

Early Literacy: A Community Commitment

A Role for Business Leaders

Community Leadership Counts

Business owners are an integral part of the community. As a neighborhood leader, you contribute to the welfare of the community and its members. As an employer, you understand the importance of literacy and the challenge of helping everyone learn how to read proficiently.

Reading is a gateway to future success...in school and in life.

Results of the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress tell us that more than one-third of 4th graders (and an even higher number of our at-risk students) read so poorly they cannot complete their schoolwork successfully.

Sixty-nine percent of 8th grade students fall below the proficient level in their ability to comprehend the meaning of text at their grade level.

It's critical to start early in helping children develop the skills they will need to be successful. By supporting early childhood literacy, you can make a difference in building awareness, making connections, and sharing resources with preschools and families in your community.

Learn about:

- What the research says about early literacy and its connection to future learning



- How to build community support for early literacy through partnerships
- Ways to share early literacy resources with preschools and families

What Research Says About Early Literacy

Knowing the key research findings can help you inform colleagues about the issues, make connections with preschool staff, and plan ways to support early literacy initiatives to give every child a good start in reading.

The years from birth through age 5 are a critical time for children's development and learning. Learning to read begins well before children enter school.

Children who develop more literacy skills in the preschool years perform better in the primary grades. Providing young children with the critical precursor skills to reading can offer a path to improved overall achievement.

Important Early Literacy Skills for Learning How to Read

The National Early Literacy Panel reviewed the research and found that a young child's ability to talk, listen, and understand spoken and written words is related to later literacy achievement in

- *reading*
- *writing*
- *spelling*

Even before children start school, they can become aware of systematic patterns of sounds in spoken language, manipulate sounds in words, recognize words and break them apart into smaller units. They learn about the relationship between sounds and letters, and build their oral language and vocabulary skills.

Although there is evidence of a link between early literacy and later-developing literacy skills, some early literacy skills appear to be more important than others in getting children ready for the next step...learning how to read.

Most Important Skills

- **Alphabet Knowledge:** Knowing about the names and sounds associated with printed letters
- **Phonological awareness:** Being able to detect, manipulate, or analyze the auditory aspects of spoken language
 - e.g., break words apart into smaller sound units (e.g., syllables or phonemes, adding or deleting sound units)
- **Rapid automatized naming:** Being able to quickly name a sequence of random letters, numbers, objects and colors

- **Writing letters:** Writing letters in isolation on request or write own name
- **Phonological memory:** Remembering content of spoken language for a short period of time

Other Important Skills

- **Concepts about Print:** Knowing about print conventions (e.g., reading left-right, front-back) and concepts (e.g., book cover, author, text)
- **Print Knowledge:** Knowing alphabet knowledge, concepts about print, and early decoding
- **Oral Language:** Being able to produce or comprehend spoken language, including vocabulary or grammar
- **Visual Processing:** Being able to match or discriminate visually presented symbols
- **Reading Readiness:** A combination of skills including alphabet knowledge, concepts of print, vocabulary, memory, and phonological awareness

Taking Action

Strong leadership from informed business leaders can help meet this challenge through:

- learning about local early literacy needs, issues, and raising awareness in the community
- building business, community, and educational partnerships to support local early literacy initiatives
- supporting preschools, teachers, and families



Talk to Education Leaders

Learn about early childhood services in your community.

Find out what's happening in local preschools, child care centers, and elementary schools.

Discuss early literacy needs and issues in your community with:

- preschool directors and teachers
- principals and school board members
- community service organization staff
- local policymakers

Create Partnerships

Your central role in the community puts you in a unique position to build partnerships.

Disseminate Information

- Collect early literacy materials from national, state, and local early childhood groups to share with colleagues, customers, and other community members

Network with Colleagues

- Use your visibility, resources, and business contacts to raise awareness at

professional events and meetings in the community

Make Outreach

- Get to know the educators in your community and invite them to attend and make presentations at business and other community events and meetings

Link Partners

- Bring people and resources together and connect them with early literacy initiatives (e.g., through Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, and other community organizations)

Support Preschools and Families

Reach out to families

- Hold in-store activities that promote storybook reading
- Plan children's events around music, poetry, rhyming and, sound games
- Provide free publications from early literacy federal agencies and professional organizations

Support preschool teachers and child care staff

- Offer special promotions for teachers and caregivers
- Sponsor preschool events

Participate in school/community activities at

- schools, centers, and libraries
- community meetings and fundraisers
- businesses (e.g., organize a literacy block party for preschoolers)

The National Early Literacy Panel

The National Early Literacy Panel was convened in 2002 to conduct a synthesis of the most rigorous scientific research available on the development of early literacy skills in children from birth to age 5.

The primary purpose of the Panel was to identify research evidence that would contribute to decisions in early childhood educational policy and practice that could help early childhood providers better support young children's language and literacy development.

Early Literacy: A Community Commitment is based on the Panel's research findings.

The Institute, a federal agency, provides leadership on literacy issues, including the improvement of reading instruction for children, youth, and adults.

Its mission is to make evidence-based reading research available to educators, parents, policymakers, and others with an interest in helping all people learn to read well.

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Learn More

Visit the Institute's website to download copies of this product, learn more about early literacy research, and download a copy of the Panel's report, *Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel*.

www.nifl.gov