As public libraries were planning their summer reading programs in January 2013, the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) invited groups such as the Indiana State Reading Association, teachers, parents, library representatives, college professors, and representatives of social service agencies to coordinate efforts to support children as readers over the summer.

Social service agencies such as United Way, YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, and many more all had existing plans. Unfortunately, children in many geographical locations throughout Indiana do not have easy access to a library in the summer months. Many of the social service organizations do not have access to the quantities of engaging books needed to support daily reading by children in their programs. Moreover, there was no concerted effort to support the social aspects of reading, which include talking about or sharing one’s reading.

We needed a plan to give these children access to literacy skills during the summer break.

**Initiating the Database**

The first step was to develop a database of non-profit literacy programs available across Indiana so that underserved areas could be identified and social service agencies and schools could discover one another and form partnerships. The advisory group recommended ways to use social media and professional contacts to spread the word and invite participation in the database.

The survey was launched in April 2013, and by the end of summer the database included schools, libraries, churches, Boys and Girls Clubs, youth organizations, and social service agencies (representing 73 of Indiana’s 92 counties). The database also clearly showed the counties where access to books and to a reading support system is limited or non-existent. IDOE now has 263 partners in 73 counties in Indiana.

**Making Resources Available**

The Department of Education worked with all its partners to solve the problem of access to reading materials. For children with no access to public libraries or the opportunity to read online, Discover Books, an organization that redistributes used books, helped. Also, the Professor Garfield Foundation donated 4,000 books to distribute to visitors at Indiana Black Expo and the Indiana State Fair.

The group also developed an important collaboration with around 20 summer nutrition sites around the state. Children who came for breakfast and lunch were provided with books to read. Discover Books provided 17 boxes of books to nutrition sites around the state (60–80 books in each box) and sent three and a half boxes to be given out at Indiana Black Expo.
Supporting Intrinsic Motivation

Now that children had greater access to books, we designed *Hoosier Family of Readers* to foster motivation for reading so that they would continue to read after the summer had ended.

In this program participants were asked to identify their “Family of Readers,” a group of caring adults and children, to spend at least 20 minutes a day on reading. Children were encouraged to pick books that *they* enjoy rather than read from a prescribed list or at a specific level of difficulty. Participants in *Hoosier Family of Readers* read whatever interested them (including graphic novels, magazines, newspapers, and on-line materials) and then shared by doing one of the following:

- Read with someone
- Read to someone
- Share with someone what he/she has read
- Listen to someone read
- Help others read
- Read independently

Participants were encouraged to download the flyer from the *Hoosier Family of Readers* website to identify their own family of readers. Before school was out in May, many teachers across the state presented the website to their students. More than 127,000 children and adults participated in the *Hoosier Family of Readers* between May and August 2013.

*Hoosier Family of Readers* participants also had access to 3,000 books through myON Books, a complete digital library with English and Spanish texts. myON Books reported that 44,259 digital books had been read in Indiana and that children and adults spent 7,771 hours reading digital books this summer (as of August 24).

Getting the Word Out

In addition to information on the Indiana Department of Education website and through social media, Indiana residents learned about the *Hoosier Family of Readers* through networking with the partners on the database. *Hoosier Family of Readers* was also promoted through media contacts including spots on PBS affiliates statewide and in personal appearances by Superintendent Ritz at schools and community events.

Special celebrity endorsers who made appearances included Young Adult award-winning novelist John Green, the Professor Garfield Foundation, Indiana Fever player Briann January, Lil Bub (the famous Bloomington cat who wrote his own book this summer), and Clifford the Big Red Dog.

Overall, we were proud of the success of the *Hoosier Family of Readers* and its coordinating projects. We feel that we worked together in a strategic way to make differences in many children’s lives, especially underserved students who often suffer most from the “summer slide.”

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