

Looking Back – and Forward – to the Summer Reading Program

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Collaborative Summer Library Program

All across Ohio, kids made a splash, teens made waves, and adults watered their minds during the 2010 Summer Reading Program. Public libraries took to this year's shared themes from the [Collaborative Summer Library Program \(CSLP\)](#) like – a book to water? Oh, no – like a fish to water, please! Fortunately, we all managed to keep the books dry, and still had a great time with the “water” concept and the “Make a Splash – Read!” theme, which lent themselves to wave upon wave of fun activities, programs, crafts, and storytimes.

Public libraries are asked to report their summer reading statistics and evaluation to the State Library. This year, 253 individuals, representing 218 public library systems, responded to the online survey. They reported a total of 386,683 people participating in summer reading programs across Ohio in 2010, including 269,662 children, 50,819 teens, and 66,202 adults. That's a lot of summer readers!

112 libraries (45%) reported that participation in their SRP increased from 2009, while 85 libraries (34%) reported that participation decreased. Economic factors were almost universally cited as reason for a drop in participation, though some libraries noted that economic factors actually increased the level of participation in their programs.

For many libraries, budget reductions meant fewer incentive prizes, less publicity and promotional materials, reduced outreach, or, most profoundly, reduced staffing and library hours. Several libraries also noted area population decreases as residents look elsewhere for jobs.

On the other hand, depressed economic circumstances in communities were reported to increase SRP participation at some libraries, thanks to families seeking out free activities and unemployed adults having more time to participate in an adult SRP or to bring their children to SRP activities. Steady or increasing demand put pressure on financially strapped but highly creative librarians. As one wrote, “A good theme with a good incentive with a good format with good activities help to make the programs, but with declining funds, I was surprised that I was able to accomplish what I did.”

Another librarian wrote, “This was my first year planning the Summer Reading Program and I loved the theme! I was complimented many times on how fun it was!” CSLP resources for public libraries, including custom theme artwork from celebrated illustrators and a manual packed with program ideas based on the year's theme, can make SRP planning affordable, manageable, and fun.

Even with a standard theme and universal manual, there's lots of room for creativity and the flexibility to take advantage of local opportunities. The CSLP manual provides many ready-made ideas, but local libraries play with the theme to create programs, crafts, activities, and booklists, collaborate with area businesses on incentives, and put a unique local spin on the concept. Ohio public libraries are not required to use the CSLP theme, and some develop their own SRP themes using in-house resources to create artwork and materials. 221 survey respondents (94%) used the “Make a Splash – Read!” theme, while 24 respondents (10%) developed independent children's SRP themes. Several local themes played

on the water concept (such as “Books Ahoy,” “Float Your Boat – Read,” “Everything’s Beachy,” “Catch the Reading Wave,” and “Dive Into a Good Book”). Other libraries celebrated a milestone anniversary, created a “green”/environmental theme, or developed unique SRP concepts for their communities.

For the complete SRP Evaluation report, which includes data on participation, themes, program length, tracking methods, resources and incentives, planning, and workshops, plus two appendixes, which include all comments and suggestions submitted by survey respondents, please see

<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohsumread/-/articles/content/108497087>.

Public libraries are already deep into planning for next summer. One energized survey respondent wrote, “This was my first year as a librarian. I previously taught preschool. I am glad to have one SRP under my belt and can’t wait for next summer to put my ‘on the job training’ to good use.”



The summer 2011 CSLP theme for children is “One World, Many Stories,” featuring artwork by Pura Belpré Award-winning illustrator [Rafael López](#). The teen theme is “You Are Here,” featuring artwork from [Svetlana Chmakova](#), creator of *Dramacon* and *Night School*. The adult theme is “Novel Destinations.” It may be nearly winter, but librarians are thinking summer, working this concept of world cultures and travel and planning for the 2011 SRP, while readers daydream of places far and near and get ready to celebrate and explore the world at their public library next summer.

