

Summer reading program sees record-high numbers

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CHEYENNE – Among the Laramie County Library System's many goals, none is more imperative than improving and maintaining literacy among the county's youth.

And as the summer begins to wind down, library officials have big reasons to celebrate.

The library saw record numbers of children and adolescents register for – and complete – this year's summer reading program, easily surpassing the goal it set at the beginning of the summer.

"A year ago, we had 4,961 signups, and we wanted to break 5,000 this year," said Lucie Osborn, the county's head librarian.

"We did that and then some," added Beth Cook, the library system's manager of youth and outreach services. "We had a lot more signups this year, and in terms of completion, we had an increase in the completion rate in almost every age group."

In total, 6,179 people, including 4,252 children between pre-kindergarten and

By the numbers

Registrants and completions, Laramie County Library System Summer Reading Program, 2011-2012

Age group	Registrants 2011	Completions 2011	Percentage of completions, 2011
Pre-K	681	475	69.8%
Grades K-6	2,067	1,173	56.7%
Grades 7-12	692	413	59.7%
Adults	1,521	881	57.9%
Total	4,961	2,942	59.3%

Age group	Registrants 2012	Completions 2012	Percentage of completions, 2012
Pre-K	942	627	66.6%
Grades K-6	2,459	1,507	61.3%
Grades 7-12	851	520	61.1%
Adults	1,927	1,086	56.4%
Total	6,179	3,740	60.5%

Source: Laramie County Library System, Youth and Outreach Services

18 years old, registered for the program, with 2,654 children completing it and walking away with their own free book.

"They sign up to set a goal to read for either 25 days (30 minutes each day), 25 books or 25 hours," Cook said. "For every five that they finish, they get a prize, and once they finish the 25 goal, the children and teenagers receive a book as their completion prize."

Both Cook and Osborn said they're not certain why the program's numbers jumped as much as they did this year. That will be something the library's summer reading committee will discuss during their "debriefing" over the next few weeks.

In the meantime, they agreed that the important thing is more children than ever before are boning up on their reading, which will help them avoid the "sum-

mer slide" in reading skills that many school-age children experience while school is out.

But the summer reading program isn't just open to children and teenagers. Osborn said the library also encourages adults to sign up, since they help model the behaviors that children will take after.

"We know children imitate the behavior of the adults in their lives, so we encourage adults to read as much as we encourage children," she said.

Cook added that not only have more children than ever completed the program, many who did continued to stick with it as part of the library's "Read for a Good Cause" program.

Cook said that for every additional five books, hours or days a child completed after finishing the main reading program, they earned \$5 toward the Friday Food Bag Foundation, a local nonprofit that provides weekend meals to children in need.

Osborn said Cheyenne State Bank and the Rotary

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Read: Donation given for extra reading efforts

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Club of Cheyenne agreed to donate up to \$2,000 toward the Friday Food Bag Foundation, which would have required 400 children to complete an additional five books/hours/days milestone beyond their initial 25.

"We had 712 of those completions," Cook said, "which is awesome."

Osborn said Chick-Fil-A, Taco John's and the library foundation supplied coupons, which were used as prizes for milestones during the program. She added that the free books at the end were provided by a generous anonymous donor who has given the library tens of thousands of dollars for that purpose during the past two years.

"Giving children and teens a book at the end is a huge incentive, in my opinion,"

Cook said. "These kids get so excited when they walk out with their own book. It's our favorite part."

This year's program wasn't a complete success, however. Cook noted that while more pre-kindergartners completed the program than ever before this year, their overall completion rate did drop slightly, to 66.6 percent from 69.8 percent last summer.

That, Osborn said, is the statistic she and the rest of the summer reading committee will be focusing on the closest, in hopes of finding out what worked and what didn't.

"I care more about the completion of the pre-K and elementary than the older groups," Osborn said, again noting the importance of developing good reading habits early in life.