scholastic by class.
- Scholastic ships the books to each school, bundled by student and by classroom teacher.

The children are so happy when they get a new book for their library. For children to have their own place to keep books is also very special. They go right to their library crate and choose a book. My older son also keeps the magazines he receives in the mail in his crate. We have created a cozy place for them near their library crate where they can relax, read, and enjoy a good book. —Chelyse Miller, Parent

Professional Learning to Foster Collaborative Leaders

Cedo instituted a robust professional learning program, which helped the 13 participating Title I schools in the district develop a refined understanding of family engagement as they worked together to create their own shared philosophy for how to partner with the parents and caregivers in their communities.

Understanding Family Engagement

During the first year, professional learning centered on successful family engagement programs and how best to mitigate the debilitating effects of poverty on academic achievement. Cedo and her team worked to ensure that everyone understood the purpose of Title I funding and the best ways to use the money to serve low-income students and their families. Cedo focused on program effectiveness, shifting culture, developing a philosophy of family engagement, brain research, and attachment theory—all topics related to literacy and mathematics. She spent the first year primarily building consensus among the Title I principals of what was effective for students—which ultimately led to an agreement to purchase books and support reading programs. This consensus was made possible by the robust program of professional information and support.

Family Reading Workshops

Cedo and team continued to explore, refine, and co-create the family engagement philosophy and discuss how to best support it across the 13 Title I schools. During the second year they spent a great deal of time supporting teachers and principals at the school level and helping them understand the allocation shifts in their family engagement funding. Cedo provided parents with support and information about the role of literacy and numeracy in their children's future success. And family engagement liaisons received training in Scholastic's *Read and Rise*, a program that provides families with hands-on strategies for building literacy at home, reinforces the fact that parents are their child's first and most important teachers, and builds text-rich environments at home with take-home books and other parent resources.

Books in the Home

In the third year, Cedo centered professional learning on great ways to use books at home. Implementing a “train the trainer model,” Scholastic trained a group of family engagement liaisons and parents, who then introduced the model to their respective schools, expanding its circle of information and influence.

This program is a wonderful way to encourage parental involvement while bringing families together through books ... Every time children open a book and read they are practicing their reading skills, learning about the world, and increasing their confidence as readers. They discover that reading is fun and full of intriguing information. This program gives parents the resources they need to help their children achieve academic success. —Wendi West, reading specialist

Outcomes

Determined to eliminate the dire academic consequences of summer reading loss, Cedo and her team decided that the best response was to ensure access to books over the summer months. During the school year and summer of 2013, 13 Title I schools provided summer reading material to students. To analyze the success of this program, the district examined students' Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) scores from the spring and fall of 2013, allowing Cedo and her team to track the increase, sustainment, or decrease in student reading proficiency over the summer. They examined data for the entire program as well as for each participating Title I school.

Research suggests that children whose parents have lots of books are nearly 20 percent more likely to finish college. Indeed, as a predictor of college graduation, books in the home trump the education of the parents. Even a child who hails from a home with 25 books will, on average, complete two more years of school than would a child from a home without any books at all . (Evans et al., 2010)



Getting Started in Your District

With the right planning and support, Cedo says that her program could be replicated in districts nationwide. Here are tips to help you replicate Cedo's program—and results!

Work with All Stakeholders

A school program will succeed to the extent all stakeholders understand its importance to student learning. This is an understanding you must build with your stakeholders—teachers, principals, district administrators, librarians, and parents—and repeat often. By working together with all concerned parties, you establish a set of shared beliefs that you can build your program on. Cedo explains that she has been able to implement home libraries for all Title I students because she continually reminds the stakeholders of its importance.

Be Strategic

These things do not happen by chance. You must plan. Make sure that every committee you establish and every meeting you call creates actionable next steps.

—Dr. Kelli Cedo
Former Title I Coordinator

Build in Choice

Cedo explains how she uses choice to help stakeholders buy in to the program. When stakeholders are offered some say in the program rollout, they are more likely to become enthusiastic participants. For Cedo's home library program, the principals were given some control over book selection including choosing the grade levels and fiction and nonfiction titles. Additionally, principals determined how to best explain the book program to the families in their communities.

Take the Time to Do It Right

Cedo urges those who might be interested in following her lead to find the time to do it right. She made sure that the office staff of each participating school was well-acquainted with the kindergarten book pack. Then when Title I students registered for school, the staff presented each new student with a book pack, which served as a lovely welcome to the school community.

The district was involved in a district-wide social emotional learning (SEL) initiative. Therefore, many of the books that each school selected for summer reading and home libraries were titles that extended and refined the district's SEL initiative. Cedo also took the time to involve the local public library, which provided an additional level of support.

Planning for Student Success

Program Requirements

- Be focused on student achievement.
- Set clear goals—know your “why” behind the work.
- Collaborate—stakeholder’s voices must be heard.
- Be data-driven.
- Partner with your community.

Tools for Accountability

- Setting **measurable** goals
- Set concrete **implementation and budget** timelines
- Define **stakeholders’** roles clearly
- Align to targeted **district goals** and strategies
- Utilize district staff to help analyze the **results** (e.g., statisticians, SPSS software, etc.)
- Be rooted in **research**. This is the foundation of the work and facilitates results.

Be Sustainable.

- Share your results.
- Schedule regular updates and partnership opportunities with stakeholders to build long-term goals and programming.
- Partner with your richest asset, your community.

Effective Partnerships for Student Success

Closing Thoughts

Above all, Cedo recognizes the importance of relationships and partnerships. About the all-important buy-in from district partners, she writes:

“Focus on **internal partnerships** with all of the stakeholders. Get everyone on board and make sure that they understand and believe in the purpose of the program. Also ensure that your district leadership supports the work and is willing to speak on behalf of the program.”

Cedo also notes the importance of external partnerships. She found her partnership with Scholastic invaluable:

“Focus on **external partnerships** that can help with the needed materials and resources to ensure the program can be implemented. Without having a distributor with so many book titles we would not have been able to fully implement this program. Because of our partnership with Scholastic, teacher committees had all the genres and book levels they needed right at their fingertips. The Scholastic staff supported by participating in the committee selection process. They also helped to develop and implement professional learning. Ensure that your external partners not only have the capacity but also the passion and understand how important this work is to students. They must believe in your purpose and goal.”

And Cedo recognizes the importance of **community partnerships**:

“Look for other organizations that are pursuing the same goal and start working strategically with them to support your program’s growth and sustainment. The public library was offering summer reading challenges and programs. We partnered with them to support getting more students to participate in the summer reading challenge through our school summer reading program, while they brought the library programming to the Title I schools to ensure that our students had access to high-quality reading support. The public library supported the online systems in which student could input their book titles and number of minutes reading, as well as the library programs, and staff. Title I provided books for the home, space at the schools, staff to support the program, and funding for transportation. Title I schools and the library staff worked together to develop a summer schedule and next steps.”

Cedo’s program stands as a shining example of what’s possible when multiple teams come together and work collaboratively with passion and vision to help all students become confident, engaged readers with year-round access to high-quality, glorious books.

“I find that wherever my journey has led me, starting as a literacy coach, that human capital and building strong teams is essential to any work we can embark upon and ultimately accomplish.” —Dr. Kelli Marie Cedo

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