



OHIO Summer Library Program

2023 REPORT

By Janet Ingraham Dwyer
Youth Services Library Consultant
State Library of Ohio

Ohio's public libraries are the stars of summer, with a long history of bringing people together through creative, community-oriented programs for everyone from babies to seniors. The centerpiece of most libraries' summer programming is a self-directed challenge to meet a goal, whether a specific amount of reading, or a selection of learning activities including reading, library programs, community involvement, and creative work, or self-selected goals. Community members register, or simply pick up a reading record or program booklet to complete over the summer, then return regularly to the library for prizes, incentives, and special events.

Each year, the State Library of Ohio asks Ohio public library systems to report on their summer activities and results. The summary is based on data from the 226* library systems responding to the 2023 Ohio Summer Library Program (SLP) evaluation survey.

* 25 of 251 Ohio public library systems did not respond to the 2023 survey, so their SLP participation and program attendance are not included in this report.



ALL TOGETHER NOW



399,818 participated** in an Ohio public library's summer library program in 2023 including:

245,688 Children

42,360 Teens

92,892 Adults

2023

28% increase over total reported participation in 2022 (312,354) and 84% of the total reported participation in 2019 (477,349).

©CSLP 2023 Collaborative Summer Library Program Kindness/Friendship/Unity artwork was illustrated by Frank Morrison.



Paul from Paul's Cool Scales & Reptile Adventures took time during his popular program for New Carlisle Public Library to build a connection with this young patron.



Summer reading participants at Wayne Public Library enjoyed receiving their prizes!



Children at Bliss Memorial Public Library worked on a gigantic coloring sheet together.

Cover: Attendees at the Party at the Library program at Glouster Public Library (Athens County Public Libraries) painted butterfly wings for the library's garden.

**Participation is defined by individual libraries and represents the number of people who registered for, attended, or completed the SLP. This loose definition is used annually and allows statewide data to be compared from year to year, accommodating individual libraries' definitions of participation. 61% of responding libraries indicated that anyone who registers is defined as a participant; 25% indicated that anyone who does at least one thing (check out/ read a book, complete an activity, attend an online program, submit a raffle entry, etc.) is a participant; and 3% indicated that only people who complete the program are counted as participants. The remaining 11% define participation in other ways.

931,788 was the total reported attendance*** at Ohio library programs and events related to SLP (both in-person and online) in 2023 which included:

555,476 at Children's Programs

42,448 at Teen Programs

105,830 at Adult Programs

228,034 at All-Ages Programs

31% increase over total reported program attendance in 2022 (709,187) and 84% decrease from the total reported program attendance in summer 2019 (1,110,010). Intergenerational/all-ages program attendance was particularly strong, nearly doubling from 117,519 total attendance in 2022.

Of the 226 responding libraries, all but one provided an SLP for children, 97% provided an SLP for teens, and 91% provided an SLP for adults. One library reported that it offered a suite of summer learning opportunities instead of a formal summer reading program.

"We are pleased with the growth of our program this year. We love the sense of community and excitement that summer reading programs generate at our small rural library. The businesses in our community also really came through to support us this year, allowing us to offer prizes that get the kids (and grown-ups!) excited about reading."

Martha Wall
Selover Public Library



A storytime goer at the Plains Public Library (Athens County Public Libraries) put on her own storytime for the library's stuffed animals.



Library mascot Rascal and a young library patron enjoyed the Geauga County Public Library's 2023 Summer Reading Kick-off at the county fairgrounds.



Grafton-Midview Public Library celebrated bees and farm-to-table. The children's area featured 300 cardboard-roll bees, plus paper dahlias, cardboard bee cells, and a farm stand.

*** These numbers are total attendance at responding libraries' SLP-related library programs (storytimes, performers, parties, etc.). It is not expected that these numbers indicate unique attendees, because of the likelihood that individuals attended multiple programs.

Variations on a Theme

Many Ohio libraries used the Collaborative Summer Library Program's "All Together Now" theme or a variation, with programming and décor focused around community, inclusiveness, friendship – and even puzzles and bees. Kristyn Wilkins at Mohawk Community Library noted that "the theme this year left a lot of room for individual library interpretation." Sheila Privett at Andover Public Library reported: "Our patrons enjoyed the theme, which we did a play on. BEE Kind, BEE Creative, BEE United, All Together Now." And Rachael Barker at Dr. Samuel L. Bossard Memorial Library shared that her library "focused on kindness, friendship, and community helpers."

Rachael also shared a memorable patron story:

"We gave away Care Bears as one of our summer reading prizes. The kids loved getting their Care Bear. One little boy, Brian, signed up at the very last week of the program. He was so excited to start reading that he immediately sat down on the floor and started reading his Narwhal & Jelly book, then asked his caregiver to read another book right away. She told him he could read another book in the car. Brian completed the program in a little under a week. Later, I saw him clutching his Care Bear at church; he ran over to tell me that he'd completed the summer reading program!"



A little patron got to explore big equipment at the Geauga County Public Library's 2023 Summer Reading Kick-off at the county fairgrounds.

Licking County Library built a new systemwide service that tied in to the All Together Now theme. According to Executive Director Julia Walden:

"This year we introduced a 'Community Workbench' station at each location. Each bench was customized to fit the location and decorated with pegboard, tools, and other items. The library invited visitors of all ages to use the Community Workbench to practice core values like teamwork, friendship, and empathy through hands-on activities that changed weekly. During Friendship week, visitors could make friendship bracelets; during Giving week they could make a dog/cat toy for their pet and one to donate to the Humane Society; and during Empathy week they could practice reading Braille. The workbenches were positively received and helped us instill in our rapidly growing and changing community that we are 'All Together Now'."



Barberton Public Library created a seven-week kitchen literacy program called Kitchen Confidence for kids and teens 8-18. Attendees learned about reading recipes, measuring ingredients, knife skills, kitchen safety, and meal planning, and made a recipe each week to practice the skills. The local food bank provided lunches for attendees, and the farmers' market donated a basil plant for each attendee and tokens they could spend at the market.



Ashland Public Library's Bookmobile and Outreach team hosted multiple events throughout the summer, greeting children with bubbles, books, and fun.

Partnerships Create Opportunities

For some libraries, "All Together Now" was as much a strategy as a theme. Numerous survey respondents described new and ongoing partnerships that connected the library to other community assets and broadened its visibility and reach. Megan Taylor at Brown County Public Library shared that, "We partnered with more local organizations than we have in the past. We had wonderful attendance this year and our patrons loved participating. We had many people thank us for having such diverse programming. They were able to come to the library and experience things that they would not normally have available to them in such a rural area." Rikki Unterbrink at Shelby County Libraries described "an amazing partnership with the city school system which provided a new book to each child in grades K-4 on their last day of school. The book included a bookmark advertising our Summer Library Program kick-off event. We feel the school's involvement doubled our kick-off attendance."

According to Lindsay Brandon-Smith, Ashland Public Library "worked with Ashland County Parks and Ashland City Parks to bring outdoor programming, StoryWalks®, and Little Free Libraries to the community, and partnered with United Way of Ashland County again for their Fun Fridays where our team provided library materials and giveaways to promote literacy. Our 20th year of Touch-A-Truck wrapped up Summer Reading in a brand-new location. We partnered with Ashland Main Street to move the event downtown. This increased awareness and event attendance and

provided space for more vehicles." Lindsay emphasized the value of all these partnerships to the library: "We saw an increase in logging, program attendance, and overall participation all summer long. Our team was able to connect with new people and organizations, share new experiences, and continue to surpass the previous year's expectations. We can't wait for next year to make Summer Reading 2024 even better!"

Like Ashland, Archbold Public Library also leveraged partnerships to expand library offerings to the outdoors. Martie Yunker wrote, "We have been utilizing our parks' outdoor and indoor locations for programming. While this takes quite a bit more planning and effort, it is worth the effort, as it allows a lot more people to attend. The StoryWalk® is VERY popular. Many of the changes that we put in place because of COVID – outdoor venues, larger indoor venues, StoryWalks® – we have continued because it has been such a positive experience for all."

Elyssa Williams at Napoleon Public Library shared that the Florida branch "partnered with The Ability Center in Sylvania to promote their DREAM project, which advocates for books by, for, and about people with disabilities in school and public libraries. Our branch manager said that the storytimes she held with the DREAM books – as well as the guest readers – really opened the kids' eyes to disability awareness in the community."



Archbold Public Library organized a field trip to a bee farm, where beekeeper Wayne Dinius introduced attendees to the world of bees and shared fresh honey from the comb.



The Alexandria Public Library hosts a historical walk in the nearby cemetery each year, in collaboration with the local museum. The walk features actors dressed in period costumes and is always a popular event.

GIVING BACK & LIFTING UP

Another notable trend that related to the All Together Now theme was the inclusion of charitable and community-building opportunities in library programs and woven into reading and activity challenges. "We were able to do a community helpers day, which was very fun!" wrote Jillian Lastoria at Mount Gilead Public Library. "We also provided service project sheets for an extra entry into our drawing for the grand prize. This year's theme inspired us to do that, and we'll keep offering service sheets in the future!" Juliana Bering at Mercer County Library's Zahn-Marion Township Branch shared that her library's "speaker and craft programs centered around a community theme--one week, the local animal shelter, and participants could donate items for shelter for extra points; one week a local organization that provides diapers and baby supplies to mothers in need, and participants donated diapers and wipes for extra points."

A longstanding way that Ohio public libraries support children and families is by distributing meals and snacks through the USDA Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or through locally funded (non-SFSP) arrangements. According to Ohio Department of Education records, 139 individual Ohio public library locations were SFSP sites in 2023. This is a decrease from 2022, when 157 libraries served as SFSP sites. However, 25 responding libraries indicated that, while not SFSP sites, they provided summer meals or snacks to youth through other means. Some libraries also facilitate food access through little free pantries, community refrigerators, and other food distribution activities. Andover Public Library tied food access into its summer challenge, according to Sheila Privett: "We did a food drive; any patron who brought a non-perishable food item would receive an incentive to win a grand prize. We donated over three carts of food to the local food pantry."

Stark Library has developed an entire outreach SLP in response to community needs and realities. According to Julia Shaheen, "Summer Fun School is our way of reaching families and children who might not

otherwise participate in Summer Challenge because they can't get to the library, don't use the library regularly, or aren't interested in participating." Julia elaborated: "For Summer Fun School, we visit summer camps and schools as well as several low-income neighborhoods. At the summer camps, children receive an activity kit and a book. At most of the camps, we also offer storytime. At the neighborhood stops, we offer activity kits, books, a meal bag from the Stark County Hunger Task Force, and an incentive for parent engagement. The activity kits help children problem-solve, be creative, and learn new skills. They are engaged and excited for our visits. Some of our staff met families they hadn't worked with before. They also encouraged families who attended the outreach programs to visit the library – and some did!"

"At our library we focused on community. We decorated with handprint cutouts of local kindergarten students, and murals painted on cardboard, to look like the buildings in our village and surrounding villages. We received many compliments on how much thought and detail were put into them. We also used our display case to collect food for the local food pantry. We worked to include community members as co-hosts in programs as much as we could, and to do programming that fostered collaboration and socialization for all ages in the community."

Kristyn Wilkins
Mohawk Community Library



The Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library participates in many parades each summer!



Marios and Luigis posed during a Mario Kart program featuring a track through the Children's Library at New Carlisle Public Library.

Hopeful Trends

SLP participation continues to rise across Ohio libraries and communities, though statewide turnout is still short of 2019 numbers. Overall event attendance was significantly higher than in 2022. If participation and attendance trends over the past two summers continue, summer challenge participation and event attendance in 2024 will be very near pre-pandemic levels. Some libraries have already reported turnout exceeding their previous records.

Shannon Keese at Fairfield County District Library surely spoke for many when she reflected, "It was a fantastic year, such a relief from the past few years. Everyone seemed so happy to be here, they loved all the programming, and we had a large number of people finish the program."

As Ohio public libraries plan for summer 2024, there's cause for hope and excitement in anticipation of another fun, rewarding, and engaging summer ahead.



Huron County Community Library hosted an intergenerational mosaic garden stone craft program at all four locations. These Wakeman Community Library patrons learned about glass mosaics and created their own garden stones, one to take home and one for the community garden. The Wakeman Redcap Eagles and the Village of Wakeman partnered with the library on this program.



Teen volunteers decorated the sidewalk for Way Public Library's SRP Kick Off Party.

"Last summer, Noel, age 9, was in the audience watching a Polynesian dance troupe perform as part of the library reading program. This summer, Noel performed at the library as part of the same troupe! We were so proud of her transition from observer to participant and confident artist."

**Maggie Bollar
New Carlisle Public Library**



Linda Rose from the Seneca County Park District presented a program called All Things Together in the Pond at Bliss Memorial Public Library.



The Madisonville Branch of Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library was one of over 15 CHPL locations that enjoyed a visit from Dino Buddies this summer.



Musician and storyteller Joanie Calem led a campfire singalong at Perry Cook Memorial Public Library.

This report describes 2023 Ohio public library summer library programs. 226 of 251 Ohio public library systems reported their 2023 SLP results using the Ohio SLP Evaluation Survey. Evaluative comments and suggestions from this survey are shared with the Collaborative Summer Library Program, Regional Library Systems, Ohio State Parks, Ohio State Fair, Greater Cleveland Aquarium, and Ohio Renaissance Festival as appropriate. Additional comments or suggestions about Ohio Summer Library Program resources are welcome at any time. Contact library consultant Janet Ingraham Dwyer at jdwyer@library.ohio.gov or 614-644-6910 to share your feedback, or if you would like a copy of the complete survey results.

Permission to quote from surveys was granted by each survey respondent quoted. Permission to publish photos was granted by Alexandria Public Library, Archbold Public Library, Ashland Public Library, Athens County Public Library, Barberton Public Library, Bliss Memorial Public Library, Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library, Grafton-Midview Public Library, Geauga County Public Library, Huron County Community Library, Napoleon Public Library, New Carlisle Public Library, Way Public Library, and Wayne Public Library. Permission to publish photos was granted by each library.

“A mother who brings her children to the library at least once a week told me she had been promoting us when she went camping with her friends. A parent friend told her he was having trouble ‘finding stuff to keep his kids busy all summer’ and she jubilantly said, ‘TAKE THEM TO THE LIBRARY! They have AMAZING programs there!’”

Rikki Unterbrink
Shelby County Libraries



Caitie Evers was Amethyst the Fairy, the star of a Fairy Tea Party at Napoleon Public Library.