

# Reach Out and Read<sup>®</sup>

**Doctors Promoting School Readiness Since 1989**



**Reach  
Out and  
Read<sup>®</sup>**



[www.reachoutandread.org](http://www.reachoutandread.org)

- nationwide leader in early literacy
- research-proven, cost-effective model
- true public-private partnership



# Reach Out and Read:

## Preparing America's Youngest Children to Succeed in School

Reach Out and Read was developed by pediatricians and early childhood educators to make literacy promotion a part of regular pediatric checkups so that children enter school prepared to excel. Exposure to books and reading in the first years of life increases the probability of both healthy child development and school success.

**Reach Out and Read is the model of a successful public-private partnership and has changed the way that tens of thousands of primary care physicians practice medicine.** By encouraging parents to read aloud, Reach Out and Read doctors and nurses expand their practice and responsibilities to make a positive difference in children's developmental skills and consequently in the nation's economic health.



# The Problem:

## One-Third of Children Enter School Unprepared to Learn

34% of American children entering kindergarten today lack the basic language skills they will need to learn to read. And children living in poverty are especially at risk. Children who start out with reading difficulties are more likely to remain poor readers and ultimately fail in school. Without intervention, they will grow into adults with low literacy skills and poor economic potential. Since 20% of U.S. workers are functionally illiterate, this problem is not only a tragedy for each individual; it also has a significant effect on the ability of the United States to compete in the global economy.

# The Science:

## Early Exposure to Language is Critical

Early language skills, the foundation for reading ability, are based primarily on language exposure – resulting from parents and other adults talking to young children. Research shows that the more words parents use when speaking to an 8-month-old infant, the greater the size of their child’s vocabulary at age 3. Recent studies, including the landmark Hart-Risley study on language development, show that **children from low-income families hear as many as 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers before the age of 3.** The problem is compounded further by the fact that 61% of low-income children have no children’s books in their homes.

### Low-income children are at a disadvantage before school begins

A TYPICAL MIDDLE-CLASS 5-YEAR-OLD IS ABLE TO IDENTIFY 22 LETTERS AND SOUNDS OF THE ALPHABET, COMPARED TO JUST 9 LETTERS FOR A CHILD FROM A LOW-INCOME FAMILY.

(WORDEN AND BOETTCHER, 1990; EHRI AND ROBERTS, 2006)

ABCDEFGHIJKLMN**OPQRSTU**VWXYZ

MIDDLE-INCOME CHILD’S LETTER RECOGNITION (22 LETTERS)

ABCDEFGHIJKLMN**OP**QRSTUWXYZ

LOW-INCOME CHILD’S LETTER RECOGNITION (9 LETTERS)

School reform, including universal pre-kindergarten, is vital, but far too much time is lost before children enter the classroom. Intervening early to improve the home learning environment for disadvantaged children will ensure that they are ready to learn when they enter school and succeed later in life. In fact, Nobel Prize-winning economist James J. Heckman found that economic returns on dollars invested in early education are as high as 15-17% per year – higher than other traditional economic development strategies.

# The Solution:

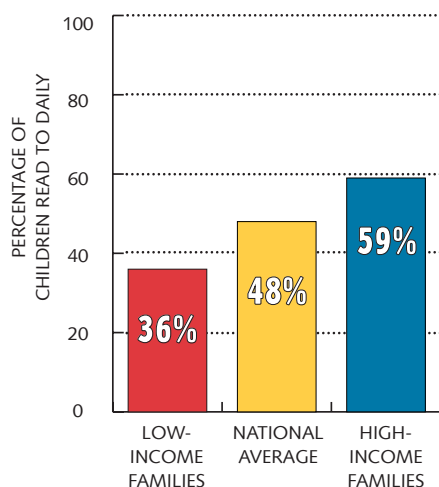
## Parents Reading Aloud

The clear solution is for all adults to speak to young children as an everyday nurturing activity. Research shows that words heard on television and radio programs do not have the same impact as live, spoken conversation. The reason is simple: children want to learn language in order to communicate with the people who mean the most to them: their parents. Of all parent-child activities, reading aloud provides the richest exposure to language. **Unfortunately, fewer than half of young American children are read to daily.**

### Too Few Parents are Reading to Their Children

Percentage of Children Age 0-5 Read to Daily, by Family Income

(NATIONAL SURVEY OF CHILDREN'S HEALTH, 2003)



Reading aloud is not only one of the best activities to stimulate language and cognitive skills; it also builds motivation, curiosity, and memory. Giving parents the information and the tools – beautiful, age-appropriate children's books – to make reading aloud a daily activity enables parents to better prepare their children to succeed in school.

# The Opportunity:

## Reach Out and Read

For two decades, through the Reach Out and Read program, doctors and nurses have gone beyond traditional medical care and provided parents with information on how to read to children at each developmental stage. Along with this advice, doctors give each young patient an age- and culturally-appropriate book to take home, to encourage parents to make reading aloud a routine activity.

# The Impact:

## Evidence-Based Intervention in Early Childhood

Research findings from 14 published, peer-reviewed studies clearly demonstrate that Reach Out and Read works. Compared to families who have not participated in the program, parents who have received the Reach Out and Read intervention are significantly more likely to read to their children and have more children's books in the home. And, children served by the Reach Out and Read program score significantly higher on vocabulary tests. This increase represents a six-month developmental gain for children in the preschool years. **No other early literacy intervention has this kind of evidence base or impact.**

# The Cost:

## \$50.00 Per Child for a Lifetime of Learning

Since all Reach Out and Read doctors and nurses volunteer the time they spend on early literacy, the primary cost of Reach Out and Read is the actual children's books. That enables Reach Out and Read to offer its full five-year program for a total cost of just \$50.00 per child. Every child in the program enters kindergarten with a home library of at least 10 books, as well as parents who understand the great importance of reading aloud.

### Why is Reach Out and Read so effective and inexpensive?

- **A trusted messenger:** Parents trust and value the advice they receive from their child's physician. Reach Out and Read capitalizes on the fact that 96% of children under 6 are seen by their pediatrician at least once annually.
- **Broad scope and reach:** Participating medical providers offer the Reach Out and Read program to all children 6 months through 5 years of age at each regular checkup.

### Reach Out and Read Works

- PARENTS MORE LIKELY TO READ TO THEIR CHILDREN
- PARENTS MORE LIKELY TO SPEND TIME WITH THEIR CHILDREN
- HIGHER SCORES ON VOCABULARY TESTS AND SCHOOL READINESS ASSESSMENTS
- SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTAL GAINS IN LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

(NEEDLMAN, 1991; HIGH, 2000; MENDELSON, 2001)

- **Hope for educational success:** Reach Out and Read explicitly ties reading aloud to future success in school; this strategy matches the aspiration that parents have for their children.
- **Positive reinforcement:** By age 1, if there are books at home, children will "demand" to hear them read aloud. The positive, loving attention children receive during story time motivates them to initiate the interaction again and again.
- **Stretching every dollar:** Deep discounts from publishers, as well

as an innovative bulk-purchasing program, enable Reach Out and Read to buy more than twice as many books as it could at standard retail pricing.

# The Policy Response:

## Strong Public-Private Support for Reach Out and Read

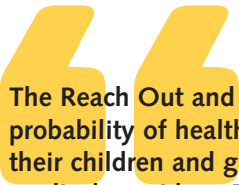
Reach Out and Read's \$30 million annual budget is supported by the public sector – including the federal government and nine states, by corporations and foundations, and by individual donors. This public-private partnership was created by, and continues to be fueled by, the strong evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of the Reach Out and Read model and the mounting awareness of the need. The partnership has enabled Reach Out and Read to expand from its original flagship Site in Boston to more than 4,600 healthcare locations nationwide, serving more than one-third of the children living in poverty in our country. With increased support, Reach Out and Read hopes to one day serve all American children.

# The Next Step:

## Giving Books Should Be as Routine as Giving Shots

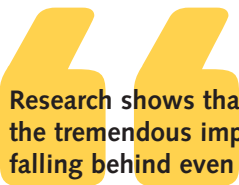
The goal of Reach Out and Read is to ensure that doctors and nurses give literacy-related advice and children's books as routinely as immunizations at pediatric checkups; both are exceptionally important. Endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, Reach Out and Read has changed the way pediatrics is practiced in the U.S. by giving doctors an evidence-based strategy to promote child development and school readiness.

Children served by Reach Out and Read will develop the language and literacy skills necessary to read, complete school, and succeed in life. The success of each child – and the collective success of at-risk children all over the country – will mean increased productivity and economic security for our nation.



The Reach Out and Read model has proven successful in helping parents read to their kids and increasing the probability of healthy child development. Reach Out and Read works with doctors to encourage parents to read to their children and gives them the tools to get started. By building on the special relationship between parents and medical providers, Reach Out and Read helps children enter school prepared to learn and succeed."

- **United States Senator Jack Reed (D-Rhode Island)**



Research shows that reading aloud to children from an early age is vitally important to their development. We've seen the tremendous impact that Reach Out and Read has on kids in Iowa and across the country, who are in danger of falling behind even before they reach school age. Reach Out and Read is an investment in the future and helps ensure that more children have a greater chance at success."

- **United States Senator Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa)**

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