

PERSPECTIVE



Susan P. Baier, top, is executive director of the Allen County Public Library. **Melinda Haines** is chief executive officer of the Literacy Alliance.

A summer of exploration

Library, Literacy Alliance keep young minds engaged outside of school

**SUSAN P. BAIER
AND MELINDA HAINES**

Did the stars align? Was it a match made in heaven? We do not know.

All we know is the Allen County Public Library and The Literacy Alliance, with their 175 combined years of literacy work, partnering on developing young readers who are ready to excel academically just made sense.

As the directors of the Allen County Public Library and The Literacy Alliance, respectively, we know that early literacy is fundamental to all aspects of academic success, and it takes a village to raise a reader. That is why we are thrilled to share the success of the long-standing initiative, Project Reads, over the summer at ACPL.

If you know anything about Project Reads, you know it is more than just a program — it is a lifeline for young readers in our area, helping thousands of kindergarten through third-grade students achieve crucial



Project Reads

also ignites a lasting love for books. It is about more than just reading; it is about making reading a joyful and integral part of their lives.

For the past few summers, the Allen County Public Library has hosted Project Reads, but this year, we did things a little differently. We strategically timed our tutoring sessions so they coincided with Fort Wayne Community Schools' free lunch/snack program. After all, full bellies make for hungry minds!

And we collaborated with the Library's SPARK Summer Reading Program planners to ensure the programs complemented each other.

And it worked. A total of 193 students were served this summer

reading milestones.

The program not only boosts students' reading skills but

with free tutoring hours, up from 97 in 2023. This time was spent not only sowing the seeds of lifelong learning, but also curtailing the learning loss that happens over the summer, and keeping these kids engaged in the community in positive ways.

Now is the perfect time to join us in this work.

Project Reads needs volunteers like never before. If you are interested, please visit literacyalliance.org/volunteer. Or put your treasure to work through a worthy project such as the ACPL's launch of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which mails free books monthly to kids ages 0-5. You can make a gift at acpl.info/imaginationlibrary.

There is no shortage of work to be done and, together, we can create a community where every child has the chance to succeed and thrive.

But for now, let's take a moment to celebrate a summer overflowing with kids and books finding each other courtesy of a partnership that just makes sense!