

Published in the Penn-Franklin News September 7, 2020

## Summer Reading Club and STEM

Summer Reading Club for kids is behind us for 2020, having been forced into virtuality by COVID-19, like a lot of other cherished activities. And this is a cherished activity, with a “backstory” that should impress especially you parents who enrolled your children over recent years. In COVID-19-free times, almost 1000 children attended on site annually at Murrysville Community Library (MCL) alone. There are only about 28,000 people in all of MCL’s service area, which includes Murrysville, Export and Washington Township, so this is a notable enrollment.

All of the 19 state-aided libraries, among the 22 member public libraries (25 sites with branches) in the Westmoreland Library Network™ (WLN), conduct annual Summer Reading Clubs normally. The WLN headquarters’ annual operating budget provides some funding in support.

Summer Reading Club is based on a national program for all ages, reaching public libraries in all 50 states. The national organization is Collaborative Summer Library Program™ (CSLP) [<https://www.csllpreads.org/about/>]. “CSLP began in 1987 when ten Minnesota regional library systems developed a summer library program for children, choosing a theme, creating artwork and selecting incentives that public libraries in the regions could purchase and use. State libraries and systems continue to join and CSLP continues to evolve, but its guiding principle remains the same, librarians sharing ideas, expertise and costs to produce a high-quality summer reading program for children.”

The 2020 theme for all ages, Early Literacy through Adult, was “Imagine Your Story.” Themes for Early Literacy and Children from recent prior years were: (2014) Fizz, Boom, Read!; (2015) Every Hero Has a Story; (2016) On Your Mark, Get Set, Read; (2017) Build a Better World; (2018) Libraries Rock; (2019) A Universe of Stories.

Children’s Librarians have a lot of latitude to customize their programming within the boundaries of each theme, and that is what they often do. There is also a lot of latitude to blend in STEM (Science/Technology/Engineering/Mathematics) content and concepts, even when the theme is not specifically STEM-related. The 2014 theme Fizz, Boom, Read! was particularly advantageous: this was the first time for Summer Reading Club that a theme seemed to already be directed to STEM material.

The Murrysville Community Library and the WLN, with its Allegheny Intermediate Unit 3 Math & Science Collaborative partner, began to incorporate STEM content in 2014. The only hurdle to overcome was that, even though librarians were already intimately engaged with the Summer Reading Club, focused professional development was needed to get them comfortable with STEM too.

The Math & Science Collaborative provided the professional development under a grant (Community Foundation of Westmoreland County), and has continued doing that for the last seven years under additional grants from other sources mentioned previously. The

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results have been very positive among Children's Librarians; you can visit the most recent annual independent participant survey by the Department of Education, University of Pittsburgh, at <https://www.aiumsc.net/grants-and-evaluation-reports>. The vast majority of participants acknowledge having had their STEM comfort level and commitment elevated. That story is so unique and interesting, including that it led to an actual educational product for the Math & Science Collaborative (which is Storytime STEM-packs™ [<https://storytimestem.com>]), that I'll tell you more about the product next time, in a continuation article. In so doing, you will get a peek into how informal, standards-based STEM learning for children is built into reading for pleasure.

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