

Beyond the School Day: What Caregivers Taught Us About Book Access

Staci Koutsoukos, PhD

Key Takeaway: When books are consistently available, families read.

Interviews with 20 low-income caregivers in Denver revealed a simple but powerful finding: access drives reading. Families valued reading and often built meaningful routines around books. When access to books was interrupted, reading routines frequently declined-not because families cared less, but because barriers made it difficult to replace those resources.

What Caregivers Told Us

Books Create Routines

Caregivers described books as reminders to read, opportunities for bonding, and an important part of daily family life.

“It wasn’t just a book...it sparked a tradition for us.”

Access Is Not Equal

Many families face barriers that make accessing books difficult, including:

- Transportation challenges
- Cost of purchasing books
- Limited time and competing responsibilities
- Difficulty navigating library systems

One caregiver shared:

“The nearest public library is about 30 minutes away, and without a car, getting there involves taking two different buses.”

Consistency Matters

When book deliveries paused, many families reported disruptions in reading routines and decreased engagement with books.

As one caregiver reflected:

“It reminded me how fragile access to education could be.”

Why School Libraries Matter

For many students, school libraries are the most reliable and accessible source of books.

School libraries:

- Remove transportation barriers
- Eliminate cost barriers
- Create consistent access
- Reach every child

For some students, the school library may be the primary way books enter the home.

What School Leaders Can Do

Protect Library Time

Treat library access as foundational to student learning, not supplemental.

Prioritize Student Access

Ensure students have regular opportunities to browse, borrow, and take books home.

Support Community Partnerships

Collaborate with public libraries, literacy nonprofits, and community organizations to expand access beyond the school year.

Reduce Barriers

Look for ways to simplify and expand book access for students and families both during and beyond the school day.

Final Thought: When access exists, reading follows.

For many students, librarians are not simply providing books—they are providing access.

Staci Koutsoukos, PhD

Educational Leadership & Community Engagement Consultant

stacikou@gmail.com

linkedin.com/in/staci-koutsoukos