

MAKE EVERY STUDENT COUNT

How Collaboration Among Families, Schools, and
Communities Ensures Student Success

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT 2013 RESEARCH COMPENDIUM

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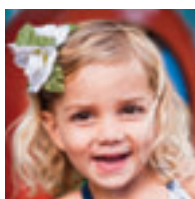
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Scholastic Supports Family and Community Engagement



“**We believe there’s real power in collaboration among families, schools, and community-based organizations.**”

—Greg Worrell, President, Scholastic Classroom & Community Group, 2012

There’s no question that student achievement is inextricably linked to family and community engagement. The landmark *Coleman Report*, published in 1966, was the first major study to categorically find that academic achievement had less to do with the quality of a student’s school and much more to do with the social composition of the school and surrounding neighborhood—together with the student’s family background (Gamoran & Long, 2006).

More than four decades later, researchers are still discovering the pivotal role family and community play in the achievement of academic success. Sastry and Pebley (2008), for example, examined socioeconomic inequalities in children’s reading and mathematics achievement in Los Angeles and found that “living in a low income neighborhood may have a greater effect on inequality in test scores than coming from a low income family.” The literature is replete with similar studies; there’s no doubt that the economic health and corresponding education levels of community members influence the academic accomplishments of the children who live in that community, and yet high-poverty neighborhoods vary in the kinds of support they provide their residents. Indeed, supportive neighborhoods exist even in economically challenged areas and can provide students with a foundation for high academic achievement (Holloway, 2004).

Increasingly, we know just what’s needed to support all children. This compendium attempts to cull pertinent research that points the way to successful family-school-community partnerships, explains how access to books promotes academic success, showcases the developmental nature of language and literacy, and outlines the essential role adults play in shaping that development.

The research is indisputable: The vastly different conditions in which children grow up do influence their literacy development and academic achievement (Benson & Borman, 2010). And there’s much that we can do to make sure that all children benefit from the array of resources and support we now know are needed to foster success in school and beyond.

Statistics Tell the Need

Children may enter school with as many as 1,500 hours of read-aloud experience or as few as 25 hours (Adams, 1994); indeed, “up to one-third of American children enter kindergarten lacking at least some of the skills needed for a successful learning experience” (Russ et al., 2007). Those who don’t experience the benefit of the daily read-aloud with their parents miss out on the remarkable academic benefits that early experiences with reading make possible, including



a robust vocabulary, enhanced listening comprehension skills, and an expansive knowledge of the world. Consider these statistics:

- Children who have not developed some basic literacy skills by the time they enter school are three to four times more likely to drop out in later years (Kirsch et al., 2002).
- The educational careers of 25% to 40% of American children are imperiled because they don't read well enough, quickly enough, or easily enough (Lesnick et al., 2010).
- Fewer than half (48%) of young children in the U.S. are read to daily, meaning that more than 13 million children under age five go to bed every night without a bedtime story (Russ et al., 2007).
- The percentage of children read to daily drops even lower (to 36%) among low-income families, whose children face the highest risk of literacy problems. Even among high-income families, however, more than two out of every five children are not read to daily (Russ et al., 2007).

The Five Pillars of FACE



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2 Family Involvement

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- Parents may not read aloud to their children for a range of reasons (Russ et al., 2007):
 - Families living in poverty often lack the money to buy new books, as well as access to libraries. In fact, 61% of low-income families have no children’s books in their homes.
 - Parents who may not have been read to as children themselves may not realize the tremendous value of reading to their own children.
 - Low literacy rates are not just the result of economic poverty; they are also the result of time poverty, something that affects nearly every parent in our country. Responsibilities at work, community activities, the television, and video games all make it difficult to carve out time for a parent and child to sit down together to read a favorite book.

Why We Need Family and Community Engagement

Family and community engagement isn’t incidental—it’s essential. To this end, Scholastic is committed to developing the literacy resources and services that enable families and caregivers, teachers and administrators, after-school instructors, librarians, and all community-based partners—including businesses, social service agencies, churches, community colleges, and universities—to help their children at school, at home, and in a range of community literacy programs. “Working together, we can achieve far more than any one of us can achieve alone” (Worrell, 2012).

Empirical research from the Harvard Family Research Project (2006) confirms the effectiveness of Scholastic’s multi-faceted approach:

... family involvement in early education is connected to the concept of complementary learning. Complementary learning emphasizes the linkages—such as those among the home, early childhood setting, and school—that work toward consistent learning and developmental outcomes for children. In line with the concept of complementary learning ... policymakers, practitioners, and researchers can advance the practice of family involvement and strengthen the linkages among early childhood programs, schools, community-based organizations, and families (Weiss et al., 2006).



The Five Pillars of FACE

Scholastic's Family and Community Engagement (FACE) brings together research-based programs and strategies that support students from birth through high school. FACE is framed around five interlocking pillars, drawn from the research.

This research compendium will explore each in turn, showcasing the key research that informs each; however, feel free to start anywhere and read in any direction. 🧭



Early Literacy

“**Providing children strong literacy education in the early years leads to better outcomes later on.**”

—Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller, 2002

Children who are routinely read to day in and day out—and immersed in rich talk about books and the various activities in which they are engaged—thrive. And those children with less exposure to books face tougher learning challenges in school and beyond (Campbell et al., 2002; Dickinson, McCabe, & Essex, 2006; Neuman & Celano, 2006).

Earl Martin Phalen is the CEO of Reach Out and Read, a program that promotes early literacy and school readiness in pediatric exam rooms nationwide by giving new books to children and advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud. He explains both the advantages of early reading experiences as well as what’s lost when children are deprived:

The brain develops faster than any other time between the ages of zero and three. Because of this, it’s important to foster literacy during the early stages of life. If children are not stimulated, if they’re not read to, if they’re not engaged, if they’re not asked questions, their brains actually atrophy. There’s real opportunity in providing parents with books and encouragement to read to their children regularly, sing with their children, and engage their children in conversation—all of which prepares our next generation to be incredibly successful in school (2011).

Literacy development is less about a limited critical period and more about *windows of opportunity* that extend across early childhood, culminating perhaps around the age of 10. So even if a child has limited access to language and literacy experiences in the home,

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there's much ground to be gained through literacy-rich expanded learning or mentoring opportunities such as preschool, extended day programs, cross-age literacy partners, and the like. During late infancy and late childhood synaptic density reaches a plateau—this is the period of maximal responsiveness to environmental input (Huttenlocker et al., 2002).

Pam Schiller, early childhood curriculum specialist, lists five key findings from the imaging technology used in neurobiology and early brain development research. They are as follows:

- The brain of a three-year-old is two-and-a-half times more active than an adult's.
- Brain development is contingent on a complex interplay between genes and the environment.
- Experiences wire the brain. Repetition strengthens the wiring.
- Brain development is nonlinear.
- Early relationships affect wiring.

Again, the “windows of opportunity” suggest especially fertile times when the developing brain is most susceptible to environmental input—and most able to “wire skills at an optimal level.”

How Literacy Develops and Predicts Later Academic Success

In 2008, the National Institute of Literacy issued its report, *Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel*, and, among its many findings, stated that the foundational reading and writing skills that develop from birth to age five have a clear and consistently strong relationship with later conventional literacy skills. “These six variables not only correlated with later literacy as shown by data drawn from multiple studies with large numbers of children but also maintained their predictive power even when the role of other variables, such as IQ or socioeconomic status (SES), were accounted for.” The six variables are:

- **Alphabet knowledge**
Knowledge of the names and sounds associated with printed letters
- **Phonological awareness**
The ability to detect, manipulate, or analyze the auditory aspects of spoken language (including the ability to distinguish or segment words, syllables, or phonemes), independent of meaning
- **Rapid automatic naming of letters or digits**
The ability to rapidly name a sequence of random letters or digits
- **Rapid automatic naming of objects or colors**
The ability to rapidly name a sequence of repeating random sets of pictures of objects (e.g., *car, tree, house, man*) or colors



“Seventy percent of what is given to us genetically is brought to fruition by our environmental experiences.”

—Daniel Goleman, 2006

Windows of Opportunity

Window	Wiring Opportunity	Greatest Enhancement
Social Development	0-48 months	4 years to puberty
Attachment	0-12 months	
Independence	8-36 months	
Cooperation	24-48 months	
Emotional Intelligence	0-48 months	4 years to puberty
Trust	0-14 months	
Impulse Control	16-48 months	
Motor Development	0-24 months	2 years to puberty
Vision	0-24 months	2 years to puberty
Thinking Skills	0-48 months	4 years to puberty
Cause and Effect	0-16 months	
Problem-Solving	16-48 months	
Language Skills	0-24 months	2-7 years
Early Sounds	4-8 months	8 months to ten years
Vocabulary	0-24 months	2-5 years

*From Exchange magazine, November/December 2010.
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- **Writing or writing name**

The ability to write letters in isolation on request or to write one's own name

- **Phonological memory**

The ability to remember spoken information for a short period of time

An additional five early literacy skills were also correlated with at least one measure of later literacy achievement, including:

- **Concepts about print**

Knowledge of print conventions (e.g., left-right, front-back) and concepts (book cover, author, text)

- **Print knowledge**

A combination of elements of alphabet knowledge, concepts about print, and early decoding

- **Reading readiness**

Usually a combination of alphabet knowledge, concepts of print, vocabulary, memory, and phonological awareness

- **Oral language**

The ability to produce or comprehend spoken language, including vocabulary and grammar

- **Visual processing**

The ability to match or discriminate visually presented symbols

These eleven variables consistently predicted later literacy achievement for both preschoolers and kindergartners. Typically, these measures were more closely linked to literacy achievement at the end of kindergarten or beginning of first grade, although oral language, when assessed by more complex measures, was found to play a bigger role in later literacy achievement. Children's early phonological awareness—that is, their ability to distinguish among sounds within auditory language—also predicted later literacy achievement.

Within the Early Literacy Pillar, we will explore the research and practical recommendations related to language and literacy development around eight key understandings:

- Reading Begins at Birth
- Oral Language Is the Foundation of Literacy
- Young Children Can Easily Learn More Than One Language
- The Read-Aloud Plus Text Talk Maximizes Learning
- A Robust Vocabulary Promotes Early Reading
- The ABCs and Code-Related Skills Are Essential
- Reading and Writing Offer Mutual Support
- Early Readers Reap Benefits That Last a Lifetime

Reading Begins at Birth

“**Parents should begin reading aloud to children at birth. It feeds the child's hungry brain with data for language development, speaking, and early word reading. It's a wonderful way to bond and leads to cognitive, social, and emotional development.**”

—Richard Gentry, *Raising Confident Readers*, 2011

As the newborn hears sounds and discriminates the oral language, he or she begins to build the foundation of written language and reading and writing. Indeed, the “window into the developing brain allows us to see that stimulation from the environment changes the very physiology of the brain with implications for social, emotional, and cognitive growth” (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000).



Three-plus decades of research have detailed the benefits of reading aloud to children. Educators, pediatricians, and policymakers alike recognize the immense advantages for those children who enter school thoroughly immersed in the rich, inventive language of picture books. Robert Needlman (2006), a pediatrician who founded Reach Out and Read, a program that prescribes books and reading to its youngest patients, sums up the benefits:

A substantial body of evidence supports the efficacy of Reach Out and Read-like programs in promoting positive attitudes toward reading aloud, increasing the frequency and regularity of parent-child reading, and—probably as a result of these changes—stimulating vocabulary growth. Furthermore, the program seems to be most effective for children at greatest risk of developing reading problems, including children from low-income households and Latino children in particular.

The Building Blocks of Early Literacy

In the mid-eighties the term *emergent literacy* gained prominence as a theory that explains the origin of reading and writing in the youngest children. Emergent literacy comprises the skills, understandings, and attitudes that young children demonstrate before they are able to control conventional forms of reading and writing. Emergent literacy is based on the understanding that young children acquire literacy not only through direct instruction, but also as the result of exposure and encouragement—as they are immersed in print, recognize the pleasure and purpose of reading and writing, and are encouraged to try the processes themselves (Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Landry & Smith, 2006).

- The building blocks of literacy begin to develop in infancy. Day-to-day activities expose babies and toddlers to sounds, words, speech, and print. Researchers have found strong evidence that children can learn reading and writing in their earliest years, long before they go to school (National Early Literacy Panel Report, 2008).
- Another strand of infant research that sheds light on fundamental early-reading abilities stems from auditory and visual discrimination. In general, infants prefer patterned displays; for example, six-week-old infants notice differences in orientation of identical line forms (for example, Y) and infants, starting at six months, begin to develop spatial relations and discern visual patterns—such as the difference between dot patterns and images of animals (Eimas & Quinn, 1994; cited by Paratore et al. 2011).





- Infants three and four months of age demonstrate that they have both finely tuned auditory and visual discrimination (Paratore, Cassano, & Schickedanz, 2011); and toddlers can discriminate word pairs that are minimally different and “hear those differences as accurately as adults” (Gentry, 2011).

In general, skilled reading in elementary school is shaped by early literacy experiences long before a child encounters formal reading instruction. Providing children strong literacy education in the early years leads to better academic outcomes and reading success later on (Campbell et al., 2002). Therefore, it seems evident that involvement in rich language and literacy experiences at home and in the community creates tremendous opportunities for the child. “Learning to read represents the weaving together of multiple skills, understandings, and orientations, many of which have their developmental origins in infancy and toddlerhood,” writes renowned literacy researcher Catherine Snow (Snow & Juel, 2005).

Long before children can read and write in the conventional sense, they are learning about literacy. From as early as the first months of life, children’s experiences with oral-language development and literacy begin to build a foundation for later reading success (Duke & Carlisle, 2011; Dickinson & Neuman, 2006). And what they are learning is no surprise: What, why, when, and how people read, write, and use written language. For example: to entertain and inform (picture books, newspaper, TV guide); communicate across time and distance (texts, emails, written notes and letters); to remember and plan (shopping lists, plans, and schedules); to instruct and guide (game directions, how-to manuals, recipes)—and on and on. For nearly every human enterprise, there exists a corresponding written genre and form of writing.

Fostering Early Literacy

Children do not have to “get ready” to learn how to read and write. Children begin learning language—and about language—from the moment of birth. It’s never too early to begin reading to your child—babies love hearing the sounds of their parents’ voices reading to them, even when it is the morning paper (Bernstein, 2010). What we know:

- Children thrive when they are immersed in rich language, oral and written, morning, noon, and night. Play with language, recite nursery rhymes, sing songs, and engage children in daily conversations and book reading. It’s best to weave in literacy throughout the day because “children learn best through repeated exposure to materials and experiences” (Bennett-Armistead, Duke, & Moses, 2005).
- Children quickly understand that written language serves multiple purposes—they embrace their written names as

“belonging to them,” recognize the regulatory nature of print on the street such as stop signs, and understand the role print plays in guiding daily life around the house and beyond. Read out loud from everything, even shopping lists, road signs, and bills to show your children how important reading is to you (Bernstein, 2010).

- Reading to your newborn makes it clear that your family believes reading for pleasure is worthwhile and sends the message that reading is fun. Young children have short attention spans, so try reading for short periods of time, several times a day (Bernstein, 2010).
- Story time rituals help even a toddler develop pre-reading skills and an understanding of the concepts of story beginning and end. Read-aloud and sing nursery rhymes and share board books. Ask open-ended questions about the books you are sharing with a young child.
- Visit the library on a regular basis and secure a library card for your baby; check out enough books to last for a week or two. Enroll children in the library’s summer reading program.

“Both for building your own relationship with your baby and also for welcoming her into a very long relationship of her own with books, now is the time to encircle your baby with the love of language.”

—Pam Allyn, *What to Read When*, 2010

13 Things Babies Learn When We Read With Them

by Julia Luckenbill

We all know that it’s good to read to our babies. But what exactly are they learning? Here are just some of the things your baby can learn as you read together.

1. Books contain wonderful stories and songs that I can hear over and over again.
2. Reading time is a time when I am held and loved.
3. You tell me the names of my body parts, the sounds different animals make, and that animals go to sleep, too.
4. Some books are especially enjoyable and I can hear them again and again.
5. Every time we read I hear how words are used, listen to rich language, and learn new words.
6. The letters, words, and pictures you point to all have meaning.
7. I can explore how books are the same and how they are different by tasting and touching them.
8. There is always something hiding behind the flap; my favorite pictures are always in the same place in a book.
9. Listening is part of communication and language includes listening and understanding.
10. Things come in different colors, sizes, and shapes.
11. It’s fun to play with language, and explore rhythm, rhyme and humor.
12. When I do something, another thing happens; if I point at a picture, my mom or dad will tell me its name. If I drop the book, we might stop reading.
13. I love books and one day I will love to read on my own.

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Oral Language Is the Foundation of Literacy

“**Oral language is the foundation on which reading is built, and it continues to serve this role as children develop as readers.**”

—Elfrieda Hiebert, 1998

Oral language development precedes literacy and then parallels it; both oral and written language are developmental language processes that are mutually supportive and develop over time. Parents’ interactive strategies, particularly the quality of their language that they share with their children and the books they read aloud, are strongly related with their children’s language development (Hart & Risley, 2003; Landry & Smith, 2006). What understandings about reading do young children acquire through oral language? Snow, Burns, & Griffin (1998) identify the following:

- Basic language components that both oral and written language hold in common (lexical, syntactic, and interpretive processes)
- Cognitive mechanisms (working memory)
- Conceptual memory (vocabulary, topic knowledge)

The Scientist in the Crib

Language development begins well before infants begin making their first words. In their widely read *The Scientist in the Crib* (2000), Gopnik, Meltzoff, and Kuhl maintain that processing speech sounds begins in early infancy. Infants quickly become language-specific listeners—by four months they pay attention only to sounds heard in the language to which they have been exposed. Infants make sounds that imitate the tones and rhythms of adult talk. They “read” gestures and facial expressions and begin to associate words and meanings. At birth, even before they speak or understand language, infants begin processing the speech stream around them in order to determine the sounds of the language (phonology), and the form and structure of the language (syntax). By the time they are 12 months of age, they will have “cracked the code” for many of these properties, as they prepare to produce their first spoken words. Here they will show they are mapping what they know about the form of language to what language means (semantics). Over the first 12 months, the infant is conducting many different analyses of the speech stream, working on all the dimensions of language at once—phonology, syntax, semantics. By the time children are about three years old, they will have mastered much of the basic system of the language around them (Lust, 2006).

We also know that sensitive parents adjust and simplify their language to correspond with their child’s need. These adjustments include simplification of language, redundancy, a higher voice pitch, and a striking number of questions. Parents differ in the amount of structure they use; for example, as children grow and develop into the preschool years, many parents pull back from repeating and extending their child’s language. They also ease up on directives

and invite the child to take the lead. The impact of directives varies across ages. In the early-toddler period, higher degrees can support language skills, but by preschool, it begins to interfere. While it's important to maintain a "moderate level" of linguistic challenge, it's also essential to let the child take the initiative with language and not be overly directive (Landry & Smith, 2006).

We can observe children's literacy development through their use of literacy materials. After babies can purposefully grasp and manipulate objects, board books become a part of their exploration. Infants between 8 and 12 months who are read to regularly progress from mouthing books to playing with the covers to turning pages. This book handling is usually accompanied by babbling, which reflects an adult's vocalizations during reading (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

As children continue to develop as language users, they learn the grammatical structure of their language, expand their vocabulary, and gain metalinguistic skills. Metalinguistic skills involve not only the ability to use language but also the ability to think about it, play with it, analyze it, talk about it, and make judgments about correct forms (Bennett-Armistead, Duke, & Moses, 2005).

Young children also use their language in connection with everyday literacy events—such as, with their parents' help, searching for and clipping needed coupons, sorting the mail, checking the TV guide for favorite shows, following a recipe to make dinner—providing an opportunity for researchers and caregivers to observe their ideas about literacy. In these ways, children learn how to "connect life with literacy" (Morrow, 2008).

A Thirty-Million Word Gap: The Hart-Risely Study

In order to develop a robust vocabulary and extensive conceptual knowledge, children need rich language input that enables them to understand what objects are called and how they work or go together. Hart and Risely (1999) conducted a seminal longitudinal research study that examined parents' talk to children among families from varying socioeconomic levels—identified as welfare, working-class, and professional families—and discovered dramatic differences in the richness of words children from lower socioeconomic levels heard compared to those heard by their peers from middle or more affluent levels.

Their study of parent-child talk in families in Kansas was conducted over a decade. A team of researchers recorded one full hour of every word spoken at home between parent and child in 42 families over a three-year period, with children from seven months to 36 months of age, and then spent six additional years typing, coding, and analyzing 30,000 pages of transcripts.

Follow-up studies by Hart and Risely of those same children at age nine showed that there was a very tight link between the academic

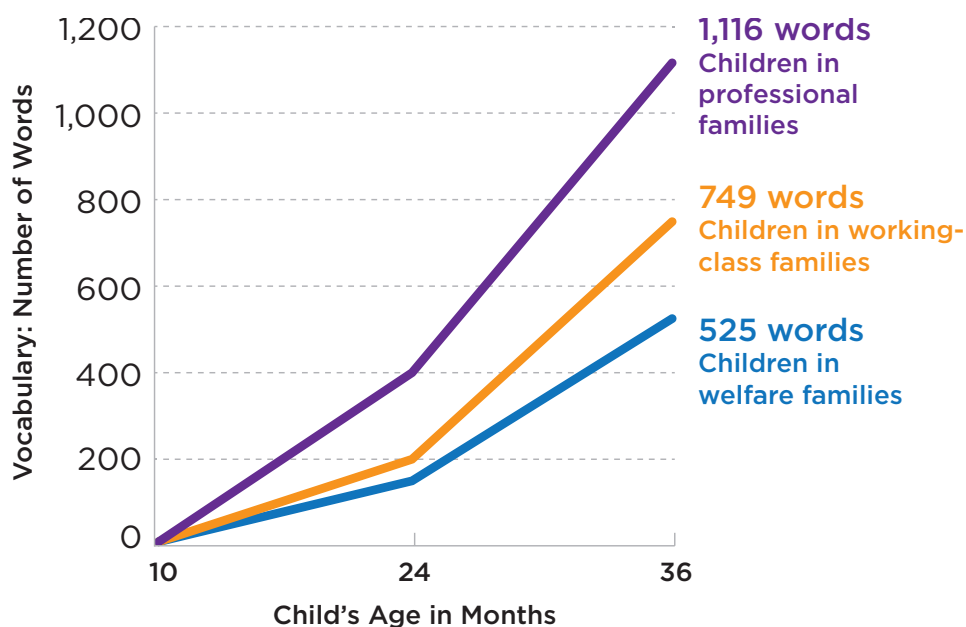
The Common Core on Oral Language

The Common Core State Standards address the role of oral language in relation to written language development:

"Oral language development precedes and is the foundation for written language development; in other words, oral language is primary and written language builds on it. Children's oral language competence is strongly predictive of their facility in learning to read and write: listening and speaking vocabulary and even mastery of syntax set boundaries as to what children can read and understand no matter how well they can decode."

For children in preschool and the early grades, receptive and expressive abilities do not develop simultaneously or at the same pace: receptive language generally precedes expressive language. Children need to be able to understand words before they can produce and use them (2010).

The Achievement Gap Starts Early



Adapted from Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young Children by Todd R. Risley and Betty Hart. © 1995 by Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

success of a child and the number of words the child's parents spoke to the child at age three. We can summarize their three key findings:

1. The variation in children's IQs and language abilities is relative to the amount parents speak to their children.
2. Children's academic successes at ages nine and ten are attributable to the amount of talk they hear from birth to age three.
3. Parents of advanced children talk significantly more to their children than do parents of children who are not as advanced.

“The single most important condition for literacy learning is the presence of mentors who are joyfully literate people.”

—Shirley Brice Heath, sociolinguist, 1986

In general, children from the professional families heard over 1,500 more words each hour, on average, than children from economically challenged families (616 vs. 2,153 words each hour). Ultimately, children who are immersed in rich language may hear 30 million more words by the time they enter school than children who don't. What's more, they are more likely to hear language used to accentuate the positive and encourage, rather than discouraging language used to reprimand and criticize. And these essential differences are reflected in the test scores administered to the same children when they are nine and ten years old.

One word of caution: we want to avoid making assumptions about children's language or literacy level based simply on their families' professional, educational, or economic status. Children arrive at

school with a wide variety of experiences. The goal of an educator is to get to know each child as a unique learner and work with the family to promote literacy both at home and at school.

Fostering Oral Language

- Immerse children in rich language—both oral and written—beginning at birth. We need to speak directly to our young children every day; researchers suggest that for optimal development, infants and toddlers should hear 30,000 words per day.
- Children learn not only from language you address to them, but also from language they overhear around them (Au, 2002). Linguistic interaction has additional positive effects on linguistic development.
- Although exposure to language is essential, explicit “drilling” is not needed for the normally developing child. Parents don’t so much “teach” the child, as the child discovers language. As one linguist explains, children are “spontaneous apprentices” (Miller, 1977); they latch themselves to their caregivers and follow and learn from their every move, including absorbing the almost innumerable ways in which adults use language, both oral and written.
- Read to children, encourage them to ask questions and to talk about what is read, and surround them with language through literacy; reading aloud to children is tremendously important, but reading and *discussing the reading* is even more potent and beneficial (Whitehurst et al., 1988).

Three Dimensions of Oral Language Experience Linked to Later Literacy Success

By David Dickinsen and Patton Tabors

1. **Exposure to *varied vocabulary*.** Knowing the “right word” is vital if one is to communicate information clearly. We have long known that large vocabularies are instrumental to reading success; a robust vocabulary also signals that children are building the content knowledge about the world that is so critical to later reading.
2. **Opportunities to be part of conversations that use *extended discourse*.** Extended discourse is talk that requires participants to develop understandings beyond the here and now and that requires the speaker to use multiple sentences to build a linguistic structure, such as in explanations, narratives, or pretend talk.
3. ***Home and classroom environments that are cognitively and linguistically stimulating.*** Children are most likely to experience conversations that include comprehensible and interesting extended discourse, and that are rich with vocabulary, when their parents are able to obtain and read good books and when their teachers provide classrooms with a curriculum that is varied and stimulating (2002).

“**Language does not need to be only accepted. It needs to be explored, expanded, celebrated.**”

—Alma Flor Ada, *Fostering the Home-School Connection*, 1995

Young Children Can Easily Learn More Than One Language

Young children are very good at learning more than one language—and not only can they learn multiple languages, but also they learn *when* to speak and write each language and *to whom*. And the earlier they learn the second or third or fourth language, the more likely they are to achieve native-like proficiency. What’s more, children who are learning English as a second language are more likely to become readers and writers of English when they are already familiar with the vocabulary and concepts in their primary language (Wong Fillmore, 1991).

Linguistic Geniuses

Spend time with a little one who is learning to speak, and in no time you’ll hear language that surprises and delights with its unique *inventiveness* as children invent their way into conventional language. Children do, indeed, say the darnedest things, but what they say is always systematic and rule-governed, and it reflects their brilliant hypotheses about “how language works” and how they can use it to accomplish what they’re trying to do—whether they are learning one language or more.

- One of the greatest feats of human development is language learning. Children are well equipped, beginning at birth, to accomplish the complex task of learning language (Lust, 2006).
- Learning a second language does not cause language confusion, language delay, or cognitive deficit, which have been concerns in the past. In fact, according to studies at the Cornell Language Acquisition Lab (CLAL), children who learn a second language can maintain attention despite outside stimuli better than children who know only one language (Lust, 2006).
- Becoming bilingual creates cognitive advantages, which contribute to a child’s future academic success (Espinosa, 2008; Lust, 2006).
- Research demonstrates that bilingualism enhances the development of executive attention and facilitates superior performance in bilinguals as compared to monolingual counterparts on an executive-attention test (Yang & Lust, 2009).
- Children will learn two languages best if they know that both languages are important and valued. Children also need to have lots of fun and meaningful opportunities to talk, read, and pretend-write in both languages (Freeman & Freeman, 2007). Learning a second language also means learning a second culture and way of being.
- A sound foundation in the first language—spoken and written—creates the best conditions for the acquisition of a second

language. Research demonstrates the importance of literacy in the first language for students' full development of proficiency in the language of instruction, subsequent academic success, and high levels of self-confidence. What's more, academic and linguistic skills transfer to the second language, even when the target language has a dissimilar writing system from the first language (Cummins, 1991; Goldenberg, 2011).

Speaking Two or More Languages Is Better Than One

What's the best way to support bilingualism—or even multilingualism, which is quite often the norm in other countries where children have easy access to multiple languages that serve real purposes in their daily lives? Consider the following:

- Surround children with more than one language through conversations and social groups using different languages—the earlier the better.
- Maintain home (heritage) language when children are learning a second language outside the home.
- Expose children to multilingual settings and give them plenty of opportunities to play with children who speak the target (second or third) language.
- Provide fun and interactive language-learning environments (e.g., books, songs and music, dance, and film) in both languages, and, if possible, with children of similar age. Promote reading and storytelling in multiple languages.

English Learners in the United States

Linguist Claude Goldenberg (2011) provides these telling statistics:

- There are more than 5 million ELs or 1 in 9 public school students, K-12.
- This is a 150% increase since 1990 during a period when the overall school population has increased by only about 20%.
- Even states not typically associated with ELs, such as South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Indiana, have seen an increase of 400% or more during 1993-94 and 2003-04.
- ELs in the United States speak more than 400 languages collectively.
- Most ELs were born in the United States; less than one-quarter of elementary students and less than one-half of secondary students are foreign-born.
- The majority of ELs (80%) are Spanish-speaking, from Central America and Mexico.
- Speakers of Asian languages such as Vietnamese, Hmong, Chinese, Korean, Khmer, and Hindi, comprise 8% of the EL population.

- Maintain a positive attitude toward all languages and cultures children learn. Children will take risks in their new language only if they feel it's safe to make mistakes. Keep stress levels low by keeping language demands appropriate: difficult enough to promote learning, but easy enough to be achievable (Einhorn, 2002).

The Read-Aloud Plus Text Talk Maximizes Learning

The interactive read-aloud, or the read-aloud plus text talk, is based on three essential understandings. The read-aloud together with text talk:

1. Encourages the child to become an active learner during book reading
2. Provides feedback that models more sophisticated language
3. Challenges the child's knowledge and skills by raising the complexity of the conversation to a level just above the child's current ability (De Temple & Snow, 2003; Lane & Wright, 2007)

The Critical Importance of the Interactive Read-Aloud

- Researchers maintain that the most valuable aspect of the read-aloud is the experience it gives young children with decontextualized language, requiring them to make sense of ideas that are about something beyond the here and now (Beck & McKeown, 2001).
- The interactive read-aloud results in student gains in vocabulary (Beck & McKeown, 2001), comprehension strategies and story schema (Pinnell & Fountas, 2011), and concept development (Wasik & Bond, 2001). However, simply inviting children to talk during interactive read-alouds doesn't provide the needed learning boost. It's the *close reading*—and deep, intentional conversation about the text—that makes the difference.
- Wasik and Bond (2001) investigated the learning potential of the interactive read-aloud. Their study, which included 121 four-year-old children from low-income families, 94% of whom were African American, engaged the treatment group in interactive book reading and book reading extension activities. The interactive read-aloud included defining vocabulary words, providing opportunities for children to use words from the books, asking open-ended questions, and giving children the chance to talk and be heard.

“By employing research-based methods for reading aloud—such as the interactive read-aloud—teachers and parents can maximize the effectiveness of reading aloud, thereby enhancing the reading experiences and the achievement of students.”

—Holly Lane and Tyran Wright, 2007

- Children come to school well able to think and reason about the world in situations that make sense to them. What they have to learn to do in school is to think and reason in “disembedded contexts” ... to use symbols systems and deal with representations of the world.

Control teachers received all the books treatment teachers did. These books were read as often in control classrooms as they were in treatment classrooms; however, control teachers did not receive the interactive read-aloud training that treatment teachers did.

For the first four weeks of the intervention, an experienced teacher modeled the shared book reading techniques in each treatment classroom and assisted with reading extension activities. For the next 11 weeks, treatment teachers ran the program on their own. At post-test, treatment classes scored significantly higher on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary-III than did control classes. Treatment classes also scored significantly higher on their knowledge of target vocabulary words. Classroom observations found that teachers in the treatment group were significantly and substantially more likely than control teachers to use the target words during related activities.

- Programs that promote early at-home reading foster positive attitudes toward reading aloud, increase the frequency and regularity of parent-child reading, and stimulate vocabulary growth. What’s more, early literacy programs are most effective for children at greatest risk of developing reading problems, including children from low-income households and Latino children in particular, whose parents want to help but may not always have the resources or know-how to do so (Juel, 2006). Early readers have a head start in their academic career that will last a lifetime, while poor readers often fall behind and may never catch up. Connie Juel (2006) found that if a child is a poor reader at the end of first grade, there is a .88 probability that that child would still be a poor reader at the end of fourth grade.
- We’ve long believed that the parent-child read-aloud plays a pivotal role in helping youngsters learn to read. An intergenerational reading study provides the research to back that belief; indeed, the research demonstrates that the read-aloud is not only effective, but also the strength of the relation between parent-preschooler reading and outcome measures “is as strong a predictor of reading achievement as is phonemic awareness (Bus, van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995).
- The available data on the read-aloud supports intergenerational literacy programs intended to stimulate parent-preschooler reading as an effective way to better prepare young children



“**Children who have strong oral-language skills often have strong reading and writing skills. In contrast, children with oral-language problems are at a higher risk of reading and writing difficulties.**”

—Hollis Scarborough, 2001

for beginning reading instruction. The results also support the hypothesis that book reading particularly affects acquisition of the *written language register* or *storybook language*—syntax and vocabulary (*once upon a time*, for example) that’s unique to the written language used in children’s literature. Children acquire this language as they hear stories read aloud—which eventually aids in reading comprehension. Furthermore, this meta-analysis shows that the effect of book reading is not restricted to children of preschool age. However, the effect seems to become smaller as soon as children become conventional readers and are able to read on their own. The data makes clear that the parent-preschooler reading is a necessary preparation for beginning reading instruction at school (Bus, van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995).

Read Aloud and Talk About It

We can begin to read to babies on the day they are born. Set aside time every day for “reading time”; read aloud to children, and as they grow, ask them to read aloud to you, or encourage independent reading—and discuss with your children the different materials that you are reading and why; the books you are reading to them; and the books that they are reading on their own. As Jairrels (2009) notes, when children are read three stories a day, by the time they enter first grade they will have heard more than 6,000 books.

- Create a “reading culture” inside the home, including cozy places to nestle with books; reading routines throughout the day; and dinner table discussions about what family members are reading—including all the different print materials that pour into the house every day. Talk with children about their interests, plan trips to the library, and find books that will support and extend what interests your children most. Make books their first go-to resource.
- As they move closer to kindergarten entry, some children will begin to track print and most will do so by the middle of kindergarten year. The real challenge to the beginning reader is not memorizing a word in isolation, but reading it within the continuous text while keeping meaning in mind.

A Robust Vocabulary Promotes Early Reading

The best way to help our children become readers is to read to them. As young children hear stories read aloud, they learn new words, begin to figure out how letters and sounds are related

(phonological awareness), and learn how words are conceptually related (Biemiller & Boote, 2006). And furthermore, a robust vocabulary predicts reading comprehension; in other words, the larger a child's vocabulary, the stronger her reading comprehension (Duke & Carlisle, 2011).

- The linkages between early exposure to reading aloud and enhanced language development and between preschool vocabulary and later literacy are well documented (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). The majority of vocabulary growth occurs not as a result of direct instruction, but as the result of reading voluminously—hearing stories read aloud and reading independently (Krashen, 2004; Hargrave & Senechal, 2000).
- “Vocabulary instruction ... must be more than merely identifying or labeling words. Rather, it should be about helping children to build word meaning and the ideas that these words represent. By understanding words and their connections to concepts and facts, children develop skills that will help in comprehending text” (Neuman & Dwyer, 2009).
- Vocabulary growth is heavily influenced by the amount and variety of material children read. And conversely, reading comprehension is influenced by the depth and breadth of the reader's vocabulary (Tannenbaum, Torgeson, & Wagner, 2006).
- Biemiller and Boote (2006) have demonstrated that in order to get the biggest instructional bang for the buck, children not only need to hear engaging read-alouds, but also, they need explicit explanations of the words. It's this combination—word explanations plus read-aloud—that leads to the greatest vocabulary growth.

These findings also confirm that the more words young children know, the more sensitive they are to the ways in which words are put together, and the more likely they are to become successful readers. Ultimately, the enhanced vocabulary that young children acquire through the read-aloud aids their ability to crack open texts themselves as independent readers (Biemiller and Boote, 2006).



The ABCs and Code-Related Skills Are Essential

“Children who know alphabet letters and the sounds they represent, who can hear sounds in words, and who can understand how print works are far more likely to be good readers in kindergarten and in the grades that follow.”

—Susan Bennett-Armistead, Nell Duke, & Annie Moses, 2005

Paratore, Cassano, and Schickedanz (2011) explain that “three areas of early literacy skills knowledge provide important foundations for the development of code-related skills: print awareness, phonological awareness, and alphabet knowledge.” Researchers Linnea Ehri and Theresa Roberts (2006) maintain that the ABCs are pivotal. They suggest that in order for young children to succeed in reading in English, they must understand our alphabetic writing system and, specifically, acquire phonemic awareness and letter knowledge.

The Building Blocks of Early Literacy

In order to understand their spoken language, children must be able to hear and distinguish the sounds that make up their language.

Almost without exception, all children raised in a normal linguistic environment can distinguish between different speech sounds in their native language. Almost all native English speakers then can hear the difference between similar English words such as *pop* and *plop*.

- Phonemes are the smallest sounds in speech—for example, *no* consists of two phonemes: /n/ and /o/. Phonemic awareness (PA) refers to the ability to manipulate phonemes in spoken words. So if we ask a child what letter she hears at the beginning of *stop*, at some point, she should be able to say /s/. And then if we take away the *s*, the child with PA will know we’re left with *top* (Ehri & Roberts, 2006). This kind of awareness develops as children are immersed in print, hear many, many stories read aloud, and participate in rich talk about letters and the sounds they represent. But Ehri and Roberts also believe young children need instruction as well as immersion. “To write messages the children must come to terms with the distinctive features of letters which make any one letter different from all the others” (Clay, 2005). Letter and word learning are essential in the process of becoming literate (Pinnell & Fountas, 2011).



- Numerous longitudinal studies have identified critical early foundational skills that predict success in both beginning and later reading achievement—these include both code-related and oral language abilities. In 2002, Storch and Whitehurst assessed more than 600 Head Start preschoolers using a range of instruments, including the Developmental Skills Checklist, to determine the children’s alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print concepts, as well as their story retelling and emergent writing, including name and message writing. Code-related skills predicted decoding skill in beginning readers. Code-related skills and oral language skills were highly related in the preschool years (48% variance), somewhat related in kindergarten (less than 10% variance), and unrelated in first and second grade (that is, reading ability—word recognition accuracy—in grades one and two was not directly related to language abilities).
- The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Study (2000) examined results from more than 1,000 children from birth to third grade and found that code-related skills were the best predictors of early reading, while language-based skills were more influential by third grade. Code-related skills predict the largest amount of variance in early grade reading skill, while oral vocabulary contributes to reading comprehension in Grades three and four.
- Name recognition correlates with age (.86) for three-year-olds, while for four and five-year-olds, name production correlates with alphabet knowledge (.55 to .77), word recognition (.49 to .62), and concept of word (.39 to .66). Personal “name letters” represent approximately 40% of children’s random-letter written characters. The children’s literacy skills reflect reciprocal relationships; for example, automaticity in name writing paralleled control of the alphabet, recognition of several sight words, and emerging tracking ability. The ability to control the writing of one’s own name transfers to other aspects of young children’s literacy development in positive ways (Bloodgood, 1999).

Learning Sound-Letter Relationships

- Typically, children first access the ABCs through their own written names. For little ones, there are no more magical letters in the world than those in their own personal names and the names of their family members and friends, so that may be the best place to begin identifying the names of the letters and pointing out the sounds each letter makes (Pinnell & Fountas, 2011).
- Combined with many opportunities to manipulate letters (felt and magnetic letters, letter cards, etc.) and talk about letters and the sounds they make, this sort of name exploration helps children understand the ABCs and their foundational role in supporting early reading.

- Children need to see letters in many different contexts—and they need specific teaching to learn how to look at letters, even though they also absorb information about the alphabet and how it works as they attempt to read and write on their own. There are dozens and dozens of fun and engaging letter, sound, and word games and books that play with speech sounds through rhyme, alliteration, and phonemic manipulation (Pinnell & Fountas, 2011).
- Children need to learn the *concepts of letter* and *word* and understand how they are different; they also benefit from specific instruction on words and from practice in locating words within connected print (Pinnell & Fountas, 2011).

Reading and Writing Offer Mutual Support

Reading and writing are complex developmental language processes involving the orchestration and integration of a wide range of understandings, strategies, skills, and attitudes. Both processes should develop as a natural extension of the child’s need to communicate and make sense of his or her varied experiences. A reader needs to make sense of what the writer is communicating through the text and the writer needs to make sure that his or her message is clear and understood by the reader. Children should understand the responsibilities of an author; that is, others will be reading their writing. So all young writers must write with their potential readers in mind.

Reading and Writing Are Mutually Beneficial

- Beginning readers and writers need to learn to use many sources of information including memory, experience, pictures, and their knowledge of language—sound/symbol connections, or phonics (Blevins, 2011). Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are four interrelated language processes; all are mutually reinforcing and called into play as the young child approaches print. Successful readers bring to the reading task a wealth of background experience and both linguistic and conceptual knowledge.
- While specific early reading skills such as letter naming, letter-sound correspondences, phonemic segmentation (the ability to break up a word into its component sounds, e.g., /ka-at/), and the acquisition of a sight vocabulary correlate with learning to read successfully, there are other more basic aspects of early literacy. For example, young readers must come to understand the nature of “decontextualized language”—that is, the language they encounter in books is often used to talk about ideas, or about events distant in time or place (Duke & Carlisle, 2011).

“**Reading and writing are interdependent processes that are essential to each other and mutually beneficial.**”

—S.L. Holt and JoAnne Vacca, 1984

- Children must also understand that print carries meaning and the illustrations in picture books help illuminate the meaning. Children also learn that books are sources of pleasure and information, which builds the motivation they need to do the hard work of mastering letters and sounds. Developing a love of reading begins early in life, as children are exposed to print in early, affectionate, and positive settings.
- Research shows clearly that even very young children engage in literacy when they use “print to represent their ideas and to interact with other people” (Dyson, 1992). Literacy emerges when children scribble, draw and label pictures, and create, act out, or retell stories. During these times they are engaged in literate behaviors that are essential parts of the language development process.

The Early Authors Program

In the Early Authors Program (EAP), a 12-month early literacy intervention based primarily in diverse, high-poverty communities, young children, aged three to five, learn to be writers and readers by creating their own self-authored storybook texts, supported by sensitive guidance of adults. The initial project, based in Dade-Miami County, Florida, involved a group of 57 teachers at 32 childcare centers, 1,179 children and 800 families, many of whom included Spanish-speaking parents who had little formal education and limited access to printed materials. Together, using the bookmaking equipment in each EAP classroom, the children and teachers authored a total of 3,286 books, which emphasized their personal stories and family photographs. Many of the books featured the child as the protagonist. The books were stored in classroom and family libraries.

The EAP children showed greater gains than control children in language and literacy development according to all measures: expressive and receptive language development (children became more verbal, formed fuller sentences, and saw the connections between writing and reading), teacher reports of children’s interactions with the books, and development of literacy skills. Perhaps most importantly, they grew in self-esteem. “Seeing their own books displayed along with the other books legitimizes their own creations, takes away the mystery of books and literate activities, and shows children how they can be literate as well” (Ada & Campoy, 2003; Bernhard et al., 2008).



Early Readers Reap Benefits That Last a Lifetime

Even very young children acquire complex understandings about print and how it works when they have been involved with innumerable print encounters and interactions—noticing print in the environment, talking with adults about the functional print they use every day (e.g., the print on kitchen appliances, on food products, on electronic gadgets, and so on), listening to and discussing stories that are read aloud to them from a favorite storybook, playing with language through riddles, rhymes, songs, and so forth.

And as they engage with print, young children are not only learning about written language and how it works, but they are also learning about the world and how it works. The conceptual knowledge they acquire and the background knowledge they build is cumulative and invaluable.



“Children exposed to lots of books during their early childhood will have an easier time learning to read than those who are not.”

—Dr. Henry Bernstein,
Harvard Medical School, 2010

Unfortunately, surveys show that fewer than 50% of parents with children younger than three years read to their children every day (Bernstein, 2010), and, too often, those children who need the read-aloud the most go without. There’s much work needed to get the word out.

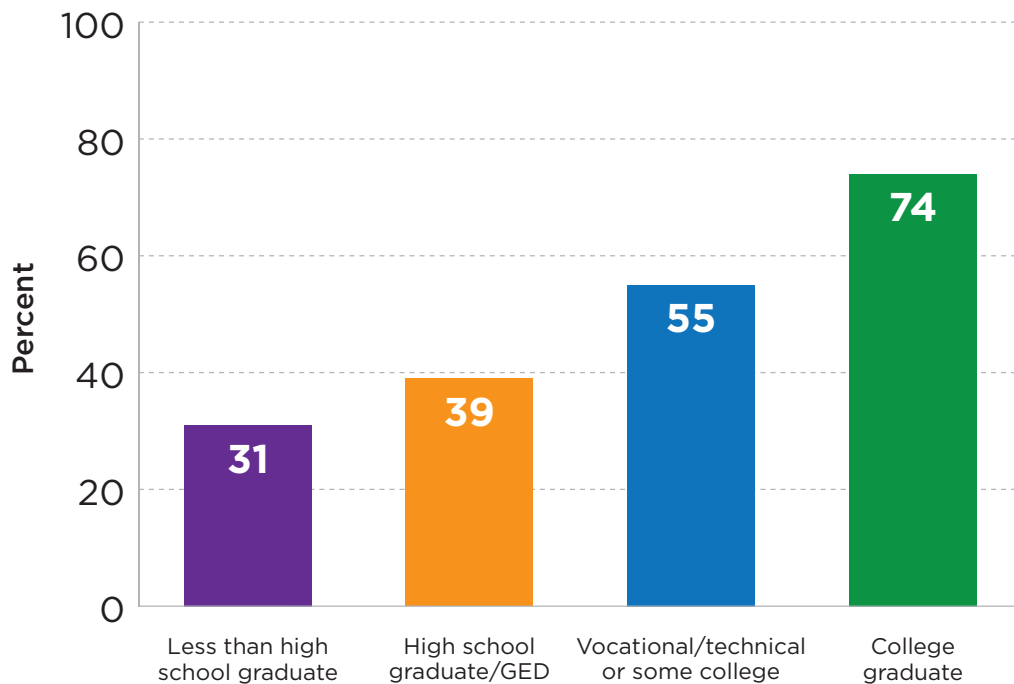
Why does it matter so much? Justine (2005) explains, summarizing and dividing the research on early literacy development into two primary strands:

1. Individual differences among children in early literacy skills are *meaningful* and *predictive*: early differences contribute significantly to long-term outcomes in children’s reading achievement.
2. The prevalence of reading difficulties is more likely to be influenced through *prevention* rather than remediation, since once a particular child shows a reading delay in elementary school, the odds suggest the delay is likely to persist and limit his or her overall academic success.

Print Immersion

As Dr. Robert Needlman writes (2006), “Pediatricians understand that experience shapes synaptic development, providing a biological rationale for efforts to enhance the early learning environment.” What’s more, given the windows of opportunity when the neural systems underlying auditory perceptions, attention, and language are developing rapidly during the first five years of life (Dickinson, McCabe, & Essex, 2006), educators should feel a sense of urgency as experiences with books and reading aloud strengthen these systems, a boost that provides lasting benefits.

Percentage of Children Ages 3–5¹ Who Were Read to Every Day in the Last Week by a Family Member, by Mother's Education Level (2007)



¹Estimates are based on children who have yet to enter kindergarten.

Source: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2009.

Table ED1. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Based on National Household Education Survey analysis.

Children who know print through encounters and interactions with print expect:

- To use knowledge of the ways books are organized to predict likely events and outcomes
- To know how sentences “work”— they have a capital letter at the beginning, a period at the end, etc.
- To use their understanding of syntax and meaning to predict sentence patterns and words
- To use their knowledge of letters and sounds to pronounce words
- To make sense, have logical connections, reflect unity of meaning, relate to children's experiences and interests
- To use natural or predictable language or interesting repeating patterns
- To use pictures to support or extend the text (Pinnell & Fountas, 2011; Juel, 2006)

Third Grade Nonreaders Are More Likely to Drop Out of High School

As stated in the Kids Count report, *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*, “Reading proficiently by the end of third grade (as measured by NAEP at the beginning of fourth grade) can be a make-or-break benchmark in a child’s educational development” (2010). In a similar vein, researchers Catherine Snow et al. maintain that “academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by knowing someone’s reading skill at the end of third grade. A person who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by that time is unlikely to graduate from high school” (1998).

Failure to achieve reading proficiency by third grade *disproportionately* affects children from high poverty households and communities—typically, the result of differences in resources and opportunities for healthy physical, linguistic, cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral development. Children who must live with the challenges of poverty have a higher incidence of health problems that interfere with learning, and, what’s more, they often lack the early interactions that foster linguistic development, such as rich verbal interactions with their families (Hart & Risley, 2003), access to books, and the daily read-aloud.

In his study, “Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation,” researcher Donald Hernandez notes that third grade is a pivotal point: “We teach reading for the first three grades and then after that children are not so much learning to read but using their reading skills to learn other topics. In that sense if you haven’t succeeded by third grade it’s more difficult to [remediate] than it would have been if you started before then.” Drawing from the data of the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ National Longitudinal Study of Youth, Dr. Hernandez examined the reading scores and later graduation rates of 3,975 students born between 1979 and 1989. His findings, as reported in the Annie B. Casey Report, are convincing:

He found 16 percent overall did not have a diploma by age 19, but students who struggled with reading in early elementary school grew up to comprise 88 percent of those who did not receive a diploma. That made low reading skills an even stronger predictor than spending at least a year in poverty, which affected 70 percent of the students who didn’t graduate. In fact, 89 percent of students in poverty who did read on level by third grade graduated on time, statistically no different from the students who never experienced poverty but did struggle with reading early on. By contrast, more than one in four poor, struggling readers did not graduate, compared with only 2 percent of good readers from wealthier backgrounds. Mr. Hernandez found that gaps in graduation rates among white, black, and Hispanic students closed once poverty and reading proficiency were taken



into account. 'If they are proficient in reading, they basically have the same rate of graduation, above 90 percent,' Mr. Hernandez said. 'If they did not reach proficiency, that's when you see these big gaps emerge' (2011).

The best way to prevent failure to thrive as a proficient reader is to marshal the support of all involved: families, schools, and communities. When all work together to surround children with meaningful literacy experiences and closely monitor their progress, children are more likely to enter the third grade pivotal point as proficient readers, thus making it more likely they'll continue to excel in school and graduate from high school. Early literacy, in other words, is the gift that keeps on giving, providing benefits that extend well beyond the primary grades and carry students all the way through a successful school career to on-time high school graduation.

Early Literacy Promotes Academic Achievement

Learn about the action steps, as outlined by the Department of Education *Handbook on Family and Community Engagement* (2011) that will help you work successfully with your families and communities: developing class and school demographic profiles, parenting contracts, parent vision statements, and parent informant literacy groups; providing school materials in students' home languages; presenting parent-student-teacher workshops on school reading and literacy; building relationships with child-care providers in the community; and expanding parent education services to include child-care providers. Understand that home-school communication and cooperation are lifelines that will improve the academic achievement of all students regardless of race or economic status, cultural or linguistic background.

In Sum

A "complex web of factors" (Dickinson & Neuman, 2006) including social, environmental, cognitive, linguistic, and emotional forces are at play in early literacy development. Children who know their letter names (and often their letter sounds, phonemic segmentation, concepts of print, and how to write their names) are almost always the same children who are immersed in rich language and literacy at home. These children also typically understand that literacy is a tool that they can use to accomplish multiple purposes as they start to venture out into the world. These are lessons young children begin to learn from the day of birth—lessons that they develop, extend, and refine during the first five years before school, a critical window of opportunity. As Dickinson, McCabe, and Essex (2006) note, "We are making hopeful advances in our endeavor to enrich the preschool experiences of children, but far more must be done to improve their classrooms and communities if we are to take full advantage of the window of educational opportunity provided us by biology." 🧑

“Make every moment count—whether you’re feeding children, transitioning them or diapering them, you are in a literacy-learning moment. Don’t waste it!”

—Susan Armistead-Bennett,
Nell Duke, Annie Moses,
Beyond the Bedtime Story, 2005



Family Involvement

“***The family seems to be the most effective and economical system for fostering and sustaining the child's development. Without family involvement, intervention is likely to be unsuccessful, and what few effects are achieved are likely to disappear once the intervention is discontinued.***”

—Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Harvard Family Research Project*, 2006

A growing body of research demonstrates that when families are actively involved in their children's learning, children arrive at school ready to engage and succeed. Students of involved parents get better grades, score higher on standardized tests, have better attendance records, drop out less often, and have higher aspirations and more positive attitudes toward work and homework. An increase in family participation in pre-kindergarten programs, for example, has been linked to greater student academic motivation and stronger social and emotional skills among all young children, regardless of ethnic and socioeconomic background. As parents and other family members help out in their child's pre-kindergarten program, they experience firsthand the difference collaboration makes. Such experience often encourages the family to stay involved throughout their child's school career, providing crucial support for school reform and increasing the chances that their children will succeed (Redding et al., 2011).

And the benefits of family involvement extend to teens as well. Bogenschneider (2004) studied 8,000 high school students in nine high schools in Wisconsin and California. With only a couple of exceptions, when parents were involved in their teen's school, students reported higher grades in school. What's more, when either mothers or fathers were involved, it benefited both boys and girls across grades, ethnicity, and education background—and made the most difference for those children who needed it most.

- 1 Early Literacy
- 2 Family Involvement
- 3 Access to Books
- 4 Expanded Learning
- 5 Mentoring Partnerships

Four Levels of Family-School Partnership

Four leading proponents of family-school partnerships, Anne Henderson, Karen Mapp, Vivian Johnson, and Don Davies (2007), offer four levels of family-school partnerships—and a rubric that establishes an achievable standard for partnership. Henderson et al. define the four levels of partnership as:

Partnership School

All families and communities have something great to offer—we do whatever it takes to work closely together to make sure every single student succeeds.

Open-Door School

Parents can be involved at our school in many ways—we're working hard to get an even bigger turnout for our activities. When we ask the community to help, people often respond.

Come-If-We-Call School

Parents are welcome when we ask them, but there's only so much they can offer. The most important thing they can do is help their kids at home. We know where to get help in the community if we need it.

Fortress School

Parents belong at home, not at school. If students don't do well, it's because their families don't give them enough support. We're already doing all we can. Our school is an oasis in a troubled community. We want to keep it that way.

The importance of families in children's literacy development is also well established. In her seminal text, *Children Who Read Early* (1966), Dolores Durkin investigated children who learned to read before they entered school and discovered that their families—parents and older siblings—often read aloud to them. This practice—known as shared book reading or the interactive read-aloud—is now widely recognized as one of the most important parental activities that fosters a child's literacy development—and carries benefits that last a lifetime. “Early success at reading acquisition is one of the keys that unlocks a lifetime of reading habits” (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997).

In multiple ways, family members are a child's first and most important teacher, and when they are actively engaged in their children's learning, the children are not only better prepared for school but also continue to achieve at higher levels (Stark, 2010).

What Is Family Engagement?

Since the 1965 passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), parent involvement, later extended to include families, has been a key component of equity, social justice, and quality education (Redding et al., 2011). And while family engagement encompasses a broad range of activities, in general, it can be thought of as anything that better prepares all students to learn and enhances family, school, and community support of that learning (Smith et al., 2007). It also means moving away from checklists of discrete activities and embracing coordinated, comprehensive family engagement that creates open communication and strong collaboration among teachers, families, schools, and community partners to increase student achievement.

Family Involvement: Four Components and Related Research

Four key components frame family involvement and related research:

- Student Performance
- Cultural Considerations
- Family Beliefs About Academic Success
- Strategies to Promote Success

Let's explore each one in turn and investigate the corresponding research.

Student Performance

“**Increasing family involvement at the early grades predicts literacy achievement and, most importantly, is a stronger indicator for literacy development than family income, maternal level of education, and ethnicity.**”

—Eric Dearing, Holly Kreider, Sandra Simpkins, and Heather Weiss,
Harvard Family Research Project, 2006

Decades of research prove a simple truth: more often than not, strong families yield strong, successful students. All families have dreams for their children and want the very best for them, but, without open communication and collaboration, how to best help families support their children isn’t always easy or clear. To this end, a strong school-family partnership can make all the difference as Byrk et al. (2009) demonstrated in their study of Chicago schools. They found that student performance is not only influenced by the home, school, and community environments in which children live, but also by the *relationships* among these settings. When home, school, and community forces come together to lend students both academic and personal support, student motivation and participation increases. Let’s examine two case studies.

Family Involvement in School and the Literacy Performance of Children in Low-Income Communities

Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, and Weiss summarize the 2006 findings of their longitudinal, correlational study of 300 K-5 students and their families in low-income communities. Family involvement activities included open house events, family-teacher conferences and other school meetings, and opportunities to volunteer in the classroom. The researchers’ results (summarized by Ferguson, 2011) are both encouraging and convincing:

1. Increasing family involvement at the early grades predicts literacy achievement and, most importantly, is a stronger indicator for literacy development than family income, maternal level of education, and ethnicity.
2. Providing processes and structures to increase family involvement at the early grades matters most for children who are at risk due to factors such as low-income families and mothers with low educational levels.

What does this mean for other schools, particularly those in high-poverty neighborhoods? The authors recommend that all schools find a way to engage families in both school literacy events and in home learning support activities in the early grades. Furthermore, to address the needs of children who are most at risk, schools need

Common Core Note: Foundational Reading Skills

The CCSS outline the early foundational skills that children need to become successful readers, including concepts of print, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, and fluency. While these skills are not to be regarded as ends in and of themselves, they are “necessary and important components of an effective comprehensive reading program designed to develop proficient readers with the capacity to comprehend texts across a range of types and disciplines.”

“Our study adds to an increasing body of evidence that family educational involvement is vital for promoting the life chances of low-income children and provides exceptional benefits for the very same low-income children who face exceptional challenges.”

—Eric Dearing, Holly Krieider, Sandra Simpkins, and Heather Weiss, *Harvard Family Research Project*, 2006

to actively develop long-term strategies to reach out to low-income families and other groups who may hesitate to get involved in their children’s education because of language barriers or because of their own negative experiences as students. Families need to feel valued and welcomed before they will enter their child’s school.

Scholastic, Houston Independent School District, and the Houston Area Urban League Come Together to Support Literacy Development and Academic Performance

Scholastic’s *Read and Rise* partnership with Houston Independent School District (HISD, a diverse district with high poverty) and the Houston Area Urban League (HAUL) provides an inspiring case study of what happens when all stakeholders come together to support children’s literacy development and academic performance. *Read and Rise* is a comprehensive literacy solution that unites homes, schools, and communities around the common goal of developing literacy skills in young children. The HISD/HAUL/*Read and Rise* partnership demonstrates that a child’s academic success lies in the strength of their *relationships* with significant others in their lives—family members, caregivers, teachers, and community literacy partners. The implementation of *Read and Rise* in Houston Independent School District has raised awareness of the importance of early literacy as it has raised parent participation and bolstered graduation results. *Read and Rise* builds community capacity by supporting and facilitating early language development in young children through educator trainings, parent workshops, and family and community resources. At the heart of *Read and Rise* is the belief that all of the adults in a child’s life should know the importance of literacy development and how best to support its growth.

The initiative shows solid and steady signs of growth and evolution and has proved to be an organic and adaptable platform for both short-term and long-term sustainable change. Note the measurable outcomes:

- Graduation rate in HISD is at an all-time district high: for 2010 an improvement of 4.3% on the previous year.
- Dropout rate in HISD is at an all-time district low: 12.6%, a 3.2% decline from 2009.
- Three HISD schools featured on *Newsweek*’s 2011 List of “America’s Best High Schools.”
- 25 HISD schools on *The Washington Post*’s 2011 Challenge Index (a measure of academic rigor)—up from 16 in 2009.

The scope of the implementation is equally impressive:

- The HAUL/*Read and Rise* Partnership worked with more than 25,000 parents.
- 12 elementary schools in this period changed to *recognized* (5) or *exemplary* status (7).



- 120,000 books were distributed.
- 70,200 magazines were distributed.
- 25,000 Parent *Read and Rise* guides were distributed.
- 89% of 500 parent/caregivers surveyed in schools said their weekly family hour now consists of reading books for fun!

In sum, two efficacy studies (Goldenberg et al., 2007 and 2009) found that parents and families, who participated in the *Read and Rise* (formerly known as *Lee y Serás*) workshop series, benefited in the following ways:

- Parents learned that their home environment and community surroundings—as well as their own culture, language, and everyday activities—are valuable resources in helping their children to develop early literacy skills.
- Parents were empowered to take on more purposeful roles in supporting their children’s literacy development by directly engaging their children in activities such as expanding their oral literacy development, reading to them, and teaching them new letters and words.
- The workshops allayed many parents’ concerns around their use of their first language—Spanish—to promote and enrich their children’s literacy.

Cultural Considerations

Strong relationships with adults who provide support are essential to the healthy development of all children (Zaff & Smerdon, 2008) but building those relationships begins with “respecting and addressing the needs and preferences of unique families and communities.” As urban sociologist and school reformer Pedro Noguera (2011) suggests, it may begin with educators seeing themselves as part of the community in which they are teaching. He outlines the challenge:

... educators need to know the community. They need to see their parents as allies; not as their clients, or as a bother. I would say that’s hard for a lot of educators because they don’t know the communities, they don’t know how to communicate with the parents. And many of the parents come to school with an attitude of suspicion, with hostility, because their experiences in school were not good. And so how do we build trusting relationships with parents? It has to be premised on the understanding that we want the same thing. That we all want to see the kids do well.

Let’s examine a case study that makes the point.

Granger High School: Family Partnerships

As reported in an Issue Brief published by The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2009), “Family involvement tends to decrease across the middle and high school levels, yet it remains a strong predictor of adolescents’ academic achievement and social outcomes” (Bouffard & Stephen, 2007; Harvard Family Research Project, 2007). Adolescents benefit when adults are involved in their daily lives (Ferguson & Rodriguez, 2005).

Granger High School is a case in point. Principal Richard Esparza made 100% parent involvement a school goal—and achieved the goal. How did he do it? In large part by acknowledging and addressing the unique needs of the school community. As summarized by Warger, Eavy, and others (2009), Granger High School serves a primarily rural population in Washington State. Many families make their living as agricultural workers. One-third of the 330 students are children of migrant workers; approximately 82% are Hispanic, 6% Native American, and 10% are Caucasian. The vast majority of students (84%) is eligible for free or reduced price meals.

As Esparza reflected on his own academic success, he realized that his own parents had provided the support and encouragement that put him over the top, so he worked hard to reach out to the parents in his school community. Esparza sums up his goal: “At its core, families needed to feel welcome and essential to their children’s education. And they needed to be supported in participating.”

“**Schools should develop and deliver culturally responsive interventions as early as possible.**”

—Sandra Barrueco, Michael Lopez,
and J. Miles, 2007

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT



The Elements of Success

Esparza and his staff initiated a system that featured the following elements:

- **Teacher Mentors**

Esparza redistributed school resources to teachers so each one could become a mentor to a group of 20 students, whom they championed for four years. Teacher mentors develop individualized educational plans with each of their students that detail goals, objectives, special activities, and various supports—all of which is explained to and discussed with the students' families. The mentor is the liaison between the family and the school.

- **Biannual Individualized Parent Conferences**

Teacher mentors meet individually with parents for 30 to 60 minutes at least twice annually and review all aspects of what they can do to best support their children at home. The meetings are scheduled at convenient times for the parents, and off-site as needed.

“**Schools must learn to embrace and implement different strategies and techniques to reach all members of their school community.**”

—Patricia Edwards, 2009

- **Semimonthly Progress Reports**

The basic tenet is clear to all: no student will fail. Every other Friday, student progress reports are sent home and parents are encouraged to review and monitor. The family’s teaching mentor is standing by to answer questions.

Something to Write Home About

The family-school partnership played a pivotal role in the rise of Granger’s academic achievement and graduation rates. Esparza explains:

Families wanted to be involved in their child’s education. They needed a way to feel welcomed and acknowledged by the school. And they needed specific ways, such as monitoring their child’s progress, to provide support in the home. The 100% attendance rate of our families at the biannual meetings is a testament to the system. As students succeed academically, their behavior improves and morale increases. Success breeds success.

Family Beliefs About Academic Success

Dr. Patricia Edwards (2011, 2009) reminds us that while all parents want their children to succeed academically and beyond, not all parents share the same set of beliefs and skills about how best to support their children to that end. Edwards suggests that schools would do well to apply the principles of differentiated instruction to their work with parents. As she notes, “Parents, like students, are best served when treated individually.” She offers several suggestions for reaching out to parents in ways that recognize not all parents are alike; not all share the same approach to child-rearing.

Differentiating Family Supports

As Patricia Edwards argues, it’s time to “think new” about parent involvement and the ways in which we reach out and welcome *families and communities* into our schools. It’s no longer something a few parents do on their own. Rather, “improving school, family, and community partnerships must be part of every school improvement plan.” And furthermore, we must tailor what we do to fit the unique cultural and linguistic needs and strengths of the communities in which we are working. As Edwards reminds us, thoughtful, sensitive “differentiation” is a must for family and community reach-out, too. To that end, she outlines six steps to sensitive family outreach:

1. Define parent involvement—in this way, everyone then will share a common understanding of what it means at your school: home-only activities or does it include an at-school response, too?

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

2. Assess your parent involvement climate—is it warm and welcoming? Parents won't get involved with school matters unless they feel welcome, respected, trusted, heard, and needed.
3. Consider the needs of your parents—consult with a small group of representative parents or consider sending home a survey in order to ascertain their primary needs and concerns.
4. Create a demographic profile—this is a short questionnaire that compiles information about the school's families.
5. Establish goals and share with parents—define your goals and determine how you'll accomplish them, then share with parents so you're all on the same page. As Lisa Delpit notes, make explicit to parents the school's "culture of power," a set of values, beliefs, ways of acting and being that too often serve to unfairly and unevenly elevate certain groups of people—mostly white, upper and middle class, male, and heterosexual—to positions where they have more control over money, people, and societal values than their non-culture-of-power peers. In this way, no one is excluded from participating; everyone is allowed a voice (1986).
6. Raise awareness—once you've identified your school community's needs, get the word out through multiple channels and help parents understand what they can do to help.

Dispelling Myths About Latino Parent Participation

Patricia Edwards's essential message is abundantly evident in the study, *Dispelling Myths About Latino Parent Participation in Schools* (2006), conducted by Quiocho and Daoud, based at two large Southern California schools, both identified by the California Department of Education as underperforming. Between the two schools, the researchers observed and interviewed 70 Latino families and nearly 100 school staff. The researchers held public meetings at each school to disseminate and discuss the data; the split between the teaching staff and families was immediately apparent—a stark example of Delpit's "culture of power." Fortunately, constructive criticism and suggestions emerged. Indeed, the study demonstrates Dr. Edwards's point: not all parents are the same. Schools must learn to embrace and implement different strategies and techniques to reach all members of their school community.

Quiocho and Daoud's data indicated that the teachers believed that the Latino families who attended their schools were "unreliable and refused to volunteer in the classroom, did not support the school's homework policy because they did not help their children with homework, did not care about their child's education, and were unskilled and unprofessional."





The parents, too, were upset; the data revealed that they:

- Wanted their children to receive the same services as other students including curriculum content and instruction
- Were concerned that the curriculum centered only on literacy and learning to speak English; they wanted their children to have science and social studies, too
- Were concerned by the lack of promised follow-up
- Wanted help in understanding their children's homework
- Wanted to be better informed about instructional goals and better informed in general; they asked for access to Spanish text so they can work more closely with their children and help
- Wanted teachers to respect their children

Ultimately, much of the parents' concern centered on a lack of communication and a worry that their children weren't receiving the same content-rich curriculum as their white peers. The parents asked for a friendly, Spanish-speaking parent liaison in the front office so they'd feel comfortable going to school and requesting

help directly. And they also asked that all school materials and communication be translated to Spanish. On the other side, the school staff were impressed with the family turnout and the extent and quality of the parental concerns as articulated by multiple family members. They immediately re-evaluated their assumption that Latino parents don't care about their children's education.

Osmond A. Church School: A Multicultural School With Multicultural Needs

Helping parents help their children can be somewhat challenging when parents are new to American schools; still, with thoughtful communication and sensitive outreach, every parent in a school community, no matter their background, can become an enthusiastic participant. Valerie Lewis is the principal of Osmond A. Church School, a diverse, high-poverty school in Queens, New York, close to JFK International Airport, with 40% African American, 33% Asian (mostly of Indian and Pakistani descent), and 23% Hispanic students. Lewis explains:

We have a large Asian population. Many of the husbands are very protective of their families and would not allow their wives in the school building. To build trust, we made sure translators were at every meeting. We scheduled meetings at different times to accommodate parent and/or guardian work schedules. We held cultural celebrations and invited not just the families but also members of the extended family to participate. Also, each month we invited families to participate in recognition days at which children and their families would be recognized for their eagerness to learn. Eventually, the husbands decided that our school was safe, and since that time we have had significant family participation (Warger, et al., 2009).

Additionally, the school implemented a number of outreach programs that further informed parents about the curriculum—materials that went home, invitations to come to the school for dissemination workshops, social work assistance, and after-school support that also helped parents learn about the school's curriculum and learning program. The effort has paid off. "Our students are learning and achieving at high rates," Lewis explains. "For example, in 2007, more than 82% of students met or exceeded state standards in English/language arts. Student also matched or exceeded the rate of proficiency posted by all New York State students."

Strategies to Promote Success

Our schools are facing daunting challenges and yet, over time, through focused research, case studies, and on-the-ground experience, educators are learning what works and what doesn't. Here's an inspiring example of what works.

“Schools are struggling to raise student achievement, reduce dropout rates, address disparities among children, close racial and ethnic achievement gaps, and increase the level of expectations of—and support for—all children. The call is clear; it is time for major systemic changes.”

—Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor,
Center for Mental Health in Schools,
UCLA

Chicago Child-Parent Centers

As reported by the Harvard Family Research Project (2006), Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) have been run by the Chicago public schools since 1967. The CPC are widely regarded by both policymakers and researchers as an example of exceptional pre-K that “provides preschool education for low-income children from age three through third grade, as well as a variety of family support services inside and outside the centers.” The CPC aim to bolster family involvement in children’s education both at home and in school. Involvement includes a range of activities: parents volunteer as classroom aides, interact with other parents in the center’s parent resource room, participate in educational workshops and courses, attend school events, accompany classes on field trips, and attend parent-teacher meetings. “This involvement strengthens parenting skills, vocational skills, and social supports.”

The research is promising. CPC has been effective in promoting both family and child development outcomes. CPC preschool participants were compared to a matched control group of children who didn’t attend CPC. The benefits of CPC preschool participation are striking and long term, positively impacting the students’ entire school career. CPC participation has led to:

- Greater parent involvement in and satisfaction with children’s schooling and higher expectations for children’s educational attainment
- Greater school achievement and lower rates of school remediation services for both preschool participation and school-age children
- Higher rates of high school completion and lower rates of official juvenile arrest for violent and nonviolent offenses

In Sum

Following the work of UCLA researchers Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor (2008), and in partnership with Scholastic, Gainesville City Schools has created a district-wide system of comprehensive learning supports for its students. After just three years, they have seen significant outcomes, including:

- A decrease in discipline referrals to tribunal hearings (91 in 2009 to just 26 in 2012, a 71% decrease)
- An increase in graduation rate (73% graduation rate in 2009 to 85% in 2011)
- An increase in the number of students exceeding expectations on state criterion tests in every group and subgroup

- An increase in community and parent support as indicated on survey ratings and participation rates

Addressing their increase in family involvement and success in implementing *Scholastic Read and Rise* as part of their Learning Supports plan, Gainesville Superintendent Merrienne Dyer and Parent Educator Maria Ramirez, say: “It’s not a program; it is the result of trust and mutual respect built over time. It is a relationship that takes a system of continual care. A healthy relationship is based on empathy and open-minded attitudes” (Light et al., 2012).

And it’s school, family, and community relationships that fuel the *Scholastic Read and Rise*, Houston Independent School District, and Houston Area Urban League partnership. Not only are hundreds of HISD parents showing up for school Literacy Nights, but the districts’ athletic coaches are also playing a leading role in recruiting and motivating families to change the culture of literacy in the community. PTOs and district administrators—superintendents and principals—are involved, as are corporate stakeholders including Walmart, HEB Grocery Stores, State Farm, and the highly-regarded Houston Astros, Texans, and Rockets.

In the end, in addition to the research-based information and quality materials that are used to reach out, educate, and involve families—family literacy nights, information about early literacy development, quality read-aloud books—it always comes down to *relationships*. Recall the most influential factor in the Hoover-Dempsey (2005) study: When asked why they chose to get involved in their child’s school, the majority of parents responded, “Because we felt welcome in the school.”

Again and again, the message is the same: Schools that succeed in engaging families from diverse backgrounds:

- Focus on building trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members
- Recognize, respect, and address families’ needs as well as their differences and
- Embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared (Henderson et al., 2007) 🧑





Access to Books

“**Ensuring that books are available to any child at any time of the year will be a good first step in enhancing the reading achievement of low-income students and an absolutely necessary step in closing the reading achievement gap.**”

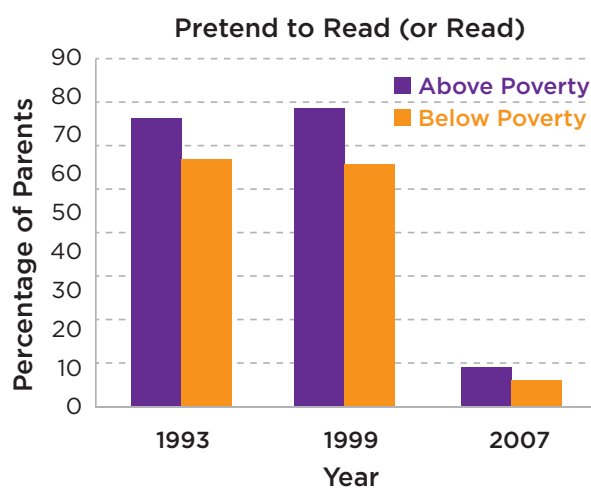
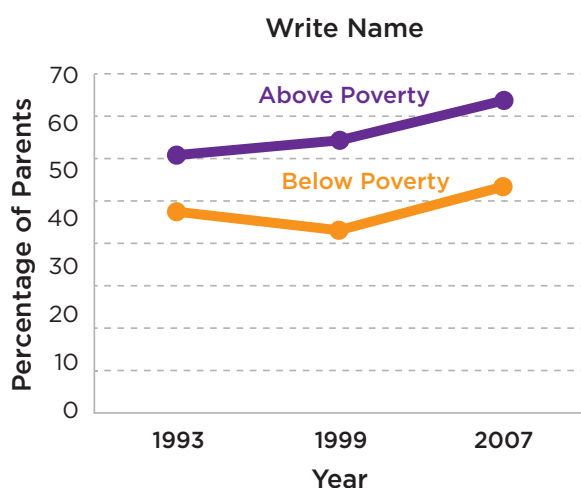
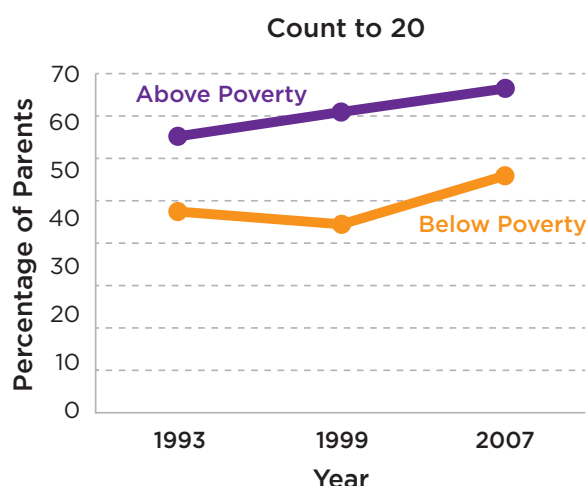
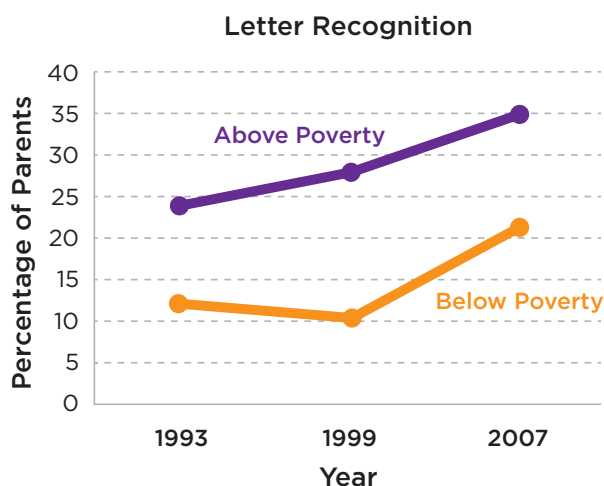
—Anne McGill Franzen and Richard Allington, 2009

It’s a well-established fact that the inequities in schools—lower tax base to support schools in impoverished areas, shortages of qualified teachers, lack of books and materials—hurt children in high-poverty communities. The data from the National Household and Education Survey (NHES) also demonstrates that children from households with limited resources enter school at a disadvantage. Researchers arrived at this conclusion by examining the data from surveys given to the parents of children aged three to six in 1990, 1993, and 2007. The parents were asked whether their child could complete specific school readiness tasks and the results were troubling (see figure on page 50). Across all three years, “... children from poorer families are less able to recognize their letters, count to 20, write their name, or read or pretend to read a book” (reported in Lindsay, 2010; Child Trends data bank).

What might account for the differences in school readiness among children with economic challenges and those free of financial constraints? Researchers have examined multiple possibilities, but two intertwined lines of research suggest a logical argument. First, early literacy research across four decades, from Durkin (1966) to Bus, van Ijzendoorn, and Pellegrini (1995) to Neuman and Celano (2006), offer convincing evidence that the interactions young children enjoy at home with their caregivers—especially conversation and hearing stories read aloud—play a significant role in academic success and beyond. Children who are read aloud to at

- 1 Early Literacy
- 2 Family Involvement
- 3 **Access to Books**
- 4 Expanded Learning
- 5 Mentoring Partnerships

School Readiness Skills Reported by Parents of Children Ages 3-6: Above Poverty Threshold and Below Poverty Threshold



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home develop a stronger vocabulary, more background knowledge, better expressive and receptive language abilities, and stronger phonological awareness and early literacy skills.

The second line of research centers on access to books. Children from impoverished households have access to fewer books and other reading materials than do their more financially stable peers. Not only do poor children have fewer books in their homes, but they also live in communities with fewer books in the classroom, school, and public library. If their neighborhood even has a public library,

they are likely to encounter reduced hours and limited funding for replenishing and updating the collection (Neuman & Celano, 2001; Krashen, 2012).

Drawing from the research, the argument follows this logical line of thinking:

- Children from less affluent families do not perform as well on achievement tests compared to children of more affluent families.
- These gaps related to families' socioeconomic status are present even before children enter school.
- Reading to young children is related to stronger subsequent academic achievement.
- Children in low-income families have access to fewer reading materials than children of middle- and upper-income families (Lindsay, 2010; Krashen, 2012).

Let's look first at the price of a lack of access to books—and then the advantages of access.



“**If we wish to close the gap between the rich and poor in this nation and we know where the gap grows and widens, then it is criminal to ignore it.**”

—Jim Trelease, 2007

No Books and the Terrible Cost

When Neuman & Celano (2001) examined four neighborhoods, two poor and two middle-income, they found “stark and triangulated differences” in access to materials between them. Children in middle-income neighborhoods had multiple opportunities to observe, use, and purchase books (approximately 13 titles per child); few opportunities were available for low-income children who, in contrast, had approximately one title per 300 children. Other avenues of access to print were also unavailable: school libraries in poor communities were often closed, unlike thriving libraries in middle-class schools, which featured 12 titles per child. Public libraries were open only for brief hours in low-income neighborhoods, compared with many open hours in middle-income neighborhoods. Additionally, while middle-class day care centers featured quality books for the children in their care, in low-income neighborhoods, Neuman and Celano found on average fewer than one to two books available per child; of those books, the majority were mediocre or of poor quality.

In his study of book access in Los Angeles, USC professor emeritus Stephen Krashen found that students attending schools in Beverly Hills had access to eight times as many books in their classrooms as students attending schools in the high poverty and largely African-American communities of Watts and Compton. What's more, the Beverly Hills school libraries carried about three times as many titles, and their public libraries carried roughly twice as many (2012).



Because low-income children have limited access to books, they also likely miss out on the stimulating parent-child interactions around books and stories, in particular, the read-aloud. And without the read-aloud, children are deprived of the opportunity to learn about their world, acquire more sophisticated vocabulary beyond their everyday language, and understand how decontextualized language works, which is the beginning of abstracting information from print.

As Stanovich (1986) notes, in his classic model of the Matthew Effect, the differences in these early opportunities become “magnified over time so that less-skilled children have fewer interactions with text than their more skilled peers.” Limited, unrewarding experiences with reading add up and, ultimately, children miss out on reading as a pleasurable meaning-making experience with tremendous value and usefulness. Simply put, the reading rich get richer and the reading poor miss out on more academic growth with every passing year; children are caught in a vicious cycle of intellectual deprivation.

Donald Hayes and Judith Grether (1983) investigated high-and low-poverty students in 600 New York City Schools. They discovered a seven-month difference in scores at the beginning of second grade,

Statistics: Access to Books Is the Key to Successful Reading Development

Sixty-one percent of low-income families have no books at all in their homes for their children. While low-income children have, on average, four children's books in their homes, a team of researchers concluded that nearly two-thirds of the low-income families they studied owned no books for their children (US Dept. of Education, 1996).

Children in low-income families lack essential one-on-one reading time. The average child growing up in a middle-class family has been exposed to 1,000 to 1,700 hours of one-on-one picture book reading. The average child growing up in a less economically stable family, in contrast, has only been exposed to 25 hours of one-on-one reading (McQuillan, 1998).

The most successful way to improve the reading achievement of low-income children is to increase their access to print. Communities ranking high in achievement tests have several factors in common: an abundance of books in public libraries, easy access to books in the community at large, and a large number of textbooks per student (Newman et al., 2000).

The only behavior measure that correlates significantly with reading scores is the number of books in the home. An analysis of a national data set of nearly 100,000 United States school children found that access to printed materials—and not poverty—is the “critical variable affecting reading acquisition” (McQuillan, 1998).

but this widened to a difference of two years and seven months by the end of Grade six. As Jim Trelease notes (2007), “... what made this particularly striking was the research showing little or no difference in these students’ achievement when school was in session: ... they learned at the same pace.” But all that changed once the children entered sixth grade. As Hayes and Grether note:

The differential progress made during the four summers between second and sixth grade accounts for upwards of 80 percent of the achievement difference between economically advantaged ... and ... the [economically disadvantaged] schools.

The Impact of Print

In an unprecedented search uncovering 11,000 reports and analyzing 108 of the most relevant studies, children's book distribution and ownership programs were shown to have positive behavioral, educational, and psychological outcomes. The study—Children's Access to Print Materials and Education-Related Outcomes (2010)—was commissioned by Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), the largest children's literacy nonprofit in the United States. As outlined by Lindsay (2010), RIF, which receives federal funding to distribute books to low-income children, contracted with Learning Point

“Young children who have access to books in the home and who are read aloud to regularly have the best chance of becoming successful readers.”

—Catherine Snow, Peg Burns, and Susan Griffin, 1998

Associates to conduct “an objective and rigorous research synthesis on the impact of print access on children’s attitudes, motivations, reading behaviors, emergent literacy skills, and academic achievement.” Their goal was two-fold: 1) to demonstrate for policymakers probable impacts of the Inexpensive Book Distribution Program (federal funding stream for RIF); and 2) to provide RIF with information regarding target populations best served by these programs and the program characteristics that produce the greatest impact. In general, the findings show that providing children access to print materials accomplishes the following:

- Improves reading performance. Among the studies reviewed, kindergarten students showed the biggest increase
- Is instrumental in helping them learn the basics of reading, such as letter and word identification, phonemic awareness, and completion of sentences
- Prompts them to read more frequently and for greater amounts of time
- Improves their attitudes toward reading and learning

The researchers also suggest that a *reciprocal* relationship may exist between access and outcomes; in other words, providing interesting written materials to children increases their reading behavior and achievement, which then, in turn, further increases their desire to read and acquire more books (McGill-Franzen, et al., 1999)

A Reading Culture in the Home

The mere presence of books profoundly impacts a child’s academic achievement. From a study published in *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* comes the astonishing information that just the mere presence of books profoundly impacts a child’s academic achievement. Conducted over 20 years, the study by Evans, Kelley, Sikorac, and Treimand (2010) surveyed more than 70,000 people across 27 countries and found the following:

- Children raised in homes with more than 500 books spent three years longer in school than children whose parents had only a few books. According to the abstract, growing up in a household with 500 or more books is “as great an advantage as having university-educated rather than unschooled parents, and twice the advantage of having a professional rather than an unskilled father.”
- The results suggest that children whose parents have lots of books are nearly 20% more likely to finish college. Indeed, as a predictor of college graduation, books in the home trump even



the education of the parents. And lest you think that only the privileged with the means to purchase books reap the benefit of books: not so. Even a child who hails from a home with 25 books will, on average, complete two more years of school than would a child from a home without any books at all.

- Regardless of how many books the family already has, each addition to a home library helps the children get a little further in school. But the gains are not equally great across the entire range; rather, they are larger at the bottom, far below the elite level, in getting children from modest families a little further along in the first few years of school. Moreover, having books in the home has a greater impact on children from the least educated families, not on children of the university-educated elite (Evans et al., 2010).
- In general, the books help establish a reading or “scholarly culture” in the home that persists from generation to generation within families, largely independent of education and class. This creates a “taste for books” and promotes the skills and knowledge that fosters both literacy and numeracy and, thus, leads to lifelong academic advantages.

The authors report, then, that their reading culture theory, backed by evidence, leads to the following predictions:

- First, because reading culture provides skills and knowledge that promote literacy, it implies that parents’ participation in reading culture will enhance children’s educational attainment



“*The mere presence of books in the home profoundly impacts a child’s academic achievement.*”

—Jim Lindsay, Senior Research Associate, 2010

in all societies, regardless of the parents’ formal education and social class.

- The results also support their prediction that an increase in reading culture has the greatest impact on children from families with little reading culture to begin with. It is at the bottom, where books are rare, that each additional book matters most: each additional book yields more “bang for your book” among the book-poor than among the book-rich.
- Finally, a reading culture in the home matters more if parents are poorly educated, but matters less if parents are well educated. In other words, the greatest impact of book access occurs among the least educated and poorest families.

A note of caution: the authors write, “Our results do not in any way imply that formal schooling cannot compensate for the absence of scholarly culture in the home; but they do highlight the fact that children from homes lacking in scholarly culture may require special attention.”

Charles Bayless (2010) speaks also of a “reading culture” that develops in homes when children are able to read and enjoy their own books in their own environment:

The findings reveal what so many have both suspected and innately known to be true—access to print materials does, in fact, improve children’s reading skills, among other critical educational factors. This research is conclusive evidence for educators, parents, and communities to better understand the significance of making print material available for children at school and in the home. For the majority of young people, enthusiastic and habitual reading is the single most predictive personal habit [leading to] desirable life outcomes. Enthusiastic and habitual reading is primarily a function of the family environment and culture, and it is most effectively inculcated in the earliest years (0–6), but can be accomplished at any age. Creating a reading culture can be achieved objectively and through a series of specific behaviors and activities undertaken by parents—but it requires access to books, time, persistence, and consistency.

It’s All About the Books

Research from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS; Mullis & Martin, 2007) reports much of the same. Surveying 215,000 students across 40 countries, PIRLS 2006 was one of the largest international assessments of reading literacy ever undertaken. And results from this study, too, show a similar impact of books in the home and the benefits of a home library and reading culture.

Home Activities Fostering Reading Literacy

- The researchers found a positive relationship between students’ reading achievement at the fourth grade and parents having

engaged their children in early literacy activities before starting school (e.g., reading books, telling stories, singing songs, playing with alphabet toys, and playing word games).

- The presence of children's books in the home also continued to show a strong positive relationship with reading achievement. The average reading achievement difference between students from homes with many children's books (more than 100) and those from homes with few children's books (10 or fewer) was very large (91 score points, almost 1 standard deviation). On average across countries, there was a slight decrease in parents' reports of the number of children's books in the home, perhaps reflecting increased access to Internet-based literacy media.
- In PIRLS 2006, on average across countries, 37 percent of the fourth-grade students had parents who read more than five hours a week, 43 percent for one to five hours, and 20 percent for less than one hour a week. Not surprisingly, reading achievement was highest for students whose parents had favorable attitudes toward reading. In PIRLS 2006, on average across countries, the majority of students (52%) had parents with favorable attitudes.

Why Access to Books Matters So Much

“When kids own books, they get this sense, “I’m a reader.” It’s very powerful.”

— Rebecca Constantino, UC Irvine Researcher, 2010

Donalyn Miller, sixth grade teacher in Keller, Texas, and author of the best seller, *The Book Whisperer*, and the *Teacher Magazine* blog of the same name, supports a 2,000-plus title library in her own classroom, and makes sure her students enjoy daily in-class reading of self-selected books for 20–30 minutes. Why? Because, as she explains, “We teachers have more than enough anecdotal evidence that the students who read the most are the best spellers, writers, and thinkers. No exercise gives more instructional bang for the buck than reading” (Miller, 2009, p. 55).

When it comes to the role of books and reading in increasing reading achievement, the facts are indisputable. Extensive and intensive reading supports not only high scores on reading achievement tests but also a fulfilling and productive life. “For the majority of young people, enthusiastic and habitual reading is the single most predictive personal habit for the ability to achieve desirable life outcomes” (Bayless, 2010). Effective and enthusiastic reading does, as Scholastic CEO and President Dick Robinson maintains, create a “better life.” The U.S. Department of Education notes that avid, wide, daily reading is the most reliable path to the



development of proficient readers; indeed, there's no other way to become a proficient reader. No matter what we're trying to get proficient at (cooking, gardening, yoga), we have to practice many, many hours; Malcolm Gladwell (2008) maintains that 10,000 hours is the magic number for optimal success. No surprise, then, that students who read voluntarily and extensively become proficient readers. Indeed, research demonstrates a strong correlation between high reading achievement and hours logged inside a book—or *volume of reading*.

How important are time and engagement with books? The difference they make is nothing short of miraculous. Engaged readers spend 500% more time reading than do their peers who aren't yet hooked on books. All those extra hours inside books they love gives them a leg up in everything that leads to a happy, productive life: deep conceptual understanding of a wide range of topics, expanded vocabulary, strategic reading ability, critical literacy skills, and engagement with the world that's more likely to make them dynamic citizens drawn into full civic participation. As Mary Leonhart, author of *99 Ways to Get Kids to Love Reading* (1997), notes:

"The sophisticated skills demanded by high-level academic or professional work—the ability to understand multiple plots or complex issues, a sensitivity to tone, the expertise to know immediately what is crucial to a text and what can be skimmed—can be acquired only through years of avid reading."

In a classic 1988 study, "Time Spent Reading and Reading Growth," Taylor, Frye, and

Maruyama found the amount of time children spend reading is significantly related to their gains in reading achievement. They asked 195 fifth- and sixth-grade children to keep daily logs of their reading at home and at school over a four-month period. They found that the amount of time spent reading during reading period in school contributed significantly to gains in students' reading achievement as measured by reading comprehension scores on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, while time spent reading at home approached significance. There is no doubt that providing students with time to read enhances their reading ability.

- While the best predictor of reading success is the amount of time spent with books, reading achievement is also influenced by the frequency, amount, and diversity of reading. Avid readers are well acquainted with the joys of a good novel, but they also enjoy reading for a variety of purposes—exploring informational text, absorbing information to perform a task, or sharing poetic text through a range of social media.
- The primary difference between individual variations in children’s vocabulary has to do with their exposure to text and reading volume. That’s because oral language, compared to written, is lexically impoverished. Children encounter much richer language, replete with rare words, in the pages of children’s picture books than they do engaged in conversation with their parents or watching television. Rich, vibrant language is readily available in books—but kids who don’t read don’t access that language.
- “The average child at the 90th percentile reads almost two million words per year outside of school—more than 200 times more words than the child at the 10th percentile, who reads just 8,000 words outside of school during a year. To put it another way, the entire year’s out-of-school reading for the child at the 10th percentile amounts to just two days of reading for the child at the 90th percentile. These dramatic differences, combined with the lexical richness of print, act to create large vocabulary differences between children” (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998).

Sharing books, talking about them, and reading them aloud is the greatest harbinger of success for our children in all areas, particularly reading. Again and again, the challenges of poverty notwithstanding, we find the most important indicator of our students’ success—in school and beyond—is captured in the simple question: *Do they read?*

Nowhere is access to books—and access to the intellectual benefits they hold—more evident, perhaps, than in the phenomenon of the so-called *summer slide*. What is it and what does it have to do with access to books? Let’s find out.

The Summer Slide and the Solution

The “summer slide” or “summer reading setback” is a well-established phenomenon (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Cooper, Charleton, Valentine, & Muhlenbruck, 2000). It refers to the decline in reading skills over the few months when students have no access to school or books to read. The decline is especially dramatic for students who are economically deprived (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2010).

“**Summer reading loss accounts for at least 80 percent of the reading achievement gap by ninth grade.**”

—Richard Allington and
Anne McGill-Franzen, 2009

The Summer Slide

A quick compilation of additional facts and figures outlines the challenge, consequences, and solution:

- Summer learning shortfall experienced by low-income children in the elementary grades has consequences that reverberate throughout children's schooling, and can affect whether a child ultimately earns a high-school diploma and continues on to college (Alexander et al., 2007).
- Two-thirds of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities (Alexander et al., 2007). At best, students showed little or no academic growth over summer. At worst, students lost one to three months of learning (Cooper et al., 2000).
- New research indicates that sending books home with children over the summer yields great achievement gain and is less expensive and less extensive than providing summer school or engaging in comprehensive school reform (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008).
- Children who receive and read free books over the summer experience the equivalent of attending three years of summer school—and the difference in fall reading scores is twice as high among the poorest children in the study (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008).
- Reading four to five books during the summer is potentially powerful enough to prevent a decline in reading achievement from spring to fall (Kim, 2004).
- Children who read as few as six books over the summer break can maintain their reading skills at a level achieved in the preceding school year (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008).
- When children are provided with 10 to 20 self-selected children's books at the end of the regular school year, as many as 50 percent not only maintain their skills, but also actually make reading gains (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008).
- Students who read for fun almost every day outside of school score higher on the NAEP assessment of reading achievement than children who read for fun only once or twice a week (Mullis, Campbell, and Farstrup, 1993).

Cooper et al. (2000) reviewed 39 studies of summer academic loss and conducted a meta-analysis, which found that “middle-class students appeared to gain on grade-level equivalent reading recognition tests over summer while lower-class students lost on them. There were no moderating effects for gender or race” They concluded, “On average, summer vacations created a [reading] gap of about three months between middle- and lower-class students.”

Entwisle (1997) used a fall-to-spring assessment schedule and found that children who were more economically advantaged added 47 raw score points over a five-year period on summer vacation reading achievement tests during elementary school years, whereas children from financially strapped homes added only one point. As Allington, McGill-Franzen, Camilli, Williams, Graff, and Zeig (2007) explain, Entwisle (1997) developed a *faucet theory* to explain the disparity. When the school faucet is turned on—that is, when schools are in

session—children of every economic background benefit roughly equally, but when the school faucet is turned off, as during summer vacations, reading proficiency among children from economically advantaged families continues to develop, whereas no similar growth is observed in economically disadvantaged children.

And over a number of years, the accumulated summer loss adds up to a serious achievement gap between children with means (and books) and children without. Hayes and Grether (1983), using achievement data from the New York City public schools, estimated that as much as 80 percent of the reading achievement gap that existed between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students at sixth grade could be attributed to summer setback. More recently, Alexander and others (2007) reported similar findings.

Allington and McGill-Franzen (2010) sum it up:

In other words, each of these studies suggested that summer reading setback is a major contributor to the existing reading achievement gap between more and less economically advantaged children—reading activity is the only factor that consistently correlated to reading gains during the summer.

The Allington–McGill-Franzen Study

For three consecutive years, Richard Allington and his team conducted a longitudinal study that sheds new light on the existing data. Working with more than 1,000 first and second graders in the treatment group and a control group of 631 students who didn't receive books, Allington and associates invited the children to self-select 12 trade books to bring home and keep.

Allington and team found that providing easy access to self-selected books for summer reading over successive years does, indeed, limit summer reading setback. Analyzing data they collected on a literacy habits survey, they gathered convincing evidence that children in their study engaged in more reading activity during the summer months than their peers who didn't receive books, and the results on the state reading assessment indicated a statistically significant effect for those children who had access to books over the summer months. The effects were even larger for children from the most economically disadvantaged homes.

Access to Books

Why does having access to even a relatively small set of books seem to make such a big difference? Allington and McGill-Franzen (2010) explain:

The self-teaching hypothesis put forward by Share and Stanovich (1995) suggests one reason why voluntary reading, during the summer or otherwise, would work to enhance reading

“**Access to books coupled with minimal family and teacher support enables low SES [socioeconomic status] students to counter 100% of the typical summer reading loss.**”

—Richard Allington and
Anne McGill-Franzen, 2008



development. According to the self-teaching hypothesis, each successful decoding encounter with an unfamiliar word provides an opportunity to acquire word-specific orthographic information. Such acquisition then influences reading automaticity and fluency and, perhaps, comprehension and general reading development.

What's more, we've known for a long time of the strong link between reading volume and reading proficiency. Volume of reading is critical in the development of reading proficiency; volume is defined as a combination of the time students spend reading plus the numbers of words they actually consume as they read (Allington, 2012; Guthrie, 2004).

The U.S. Department of Education maintains that independent reading is a widely recognized precursor to

- Better skills acquisition
- Superior grades
- Desirable life related to income, profession, employment, and other attributes (2005)

Clearly, when children spend a good chunk of their summer lost in books and reading, they are logging the hours of reading practice that ultimately lead to proficiency.

- It is during successful, independent reading practice that students consolidate their reading skills and strategies and come to own them. Without extensive reading practice, reading proficiency lags (Allington, 2012).
- Students who read widely and frequently are higher achievers than students who read rarely and narrowly (Guthrie, 2004; Atwell, 2007).
- Increased frequency, amount, and diversity of reading activity increases background knowledge and reading achievement. (Worthy & Roser, 2010; Guthrie, 2004).
- The volume of independent silent reading students do in school is significantly related to gains in reading achievement (Swan, Coddington, & Guthrie, 2010; Hiebert & Reutzel, 2010).
- Adolescents' and young adults' engagement in reading, including the amount of time they spend reading and the diversity of materials they read, is closely associated with test performance and reading ability (Kirsch, deJong, Lafontaine, McQueen, Mendelovits, & Monseur, 2002).
- Fourth graders in the United States do better academically when they ... have greater access to books and other reading materials in their environment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

The Lasting Consequences of the Summer Setback

While much of the summer slide research has focused on the elementary grades, researchers from Johns Hopkins University used data from the Baltimore Beginning School Study to examine the long-term educational consequences of summer learning difference by family socioeconomic level. They examined student achievement scores from ninth grade back to first and concluded that the achievement gap between the student haves and have-nots is largely due to the differences in access to books and, consequently, to the summer slide. They also suggest that the students who are affected by the summer slide and a developing achievement gap are also less likely to complete and graduate from high school and attend a four-year college (Alexander et al., 2007). (For an overview of the downward spiraling effect of the summer slide, see table on page 64.)

The negative consequences are devastating for individual students, but, in truth, their collective setback affects us all—often leading to higher dropout rates, lost earnings and tax revenues, increased need for public assistance, and the like. We need to find ways to get books into our students' hands and into their homes, because it's the right thing to do. But it's also a smart financial investment; the return on investment—on multiple levels—is hugely significant.

“**Reading volume ... significantly affects ... general knowledge of the world, overall verbal ability, and academic achievement.**”

—John Shefelbine, 2000

Summer reading loss is cumulative. Children who missed out over the summer months don't catch up in the fall because, meanwhile, their peers have been moving even further ahead with their skills. By the end of sixth grade, children who have repeatedly fallen behind in reading skills over the summer are two years behind their classmates. It is for this reason that some researchers estimate that one-half to two-thirds of the achievement gap for diverse students living in poverty is the result of summer learning loss (Alexander et al., 2007; Cooper et al., 2000; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 2003).

Access to Books & Return on Investment

RESEARCH

Cost of High School Dropouts Draining U.S. Taxpayer (U.S. DoE, 2011)

Allington, R. et al. (2007). Ameliorating summer reading setback among economically disadvantaged elementary students. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.

Sum, A. et al. (2011). High school dropouts in Chicago and Illinois: The growing labor market, income, civic, social, and fiscal costs of dropping out of high school. Boston, MA. Northeastern University.

Sum, A. et al. (2011). The consequences of dropping out of high school: joblessness and jailing for high school dropouts and high cost for taxpayers. Boston, MA. Northeastern University.

FACT

The cost of summer school intervention was estimated at \$1,500 per student annually, while the cost of the books supplied in the Allington intervention was approximately \$50 per student annually.

The cost of getting a high school dropout back to school and through to graduation is \$13,000 a year, or roughly \$33,000 total.

On average, over the course of his or her working life, a high school dropout receives \$71,000 more in cash and in-kind benefits than he or she pays in taxes. The societal costs may include imprisonment, government-paid medical insurance, and food stamps.

In contrast, high school graduates pay \$236,000 more in taxes than they receive in benefits, and college degree holders pay \$885,000 more in taxes than they receive.

Lifetime earnings of dropouts totaled \$595,000, the study found, compared to \$1,066,000 earned by high school graduates and \$1,509,000 by those with a two-year junior college degree.

In Illinois, the fifth-most-populous U.S. state, with nearly 13 million residents, 11.5 percent of adults aged 19 to 24 left school without earning a high school diploma, and in Chicago that figure reached 15 percent.

- The highest dropout rates were among African American and Hispanic men, at as high as 30 percent.

High school dropouts accounted for 51 percent of the Illinois prison population, the study found.

- The cost of housing an inmate is \$22,000 annually, and adds up to more than \$1 billion a year for the 46,000 prisoners being held in the state, according to state statistics.
- Among men aged 18 to 34, 15 percent of the dropouts were in prison, an incarceration rate that was five times higher than that of high school graduates.

Access to Books & Return on Investment (continued)

RESEARCH

FACT

The Fiscal Consequences of Dropping Out of High School in Rhode Island (2008) (Kids Count Rhode Island, 2009)

For every \$1 of lifetime tax payment by a high school dropout in Rhode Island, high school graduates are expected to pay \$1.45, college-educated residents without a bachelor's degree are expected to pay \$1.76, and those with a bachelor's degree and master's or a higher academic degree are expected to pay \$2.29 and \$3.33, respectively.

The mean lifetime tax payment of a high school dropout is less than half of the mean lifetime tax payment of all state residents (\$368,000 versus \$769,000).

Adult Rhode Island residents who were high school dropouts are expected to pay only \$0.84 in taxes for every \$1 of the cost that they impose on the government from cash or non-cash transfers and incarceration between the ages of 16 and 64.

Each high school dropout in Rhode Island is estimated to impose a lifetime cost (net fiscal impact) of \$72,000 due to their smaller tax payments and higher government transfers and institutionalization costs. Each high school graduate (without any college education) is expected to make a net positive fiscal contribution of \$317,000 over his or her working life.

The True Cost of High School Dropouts (Levin & Rouse, 2012)

If we could reduce the current number of dropouts by just half, we would yield almost 700,000 new graduates a year, and the investment in their education would more than pay for itself.

Studies show that the typical high school graduate will obtain higher employment and earnings—an astonishing 50 to 100 percent increase in lifetime income—and will be less likely to draw on public money for health care and welfare and less likely to be involved in the criminal justice system.

Further, because of the increased income, the typical graduate will contribute more in tax revenues over his lifetime than if he'd dropped out.

When the costs of investment to produce a new graduate are taken into account, there is a return of \$1.45 to \$3.55 for every dollar of investment, depending upon the educational intervention strategy. Under this estimate, each new graduate confers a net benefit to taxpayers of about \$127,000 over the graduate's lifetime.

This is a benefit to the public of nearly \$90 billion for each year of success in reducing the number of high school dropouts by 700,000—or something close to \$1 trillion after 11 years.

Proven educational strategies that increase high school completion provide returns to the taxpayer that are as much as three and a half times their cost.

Investing our public dollars wisely to reduce the number of high school dropouts must be a central part of any strategy to raise long-run economic growth, reduce inequality, and return fiscal health to our federal, state, and local governments.



What Our Children Need

Senator Ted Kennedy once suggested that, together with food stamps, we issue “book stamps” to parents for them to trade in for appropriate books for their children. In order to thrive academically and beyond, children need abundant access to a wide variety of books and reading material. To make this happen, we need:

- Local, state, and federal intervention to keep quality libraries open in low-income neighborhoods (Neuman & Celano, 2001, 2006)
- Local, state, and national book giveaway programs, or access to inexpensive but high-quality children’s literature such as that in Scholastic’s *Read and Rise* or *R.E.A.L.*
- Widespread dissemination—to schools, community partners, and families—of the message that the summer slide is real, yet can be prevented with a book-distribution program that brings together kids and books. Such a program is easy, efficient, and relatively inexpensive to implement, but the difference it makes is incalculable

“***So many inner-city children never leave the five-block radius of their home. Books can give them another world.***”

—Access Books, Southern California Book Giveaway Program, 2010

As stated at the outset, despite broad evidence of a reading achievement gap and its correlation with economic disparity in the United States, educational initiatives at local, state, or federal level have been largely lacking. Ignoring this problem comes at a huge cost to the economic and social well-being of the nation.

One immediate response to the reading achievement gap should be to provide access to books. We should make it a national priority that *all* children from *all* backgrounds have easy access year-round—at home and at school—to the books they want to read.

In Sum

In 2009, in an article for *Teachers College Record*, Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen sounded the alarm:

Summer reading loss accounts for at least 80 percent of the reading achievement gap by 9th grade. Yet almost no federal or state programs or school district initiatives target summers as key to closing the achievement gap loss. As we all know, the gap in reading achievement between economically disadvantaged students and other students in American schools is substantial and to our dismay, stubbornly persistent. According to the NAEP data for high school seniors, that gap is roughly four years in reading achievement, with poor twelfth graders scoring almost identically to more advantaged eighth graders.

One immediate response to the reading achievement gap is access to books. We should make it a national priority that *all* children from all backgrounds have easy access year-round—at home and at school—to all the books they want to read. 📖

“**A good first step in addressing root causes of the reading achievement gap, in our view, would be for schools, with or without federal dollars, to work hard to ensure that every child, both rich and poor, has easy access all summer long to books they can and want to read.**”

—Richard Allington and
Anne McGill-Franzen, 2009



Expanded Learning

“**Expanding access to afterschool and other extended learning programs, which engage and enrich students, will provide many more of our students with firm foundations for success.**”

— NEA President Dennis Van Roekel, 2008

Expanded learning opportunities or ELOs support youth socially, emotionally, and academically and may serve as a lifeline to lifelong success, especially for those most in need—children from diverse, high-poverty communities. Indeed, ELOs are a response to a multi-decade public demand for improved educational outcomes for *all* children (Redd et al., 2012). What are ELOs and how do they work? For a cogent definition, let’s turn to the Harvard Family Research Project (Harris, Rosenberg, & Wallace, 2012):

ELOs serve children of all ages and come in a variety of formats and programs: before- and after-school programs, Saturday academies, summer school, extended school year, and other innovative programs including digital opportunities, that enhance student learning. These programs may also feature a range of sponsors as well, including childcare centers, community organizations, churches, and schools. Increasingly, schools are offering ELOs as a way to support student achievement:

- Of the estimated 49,700 public elementary schools in the nation, 56 percent reported that one or more after-school programs were physically located at the school. Forty-six percent of all public elementary schools reported a fee-based stand-alone day care program, 43 percent reported one or more stand-alone academic instruction/tutoring programs, and 10 percent reported a 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) (NCES, 2009).

1 Early Literacy

2 Family Involvement

3 Access to Books

4 Expanded Learning

5 Mentoring Partnerships

“**After-school programs deserve robust national support—not just for the benefit of at-risk teenagers, but also for children in need of academic enrichment and extracurricular opportunities, and (not least) for their working parents.**”

—Chrisanne Gayl, Social Policy Analyst

- Eighteen percent of all public elementary schools reported one formal after-school program, 23% reported two programs, 14% reported three or more programs, and 44% indicated that no formal after-school programs were located at the school (NCES, 2009).
- Public elementary schools reported an estimated four million enrollments in formal after-school programs. These include duplicated enrollments because a student could be counted more than once if he/she enrolled in more than one program. Fee-based stand-alone day care accounted for 34% of the total enrollments in after-school programs, stand-alone academic instruction/tutoring programs accounted for 39%, 21st CCLCs accounted for 11%, and other types of formal after-school programs accounted for 16% (NCES, 2009).

ELOs also differ in programmatic goals but, according to Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (2011), they usually work to increase student success and well being in the following areas:

- Academic success
- Character education
- Civic engagement
- Social and emotional development
- Wellness and nutrition

A solid base of research reveals what's possible through expanded learning opportunities and their impressive benefits. Besides keeping students safe and free of the risky behaviors that often harm unsupervised children left at home alone, “high quality ELOs correlate with student gains in academic achievement, school engagement, and social and emotional development” (CCSSO, 2011).

The Promise of Expanded Learning

High quality opportunities to learn beyond the school day offer multiple benefits, including a safe, structured learning environment for students of all ages and the opportunity to engage with their peers and caring, competent adults in the community and online. ELOs are at the forefront of a broader vision of learning beyond the traditional school day. In many ways, the traditional school day has become outmoded, particularly for students who have fallen far behind their peers.

The Numbers Tell the Need

Widespread public support for ELOs coincides with the entry of both parents into the workplace and the struggle many families face to balance work and family. In the past 50 years, the number of



stay-at-home mothers has dropped by nearly 50%. It's no surprise that 90% of American families report work-family conflict. What's more, single-parent households have increased from 11% of families in 1970 to 34% today. More than one-third of all children now live in single-parent households. (Kids Count, 2009).

And many of our students also encounter language barriers. The number of English Learners (ELs), or children who are learning English for the first time when entering school, has increased 150% since 1990, though the overall student population has only grown by 20%. ELs may come from families who are also learning English, which affects the parents' ability to help with literacy and English acquisition, and also may dissuade parents from involving themselves in school at all (Foundation for Child Development, 2010).

High School Dropout Statistics (U.S.)

Total number of high school dropouts annually	3,030,000
Number of high school students who drop out each day	8,300
Percentage of all dropouts that happen in the ninth grade	36%
Percentage of students who repeat the ninth grade that go on to graduate.....	15%
Percentage of students in the largest 50 U.S. cities that graduate high school	59%
Percentage of U.S. crimes that are committed by a high school dropout	75%
Average amount by which a high school graduate's earnings will exceed those of a dropout.....	\$260,000
Percentage of African American drop outs that have spent time in prison	60%
Percentage of Hispanic dropouts that were due to a pregnancy	41%
Percentage of U.S. jobs a high school dropout is not eligible for.....	90%

Demographics of High School Dropouts (Percent Who Drop Out)

National Rate	8.1%
Male	9.1%
Female.....	7%
African American	9.6%
Hispanic	17.6%
White	5.2%
Asian American.....	2.1%
Foreign Born	20.7%
Children of Foreign Born.....	13%

Child Trends, 2012

These challenges together with increased accountability pressure—students face more standardized testing than ever and, increasingly, teachers are held accountable for their students’ test scores—help fuel the demand for expanded learning programs that can lend support on multiple fronts, social and emotional as well as linguistic and academic.

Finally, the numbers connected to high school dropouts in the United States (Child Trends, 2012) crystallize the need; clearly, our traditional school day and schooling model is not adequately serving all our students.

It’s our most vulnerable students who stand to benefit most from the extra hours of academic and social/emotional support. Priscilla Little (2009) of the Harvard Family Research Project explains the difference ELOs can make for *all* students:

The research warrant for after-school and summer learning programs is clear: Children and youth who participate in well-implemented programs and activities outside of school are poised to stay enrolled longer and perform better in school than their peers who do not attend such programs.

What Happens After the Final School Bell Rings?

The dangers of leaving both children and teens on their own after school are well documented, and expanded learning opportunities can make a huge difference for the well being and safety of both our children and our communities. Quality programs often become the focal point of community engagement. They create a safe and caring neighborhood hub where families, schools, and communities gather in a united effort to provide support in ways that deter failure and promote success. Let’s explore the facts: first, the challenge we face when our children are left unsupervised, and then the solution.

As encapsulated by the After-School All-Stars’ slogan, too often, *Kids with nowhere to go, end up ... going nowhere*. Sadly, the research that backs this slogan is extensive and disturbing; the statistics below, many cited by the Afterschool Alliance (2008), frame the challenge and the solution:

Children Left Unsupervised

- In 2010, The Center for Family Policy and Research calculated that there may be as many as six million so-called *latchkey kids*, but the Children’s Defense Fund estimates the numbers may be as high as 13 million (Blankenship, 2011).
- The differential between the time children leave school and the time parents get home from work can amount to 20 to 25 hours per week.

EXPANDED LEARNING

Health and Safety Concerns

- Teens who do not participate in after-school programs are nearly three times more likely to skip classes or use marijuana or other drugs; they are also more likely to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes (Policy Study Associates, 2005).
- “The afterschool hours are the peak time for ... experimentation with sex; The National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center (NYVPRC) found that children who do not spend any time in after-school activities are 37% more likely to become teen parents (2012).”
- Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a bipartisan anti-crime organization led by police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, victims of violence, and leaders of police officer associations, has found through a series of studies that violent juvenile crime is most likely to occur between 3 pm and 6 pm, and that youth are more likely to engage in risky behaviors — smoke, drink, or do drugs — during these hours. Unsupervised youth are also most likely to get in car accidents during these hours.

Academic, Social, and Health and Safety Benefits

The research makes evident that expanded learning opportunities offer multiple benefits to our children and teens (Child Trend, 2012; Harris et al., 2012). ELOs have the power to reduce crime, increase safety, bring neighbors together, and foster community pride and ownership. They are proven to lower juvenile crime rates and generally improve neighborhoods in ways that go beyond just keeping youth occupied for a few hours every day. Expanded learning opportunities help young people succeed by providing academic support and the chance to form meaningful relationships with adults from their community, and by encouraging them to get involved in their neighborhood through service projects. The advantages are numerous and multifaceted and students may benefit in the following important ways:

- Engaging in activities that help them realize they have something to contribute to the group
- Working with diverse peers and adults to create projects, performances, and presentations that receive accolades from their families and the larger community
- Developing a vision of life's possibilities that—with commitment and persistence—are attainable.



“**A solid and growing body of literature shows that high-quality ELOs are correlated with student gains in academic achievement, school engagement, and social and emotional development.**”

—Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011

Communities in Schools

“Communities in Schools” describe themselves as a “nationwide network of passionate professionals working in public schools to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.” Communities in Schools works within the public school system, determining student needs and establishing relationships with local businesses, social service agencies, health care providers, and parent and volunteer organizations to provide needed resources. They boast nearly 200 local affiliates and serve almost 1.26 million students in 28 states and Washington, DC.

A return on investment analysis suggests that Communities in Schools “produces meaningful economic and social impacts.” Among the significant findings of the study are:

- The average annual rate of return to society is 18.4%.
- The benefit/cost ratio is 11.6, which means that every dollar invested in Communities in Schools creates \$11.60 of economic benefit for the community.
- High school graduates will be net contributors to their communities for an average of 44 years of their working life, using their increased income to purchase homes and cars, and paying taxes that will support police officers, firefighters, and teachers.

In other words, after-school programs may not only raise grades and tests scores, but, even more importantly, they also help students avoid risky behaviors while bolstering self-confidence and self-esteem.

Let’s explore the research studies that reveal the promise of quality after-school programs—again, many cited by the Afterschool Alliance:

Academic Achievement and Performance

Regular participation in high quality expanded learning opportunities is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores. What’s more, regular participation in ELOs is linked to significantly improved work habits and reduced behavior problems, thus facilitating academic improvements (Child Trends, 2012; Harris et al., 2012; Afterschool Alliance, 2008).

- Los Angeles’s Better Educated Students for Tomorrow (BEST) participants are 20 percent less likely to drop out of school compared to matched nonparticipants (Afterschool Alliance, 2008).
- Seventy percent of elementary students participating in high-quality ELOs experienced increases in math scores as compared with students who did not participate (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007).
- The Promising Afterschool Programs Study, a study of about 3,000 low-income, ethnically-diverse elementary and middle

school students, found that those who regularly attended high quality programs over two years demonstrated significant gains in standardized math test scores, compared to their peers who were routinely unsupervised during the afterschool hours (Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2007).

- When maternal education, race, and family income were controlled, attending a formal after-school program was associated with better academic achievement. The time that children spent in these activities was correlated with their academic and conduct grades (Posner & Vandell, 2008).
- Citizen Schools, a national network of apprenticeship programs for middle school students, reported especially large improvements in achievement among the most high-risk students, including those initially in the lowest quartile on standardized test scores and English language learners. Adult volunteers work with students with hands-on projects after school and help them develop the academic and leadership skills they need to succeed in high school and beyond (Policy Studies, 2005).

Increased Time Spent on Homework and Academic Activities

Almost all children and teens face nightly homework—and those who may not have the advantage of parental help at home benefit mightily from help through an ELO.

- Children who attended after-school programs spent more time on academic and extracurricular activities, whereas children in informal care settings spent more time watching TV and hanging out (Posner & Lowe, 2008).
- Children involved in after-school programs appear to spend more time in academic, enrichment learning, and adult-supervised play (Mahoney et al., 2005).

Improved Social Skills and Self-Confidence

Children and teens thrive in environments that are emotionally positive and warm and that provide support for developing autonomy. Some research suggests that positive experiences in one area (for example, in the family, among peers, at school, through community service) may lessen the effect of negative experiences in other areas. Students who spend time in communities that are rich in developmental opportunities for them experience less risk and show evidence of higher rates of positive development.

Fewer Risky and Dangerous Behaviors

- After the implementation of the city-wide San Diego 6 to 6 program, the San Diego Police Department's 2001 report indicated that ... juvenile arrests during after-school hours were down 13.1%. The police chief specifically cited the 6 to 6 program as one of the primary factors responsible for this

“**After-school programs succeeded in improving youths’ feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem, school bonding (positive feelings and attitudes toward school), and positive social behaviors.**”

—Gary Gottfredson, Denise Gottfredson, Allison Ann Payne, and Nisha Gottfredson, 2004

decrease. Additionally, the rates of juveniles as victims of violent crime during after-school hours decreased 11.7% from the previous year. (Ferrin & Amick, 2002).

- “Students who participated at a higher rate in Los Angeles’s Better Educated Students for Tomorrow (BEST) had significantly lower incidences of juvenile crime... . Each dollar spent on LA’s BEST returns a benefit of \$2.50 to society in the form of costs avoided due to juvenile crime (Godschidt et al., 2007).”
- Reduced delinquent behavior was achieved by positive peer associations (Posner & Vandell, 2008).
- Drug activity decreased 22%, juvenile arrests dropped 35%, and vandalism in the public housing developments decreased 12.5%. (American Youth Policy Forums, 2006)

Improved Nutrition, Physical Fitness, and Obesity Rates

Involvement with after-school programs can even impact physical health and activity. Geneva Pittman (2012) reports that

Researchers from Vanderbilt University in Nashville studied 81 racially diverse public school students, ages five to 12, who went to after-school programs at one of two different sites. To see how the kids’ friendships affected their physical activity—and vice-versa—pediatrics researcher ... Sabina Gesell outfitted the youngsters with accelerometers — small devices that clip on to the belt and measure how active people are at any given time. Based on accelerometer readings, the students spent an average of 30 percent of their free time at after-school in what the researchers counted as moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, including running around or playing active games.

Gesell found that the children in her study adjusted their activity levels in order to keep up with their more active friends. As she explains, “Kids are constantly adjusting their activity levels to match their friends.”

In general, students who participate in after-school programs are more apt to develop the proficiency they need to succeed in school; they earn higher grades, have improved attendance, behave better in school, and are more apt to graduate. They show an increased interest in school, express greater hope for the future, develop positive, nurturing relationships with peers and caring adults, and, in multiple ways, avoid the attitudes and behaviors that lead to trouble while embracing the positive values and hard work that keep them on track. ELOs play a vital role in helping students of all ages stay safe, involved, and developing in ways that enable them to thrive—and all the academic, social-emotional, and health and safety benefits that ELOs make possible also add up to long-term financial advantages.



The Quality Question

A meta-analysis reviewing evaluations of 73 after-school programs (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007) found that these programs enhance the personal and social development of youth. Specifically, students participating in after-school programs exhibited enhanced self-confidence, self-esteem, school bonding, and behavioral adjustment. They also achieved higher grades and test scores. The most effective programs were sequenced, active, focused, and explicit. A variety of factors contribute to positive outcomes that are linked to markers of program quality such as these:

- Support for autonomy
- Efficacy
- Skill-building
- Supportive relationships with peers and caring adults (Mahoney et al., 2005)

Successful programs are flexible and engage children in activities and relationships with adults who serve as role models. Investigating program quality inevitably raises the question: *What activities will best meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of children?*

What Makes for a Quality Program

Informed by an increasingly substantial research base, *The Quality Imperative*, assembled by National Governors Association (2009), identifies the seven key elements that lead to high-quality ELOs:

1. A clear programmatic mission, focused and challenging goals, and frequent evaluation that supports ongoing improvement
2. An array of content-rich programming that engages participants and builds their academic and nonacademic skills
3. Positive, constructive relationships between staff and participants
4. Strong connections with schools, families, and communities
5. Qualified, well-supported, and stable program staff
6. A low participant-to-staff ratio and an appropriate total enrollment
7. Sufficient program resources and the ability to sustain funding over the long term

“**High quality ELOs make a powerful contribution to student achievement, particularly for those students who are lagging behind their peers.**”

—Council of Chief State School Officers

When these quality components are missing, ELOs are not as effective. On the other hand, when they are in place, ELOs hit the mark: they get students on track to succeed and graduate.

The Role of the Common Core State Standards

As noted by the CCSSO (2009), “Although the Common Core is, essentially, a policy document and thus completely different than

A Note About Beyond the Bricks

The Beyond the Bricks Project (BTBP) is a media and international community engagement initiative to encourage and promote community based solutions to increasing educational and social outcomes for school age African American males. The BTBP takes a grassroots approach to improving outcomes for young African American males, by engaging community members—including the young men themselves—as well as educators, civic leaders, and other stakeholders to craft solutions to the challenges they face in their neighborhoods, cities, and the nation as a whole, while encouraging them to examine their functions as role models and community citizens. BTBP also believes that taking an asset-based attitude that seeks to build on young African American males' strengths, individually and collectively, helps to prepare young men to be leaders in advancing themselves, each other, and their communities. "We work to establish partnerships throughout the country and the world to encourage communities to address not only the educational and social inequities that contribute to failure, but also to look at the change that's necessary within so that everyone is accountable and takes responsibility for the success of our children." The BTBP aims to create a national network of communities, organizations, universities, and individuals who are committed to shifting the trajectory of all our young people towards success and community advocacy.

the rich collection of programs and initiatives that comprise high-quality ELOs, ... a strong and clear shared mission [exists] between the two." Both aim to increase student achievement and prepare students for success in college and a career after high school."

There are numerous implicit links between the Common Core and ELOs; the CCSSO suggests we would do well to make those connections explicit as ELOs increasingly play an essential role in student academic achievement and performance. It only makes sense that the thoughtful standards that now govern Common Core practice should be applied to ELOs as well, particularly those that support students academically in math and the English language arts. In this way, ELO funding can be tied to the quality and accountability the Common Core State Standards make possible and promote those programs that are meeting the standards while either improving or phasing out those that aren't.

All Students Need Expanded Learning

Increasingly, we see that those students who have more in the way of multiple opportunities across a broad spectrum continue to get more, and those who don't—typically children from diverse, low-income communities—fall further behind. ELOs are an effective way to level the playing field. "For students who need extra support to be successful academically, what happens before and after school can be as important as what happens during the school day" (NEA Policy Brief, 2008).

Sadly, those students most in need of help are still not connecting with the ELOs that might provide a critical cushion of support. Research from the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) makes clear that family income and ethnicity predict participation in ELO. With few exceptions, the children who benefit the most from expanded learning opportunities are white children from higher income families.

In other words, low-income children may be less likely to participate simply because these activities are cost-prohibitive to their parents. Practitioners and policymakers should consider providing enriching activities like sports and lessons *free of charge* to low-income youth. Scholarships and sliding-scale fees based on family income may also help ensure that all youth have access to enriching opportunities.

Clearly, efforts to reach out and engage families, helping them understand what expanded learning opportunities are available for their children, and what's needed to enroll are the key to involving all children most in need. ELOs that involve families in all aspects of their operation have a proven track record of success.

Parents as Partners

Increasingly, children's education may be occurring across multiple formal settings—not only in their schools but also through multiple extended learning opportunities. The one common denominator among these various learning venues is the family. More than ever, ELOs need to find ways to engage families in more “meaningful and pivotal ways” and make sure that all lines of communication are open as all come together to best support children's learning. Typically, at the core of the highest quality ELOs, we find family engagement. And as a happy outcome, families report improved relationships with their children and a better sense of exactly what they can do to help their children succeed in school and beyond (Harris et al., 2012).

The Harvard Family Research Project (Harris et al., 2012), working together with the National Conference of State Legislatures (2012), outlines what's needed to assure that parents are able to work with ELOs as equal partners and serve as the “primary bridge between multiple learning settings.” Together, ELOs and parents must work together to:

- Understand children's learning needs
- Ensure that program goals and activities align with children's larger learning goals
- Facilitate communication with other settings where children learn to better coordinate learning supports (e.g., tutors, books, and other learning materials)
- Share key data and results regarding children's learning progress

“**The well-being of youth who do not participate in organized activities is reliably less positive compared to youth who do participate.**”

—Joseph Mahoney, Angel Harris, and Jacquelynne Eccles, 2005

In Sum

The demand for ELOs is likely only to increase. Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), the Race to the Top called for innovations that increase learning time, including extending the school day, extending the school year, or supporting learning beyond the regular school day—through community school programs, before-school programs, weekend programs, and summer learning opportunities. And the federal government is committed to supporting working parents; note the rapid growth of 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC), a program that has grown from its original budget of \$1 million in 1996 to today's allocated budget of more than \$1 billion.

The level of federal support for ELOs is not surprising; the need is high and the evidence of their success, convincing. ELOs improve a range of educational outcomes for students—especially and appropriately for those students most in need (Child Trends, 2012). 🧑



Mentoring Partnerships

“*Education is about preparing young people to make the world better than it is.*”

—Pedro Noguera, 2011

Youth mentoring programs are bigger than ever. More than three million young people have a Big Brother or Big Sister, or a similar mentor who is involved in their lives in some way. Mentoring expert and psychologist Jean Rhodes (2008) notes that mentoring has undergone a six-fold increase from just a decade ago, fueled, to some extent, by generous federal funding. But need has driven the development of youth mentoring programs as well. Mentoring helps young people succeed by establishing supportive and beneficial relationships between youth and caring adults. Mentoring programs promote positive individual development, improved self-esteem, better social skills, and knowledge of career opportunities. Youth involved in mentoring programs are also less likely to drop out of school or use unhealthy substances, and are more likely to pursue higher education. The research suggests that when done well, mentoring offers a child the promise of focused goals and long-term success.

Traditionally, mentoring programs served as interventions to counteract risky behaviors such as school dropout, youth violence, adolescent pregnancy, and drug and alcohol use. Today, mentoring has gone mainstream and is regarded as one component of a multi-pronged, comprehensive youth development strategy (Foster, 2001). While mentoring still plays a key role in helping students avoid harmful behavior and attitudes, it's also widely employed in schools and classrooms across the states, often to provide students with yet another layer of academic support and guidance.

- 1 Early Literacy
- 2 Family Involvement
- 3 Access to Books
- 4 Expanded Learning
- 5 Mentoring Partnerships

“There are currently 18 million children in the United States who want and need a mentor, but only three million have one.”

—MENTOR Fact Sheet, 2012

The Challenges Our Students Face

For more than 20 years, The National Mentoring Partnership (MENTOR) has been the leading champion for youth mentoring in the United States, serving young people between the ages of 6 and 18. According to MENTOR, there are “currently 18 million children in the United States who want and need a mentor, but only three million have one.” MENTOR’S mission is “to close that gap so that every one of those 15 million children has a caring adult in their life.”

The Statistics of Need

MENTOR believes that the thoughtful, sensitive guidance of a caring adult mentor can help each child realize and reach his or her full potential. Research demonstrates that youth who participate in mentoring relationships experience a multitude of positive benefits—and the need is high for the extra support mentors provide. More than 8,000 young people drop out of school every day, and African American and Latino males are hit the hardest (Child Trends, 2012). Pedro Noguera (2011) outlines the facts surrounding our troubling dropout challenge:

Why Students Drop Out

Of those students who drop out, 47% maintain that they are bored, unmotivated, and disengaged.

Why?

- Poor teaching—teachers rely primarily on lecture, drill, test prep
- Unsatisfactory remedial courses—students are treated as though they are dumb; there’s no plan to connect students to more challenging academic programs
- Unchallenging curriculum—what students learn is not connected to their lives

Of those students who drop out, 43% do so because they are behind in credits as they’ve missed too many days of school.

Why?

- Stress in the household and lack of support at home
- Lack of connection with adults at school
- School has no plan to help students to catch up
- Distraction of misguided peers—pull of the streets

Of those students who drop out, 35% explain that they were failing their classes and were unprepared for high school.

Why?



- Weak literacy skills
- Lack of reading specialists at high school level
- Lack of organization skills, time management
- Low esteem due to lack of competence
- Lack of clear future goals

Of those students who drop out, 32% leave school to work—this is especially true for immigrant students.

Why?

- Immigrant youth feel pressure to work to support themselves and their families
- Kids in poverty are faced with tough choices related to supporting family and self (Bridgeland et al., 2006)

Mentors Can Help

The research base is substantial and convincing; multiple studies demonstrate that mentors help young people develop social skills and emotional well-being, improve cognitive skills, bolster their self-confidence, and plan for the future. High-quality mentoring also results in better attendance at school, lowers dropout rates, and decreases involvement with drugs and violent behavior. In short, quality mentoring works (Rhodes, 2008).

Academic Support

Perhaps the most active and widely known role for volunteer mentors is that of academic counselor; providing guidance and explicit help with academic challenges and homework. The facts suggest the immediate benefits of this guidance:

- Mentors help keep students in school.
- Students who meet regularly with their mentors are 52% less likely than their peers to skip a day of school and 37% less likely to skip a class (Tierney et al., 1995).
- Mentors help with homework and can improve their mentees' academic skills.

And consider the benefits of extensive reading. As important as early language experience is for establishing a child's learning trajectory, reading experience is also critical for the academic development of students beyond third grade. In a series of carefully constructed studies, Cunningham and Stanovich (1998) isolated the benefits of reading experience from the effects of other factors. They found that, even among students with weaker reading skills, extensive reading was linked to superior performance on measures

“**A growing body of research confirms what we instinctively know to be true—that a caring adult can make a big difference in a child's future. Mentors serve as role models, advocates, friends, and advisors.**”

—MENTOR

10 Extra Minutes of Reading

Percentile Rank	Minutes of Reading Per Day	Baseline– Words Read Per Year	Plus 10 Minutes– Words Read Per Year	Percentage Increase in Word Exposure
98	65.0	4,358,000	5,028,462	15%
90	21.1	1,823,000	2,686,981	47%
80	14.2	1,146,000	1,953,042	70%
70	9.6	622,000	1,269,917	104%
60	6.5	432,000	1,096,615	154%
50	4.6	282,000	895,043	217%
40	3.2	200,000	825,000	313%
30	1.8	106,000	694,889	556%
20	0.7	21,000	321,000	1429%
10	0.1	8,000	Based on reading level: ~ 300,000 words	
2	0	0		

Distribution of time spent reading books outside of school, with estimated words read per year and projection of increased words per year if each child's average daily time spent reading were increased by ten minutes. Adapted from Adams (2006), with baseline data from Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding (1988).

of general knowledge, vocabulary, spelling, verbal fluency, and reading comprehension.

Differences in Print Exposure

Despite its importance, students' exposure to print also varies widely. In a study of the out-of-school activities of fifth graders, Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) found that time spent reading books was the best predictor of a student's reading proficiency. They also noted that many of the students in the study rarely read books on their own; indeed, around 20% of the students devoted less than a minute per day to book reading. It's easy to see how access to a reading mentor could help turn this around.

Life Skills Support

Then, too, young people often need guidance on how to achieve day-to-day successful living:

- Mentors help improve a young person's self-esteem.
- Mentors provide support for students trying new behaviors.
- Youth who meet regularly with their mentors are 46% less likely than their peers to start using illegal drugs and 27% less likely to start drinking.
- About 40% of a teenager's waking hours are spent without companionship or supervision. Mentors provide teens with a valuable place to spend free time.

MENTORING PARTNERSHIPS

- Mentors teach young people how to relate well to all kinds of people and help them strengthen communication skills (Tierney et al., 1995).
- Chicago's federally funded Child-Parent Centers have served 100,000 three- and four-year-olds from low-income neighborhoods since 1967. Research shows that similar children were 70 percent more likely to have been arrested for a violent crime by age 18 than those who attended the program. This program will have prevented an estimated 33,000 crimes by the time the children already served reach the age of 18 (Brazelton et al., 2003).

Preventing Dropouts

A caring adult mentor over a prolonged period of time can make all the difference in changing a student's mind about dropping out. Indeed, multiple studies reveal a correlation between a young person's involvement in a quality mentoring relationship and positive outcomes in school, mental health, problem behavior, and health—all factors that can influence staying in school and graduating (DuBois & Karcher, 2005). Research shows that mentoring helps combat two early indicators of high school dropouts: high levels of absenteeism (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007) and recurring behavior problems (Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002). Students don't make snap decisions to drop out of school; it's a long process of disengagement, which often begins in elementary school with the students' first experiences with failure. Therefore, targeting young children with a disproportionate number of risk indicators for dropping out of high school is critical. Research suggests that children between 9 and 15 are commonly at important turning points in their lives (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008).

Mentoring Partnerships That Work

Not all mentoring programs are equally successful and effective. Program quality is critical, of course. Let's look at other mentoring programs with a proven track record of success beyond the positive evaluation of Big Brothers and Big Sisters (Tierney et al. 1995).

SMILE

The **S**tudy of **M**entoring in the **L**earning **E**nvironment (**SMILE**) is a large-scale, randomized study of school-based adult mentoring for students 10–18 years of age. By the end of the school year, students in the treatment group had attended an average of eight meetings and experienced an average match length of about three months. Small, but positive, main effects of mentoring were found on self-reported connectedness to peers, self-esteem, and social support from friends. There were no impacts on other areas, including grades and social skills. Analyses of subgroups found those who received the added mentoring component had experienced

Common Core Note: Close, Attentive Reading

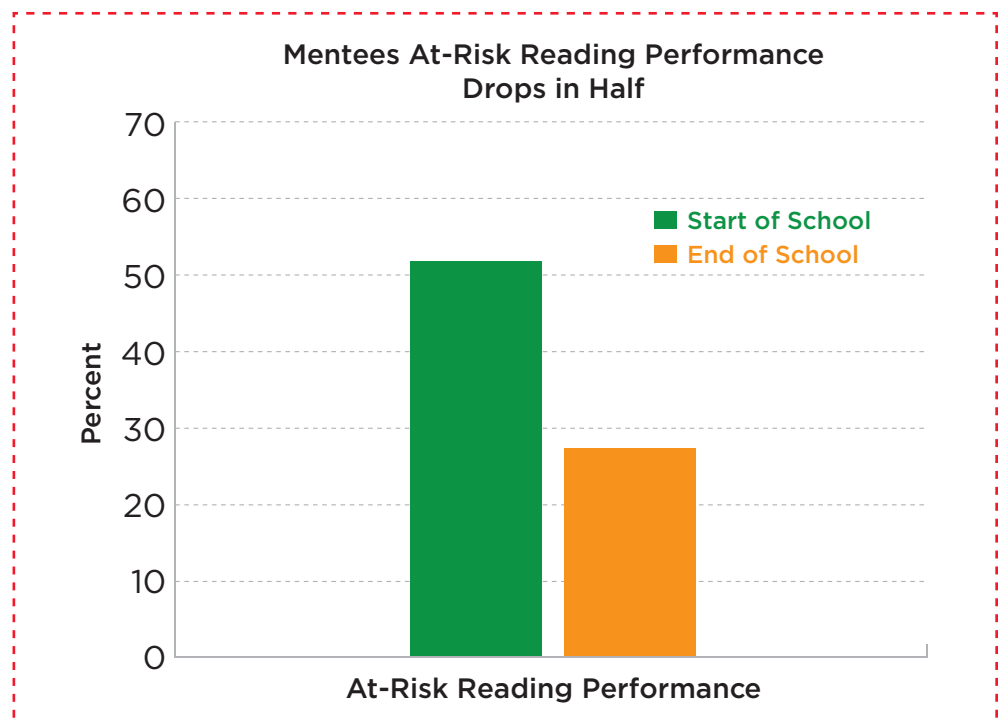
The CCSSO stress the importance of teaching students to engage in “close, attentive reading”—to engage independently in critical reading, determining what a text says explicitly, making logical inferences, and analyzing a text's craft and structure to determine how those affect the text's meaning and tone. Students also evaluate the effectiveness or value of the text, and use the information and ideas drawn from texts—“text evidence”—as the basis of their own arguments, presentations, and claims.

significant positive impacts. Among elementary school boys the positive impacts were demonstrated in connectedness to school, connectedness to culturally different peers, empathy, cooperation, and hopefulness. For high school girls, positive effects included connectedness to culturally different peers, global self-esteem, self-in-the-present, and support from friends (Karcher, 2008).

Third Grade Reads

National assessments of education progress show that too many of our nation's children are failing to meet reading level proficiency by the beginning of fourth grade, especially in urban schools serving a majority of low-income students. And that's a serious challenge because students who do not reach reading benchmarks by the end of third grade have a more difficult time keeping up with peers both academically and socially—which has, of course, serious implications for graduation rates, employment, and the ability to fully participate in a knowledge-based society (Lesnick et al., 2010).

Enter Third Grade Reads, a city-based initiative that draws together the mayor's office, a local nonprofit organization, the school district, and "ordinary citizens" who are willing to obtain the training needed to tutor the highest need K-3 students in reading in schools or after-school programs. This volunteer-based literacy intervention program is designed to provide struggling readers with more opportunities to read using research-based tutoring methods—helping improve student reading levels and ultimately increasing their chances of long-term educational success.



Barbara Bush Literacy Foundation: Trendsetters

Trendsetters, sponsored by the Barbara Bush Literacy Foundation, provides young readers with one-to-one reading attention one hour every week over the course of the school year. Trendsetters pair second and third graders who have fallen behind in reading with a teen mentor—and the results are immensely positive. The young readers benefit (see figure on page 86), but so, too, do their teen tutors, who benefit immeasurably from the experience of taking responsibility to help a younger student in need.

Everyone Wins!

A study of the Everybody Wins! Power Lunch program in seven Washington, DC, elementary schools found that it benefited disadvantaged students who read below grade level. In this program, adults shared weekly lunchtime reading sessions with students in several schools. At the end of the school year, teachers reported that the 223 students who were evaluated (20 percent of the program participants) showed the following improvements:

- Twenty-five percent of poor readers improved their academic performance, more than double the 12 percent of control-group students
- Fifty-five percent of the students often or always enjoyed reading, compared to 31 percent in the control group
- Sixteen percent of the students improved their classroom behavior, compared to only three percent of control-group students

In Sum

Perhaps the words of Diana Mendley Rauner, author of *They Still Pick Me Up When I Fall*, captures both the spirit and promise of mentoring:

As we reflect on the role of caring in young people's lives, what becomes clear is that youths need to grow up in a world infused with and organized by care To become the caring citizens we need them to be, young people need to have made real the vision of the interdependent lives organized around public, as well as private, caregiving responsibilities They must see care made the serious work of public life, rather than a private lifestyle choice. They must grow up in a community where they can both expect the constancy and trust of caring and know that such responsibility will be expected of them.

With the help of one caring mentor, a young person might grow into reading proficiency, acquire the skills he or she needs to graduate, and develop the abilities, attitudes, and understandings needed for economic well-being and full civic participation. 🧑

Common Core Note: Struggling Readers, Complex Text, and Scaffolding

All students, including those who have fallen behind, deserve access to rich, grade level, complex text. But, in order to make this possible, many students will require thoughtful instruction and mentoring—including “effective *scaffolding*”—to enable them to read at the level of text complexity required by the Common Core State Standards.” However, as the guidelines caution: “The scaffolding should not preempt or replace the text by translating its contents for students or telling students what they are going to learn in advance of reading the text; that is, the scaffolding should not become an alternate, simpler source of information that diminishes the need for students to read the text itself carefully Follow-up support should guide readers in the use of appropriate strategies and habits when encountering places in the text where they might struggle, including pointing students back to the text with teacher support when they are confused or run into vocabulary problems” (Coleman & Pimentel, 2011).



Poverty, Resilience, and Hope

The challenges of poverty in our country are ever present and growing. Writing in *EdWeek*, educator and author Anthony Cody reminds us that 44% of all American children live in low-income families, and 21% live below the federal poverty level, currently set at \$22,350 a year. Imagine trying to live on such a paltry sum.

Cody (2012) shares additional troubling statistics:

- Twenty percent or more of the child population in 36 states and Washington, DC, lived in food-insecure households in 2010 (Feeding America).
- In 2011, “one in 45 children in the USA— 1.6 million children —were living on the street, in homeless shelters or motels, or doubled up with other families ...” This represents a 33% increase over the past three years. One child in 10 has experienced foreclosure across the nation, and that number is even higher in some areas (Bello, 2011).
- 2.7 million children have a parent behind bars—one in every 28 children (3.6%) has a parent incarcerated, up from one in 125 just 25 years ago. Two-thirds of these children’s parents were incarcerated for nonviolent offenses. Previous research has shown that children with fathers who have been incarcerated are significantly more likely than other children to be expelled or suspended from school—23% compared with 4% (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010).

Cody also cites the work of Dr. Victor Clarion, M.D., an associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Stanford. Clarion notes that in communities where there is violence, where children are exposed to events such as shootings in their neighborhoods, the children experience a constant environmental threat. And as Clarion explains, “contrary to some people’s belief, these children don’t get used to trauma. These events remain stressful and impact children’s physiology.” Our country’s top child trauma experts suggest that as many as one-third of our children living in our country’s violent urban neighborhoods have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) —“nearly twice the rate reported for troops returning from war zones in Iraq.” And PTSD often leads to PTSD-related attention deficit disorder with the lack of concentration, poor grades, and inability to sit still that accompany it.

Cody explains:

These students are, of course, not evenly distributed among our schools. Some schools in well-to-do neighborhoods have only a handful of the hungry, homeless, and traumatized. Schools in poor neighborhoods, however, have a large share, and teachers

must cope every day with students who are experiencing life-shaking traumas in their homes The schools are supposed to stop making excuses and get the students focused on their next big test, and on going to college. Tough to do when your belly is empty (2012).

A Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

The Comprehensive System of Learning Supports designed by UCLA researchers Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor (2008) is a cohesive and unifying framework that enables all students to succeed and thrive. Adelman and Taylor's work, developed over the course of thirty years in the field, and now extended through a partnership with Scholastic, places student learning and well-being at the center and draws in every component of support—social/emotional, physical, and academic—to create an integrated continuum of coordinated support. The goal is to move away from the fragmented approaches that have marginalized learning supports for students—leading to poor cost effectiveness (up to 25% of school budget used in limited and redundant ways) and counterproductive competition for sparse resources—to one that marshals the full strength and force of the school, family, and community.

The Learning Supports Framework

Based on the research that details what schools need in order to effectively address barriers to learning and teaching, learning supports comprise six categories of classroom and school-wide support, each of which is organized along an integrated intervention continuum. The six categories are:

- *Enhancing regular classroom strategies to enable learning* (e.g., improving instruction for students who have become disengaged from learning at school and for those with mild-to-moderate learning and behavior problems)
- *Supporting transitions* (i.e., assisting students and families as they negotiate school and grade changes and many other transitions)
- *Increasing home and school connections*
- *Responding to, and where feasible, preventing crises*
- *Increasing community involvement and support* (outreaching to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers)
- *Facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed*

Adelman & Taylor; see: <http://rebuildingforlearning.scholastic.com/>



Resilience

“Children who develop effective coping mechanisms for responding to stress and positively adapt in the face of adversity are said to be *resilient*—an important concept in child development and mental health theory and research.” Dr. Steve Southwick, Professor of Psychiatry, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Resilience and Dr. Linda Mayes, Arnold Gesell Professor in the Child Study Center and Professor of Epidemiology, of Pediatrics and of Psychology, both of Yale Medical School and leading authorities on resilience, remind us that “helping children develop resilience-boosting skills is critical—especially when families are confronted with economic, social, and health issues.” And to that end, one of the most reliable predictors of resilience is the strong network of social support children create and maintain when they possess the social competence to do so.

One way to help children develop the skills they need to navigate relationships at home and beyond is through literacy-based practices and materials. The bedtime story is a time-honored way to strengthen and enhance a loving relationship between a young child and parent or caregiver; it’s easy to see how engagement with books and other print or digital literary resources might work to help children build the social skills they need to successfully navigate our dynamic and fast-changing social world. “As scientists learn more about the complex interplay of genetics, development, cognition, environment, and neurobiology,” it will be possible to develop an array of interventions,

“**Everyone in the community—teachers, administrators, service providers—need to assume an all-hands-on-deck stance and work together to provide an exemplary academic experience for the community’s children.**”

—Phyllis C. Hunter, 2012

including those that are literacy-based, to enhance resilience to stress (Tominey, Leslie, Southwick, & Mayes, 2011).

In his book *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* (2012), Paul Tough characterizes resilience as *grit* and argues that the personal qualities that matter most (skills like perseverance, curiosity, conscientiousness, optimism, and self-control) have more to do with *character* than with cognition. And these are skills that we can teach. Carol Dweck, a Stanford University psychologist, writing in her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2006), introduces her readers to two mental constructs: *fixed mindset* and *growth mindset*. As the labels suggest, people with a fixed mindset believe they come into the world with a fixed amount of intellectual firepower. They accept failure as an inevitable reflection of their cognitive limitations. People with a growth mindset, on the other hand, refuse to be limited by real or imagined deficiencies of any sort. They believe that with enough hard work, perseverance, and practice, success is inevitable.

Dr. Alfred Tatum, whose research centers on helping African-American adolescent males overcome adversity, believes that placing the right text in the hands of a vulnerable teen is the key to overcoming a fixed mindset and building a mindset of growth and possibility. For Tatum, growing up in Chicago’s Ida B. Wells Homes, that book was Dick Gregory’s autobiography, a book that Tatum explains “released me from the stigma of poverty, causing me to think differently about my life and moved me to read other texts that strengthened my resolve to remain steadfast as I negotiated a community of turmoil—the Chicago housing projects in the 1970s and 1980s. Gregory’s text changed my life” (2013).

Tatum believes that vulnerable teens have lost their regard for *literacy as liberation* that earlier generations simply took for granted. Frederick Douglass’s persistent fight for literacy is legendary—when the wife of his slave master, reprimanded by her husband for teaching Douglass to read, abruptly stopped her lessons, Douglass convinced the white children on the plantation to teach him. As Douglass learned and began to read newspapers, political materials, and a wide range of books, he was exposed to a new realm of thought that led him to question and then condemn the institution of slavery. In later years, Douglass credited *The Columbian Orator*, a collection of political essays, poems, and dialogues that was widely used in American schoolrooms in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, with clarifying and defining his views on freedom and human rights. As he famously remarked, “Once you learn to read, you will be forever free” (Douglass, 2003).

Hence, the power of what Tatum has termed *enabling texts*, which introduce young people to their *textual lineage* and build for them an intellectual culture in which they learn to believe in themselves

as smart, creative, capable human beings with the resilience to succeed. Like the teens Tough writes about, the adolescent African-American males with whom Tatum works succeed through their own grit, curiosity, and character, and emerge strengthened and more resourceful.

For all of us in the work of supporting our children, the goal is clear: we aim to better meet our children's needs by strengthening the connections among schools, families, and communities. Students benefit academically, emotionally, and physically when all the adults in their lives come together and form a continuous, coordinated, and collaborative circle of care around them. The research of those such as Adelman and Taylor, Tatum and Tough—together with the work of other researchers, educators, policy-makers, families, and community partners represented in this research compendium—show us how we might accomplish this worthy and vitally important goal. 🧑



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