





FROM BABY'S FIRST WORDS

Libraries Promote **Early Learning**

arly childhood learning is the basic building block of success in life. Children with quality early learning experiences do better in school, are more likely to go to college, and are less likely to commit crime. But, too many children fall behind before they enter kindergarten and never catch up.

Libraries are trusted leaders in boosting early learning and strengthening K-12 school learning. Librarians work with parents and caregivers, pediatricians, and others to empower parents as their children's first teachers. Librarians foster a love of

reading through programming and book lending, as well as supply childcare providers and teachers with resources to advance the cognitive development of children. With many thousands of locations, libraries are in communities of all sizes and deliver critical learning resources for families.

We urge decision makers in the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, other federal agencies implicated in early learning, the White House, and Congress to include libraries in their strategies and plans, and build on opportunities for partnership with agencies, non-profit and private stakeholders.

Building literacy from birth

Children from lowincome families may hear roughly 30 million fewer words by age 4 than their more affluent peers, a disadvantage

that compounds over time. Libraries staffed with trained librarians help close this gap through national efforts like *Every Child Ready to Read* and *Babies Need Words Every Day,* as well as through locally developed programs. Growing efforts to integrate universal pre-kindergarten into school districts include roles for elementary school librarians.

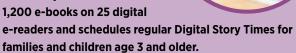
Families for Literacy at the Oakland Public Library (Calif.) works with low-literacy parents to close the word gap and make reading a family value. By starting with what parents know, including talking and playing, the library helps them develop skills and confidence to read with their children and do other activities that boost the literacy skills of parents and children alike.

Libraries serve young children with programs from birth. For example, the West Bloomfield Township (Mich.) Public Library facilitates a large support network for parents and caregivers through its Family Playgroup program. The library hosts families, invites resource professionals to speak, and provides developmentally appropriate toys, books and activities. Speakers have

included a dog trainer to discuss safe interactions with pets and an early childhood expert to discuss nighttime routines. The Salt Lake County (Utah) Library's research-based early literacy storytimes at the Road Home's Community Shelter promotes parental engagement and reading readiness. The library also provides donated books to the homeless shelter for families to enjoy.

Librarians help families navigate the digital world as media

The Casa Grande Public Library (AZ) created a program for children and families that encourages familiarity with childappropriate digital resources. The library offers more than 1,200 e-books on 25 digital





and children age 3 and

older. Meanwhile, the Kitsap Regional Library (Wash.) recommends literacy apps for early learners and hosts Open Labs for families to try out various digital activities together.

Strengthening school learning

Only about one-third of all children attending school in the United States can read proficiently by fourth grade. The numbers are even more dismal for those living in low-income households and in rural areas. Libraries work within schools and with the community more widely to improve the reading skills of young children.

The Virginia Beach (Va.) Public Library works with school librarians and teachers to run summer learning programs in Title I schools, with reading, journaling and hands-on activities. A vast majority of participants have maintained or improved reading skills as a result. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library (N.C.) provides developed a winter break program that promotes literacy and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skills. "It

[learning] doesn't end on break," said parent William Stubbs.

School libraries cultivate a love of reading, digital literacy, and a passion for research and exploration. At the Plumosa School of the Arts (Fla.) teacher-librarian Sally Smollar motivates reluctant young readers by recommending books that will pique their interest and inviting students to create media related to reading, including iMovie trailers to promote Sunshine State Young Reader Award nominees.

"Science clearly tells us that the earlier the intervention, the greater the impact it has, and that's where we need to start. We have an obligation to invest first in the very youngest, most disadvantaged children, who need our help the most."

-KATHARINE STEVENS,
AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

Addressing special needs and circumstances

Libraries develop programs to serve families with special needs and circumstances. For example, the Chattanooga (Tenn.) Public Library offers "Sensory Storytime" for school-age children with special needs (e.g., autism spectrum or other sensory issues) and their families or caregivers.

The *Read to Me* program at Hennepin County (Minn.) Library connects incarcerated parents with their children by recording themselves reading a children's book. The book and recording are sent to the child, and parents can often read the book during an in-person visit, as

well. The Brooklyn Public Library offers a video chat program with incarcerated parents, fostering family connection and a love of reading.

Several days a month, a
Placerville Library (Calif.) early
childhood literacy specialist drives
to rural areas of the sprawling
county, where she engages children
in three dozen family child care

homes. The outreach is part of a statewide effort to improve the quality of day care centers.

"As trusted local institutions, museums and libraries have the convening and staying power to help communities do the hard work of surfacing, connecting, linking, and replicating best practice and building local capacity."

-RALPH SMITH,
THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

expectant mothers.

These programs promote healthy pregnancies, improved child health and development, and self-sufficiency for families.

Parents as First Teachers facilitates a trusted

Test scores are significantly higher for schools with full-time certified school librarians.

Twenty-one state studies confirm school librarians support student achievement.

connection between nurse and mother, where the mother (and later her child) learn the importance of early literacy and library services.

Libraries work with *Reach Out and Read (RoR)*, a national nonprofit organization of doctors and nurses who

encourage family reading. Libraries create literacy-rich waiting rooms at medical offices by hosting library story hours at clinics, visiting with bookmobiles, providing age-appropriate book lists, and donating books. Reach Out and Read Carolinas (S.C.) has worked with the state library to share a Literacy Day by Day family resource with health providers and families, and

in Richland County a library card is given to children by doctors during well-child visits. ■

Partnering for success

Libraries work with a wide range of partners to advance early childhood learning. In conjunction with the *Campaign for Grade Level Reading*, the Idaho Commission for Libraries launched an effort to increase reading readiness. Focused primarily on low-income rural families with young children, the initiative offers themed book bags that can be checked out from 250 partner sites including Head Start providers, child care centers, and family child care homes.

The York County Libraries (Penn.) received a Community Innovation Zone grant to work with United Way, Head Start, PA Pre-K Counts program, and the University of Pittsburgh for family engagement in early education. They are expanding the Ready Freddy program, which transitions pre-K children into kindergarten, to take a cohort of children and their families through 3rd grade and track learning outcomes.

Madison (Wisc.) Public Library partnered with local public health departments to offer Parents as First Teachers. Librarians provide early literacy training to public health nurses who participate in programs that serve low-income

TAKEAWAYS for decision makers ▶▶▶▶▶

- The United States needs to better prepare the next generation of workers and entrepreneurs—especially young children from families or communities with meager opportunity.
- Look to libraries to strengthen early childhood learning.
 Libraries constitute a ready-made infrastructure that provide resources and expert guidance to help parents and caregivers advance children's literacy, which have farreaching academic and economic impacts.
- Librarians work with and in schools to promote early learning. School and public libraries inspire reluctant readers and extend learning for all beyond the classroom and the school day.
- Libraries serve as a community lynchpin for family engagement and early learning networks – bringing learning materials to children who might not otherwise have access, serving families with special needs and circumstances, and laying a foundation of learning for all children.

ABOUT AMERICA'S LIBRARIES

he 120,000 libraries across the United States are a powerful force in addressing public policy priorities. Libraries advance Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, and Engagement for Everyone, Everywhere—The E's of Libraries®.

Libraries serve America's cities, towns, counties, and states; on school and college campuses; on military bases; in hospitals, government agencies, corporations, and other institutions. Library professionals provide diverse programs, services and resources tailored to community needs.

The American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest and largest library association in the world, with more than 58,000 members. The ALA Annual Conference, held in June, typically attracts over 20,000 participants. ALA maintains a Washington Office to engage federal and national decision makers and influencers.

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