

NEWS

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Child Trends Reports on Promising Program for Closing “Word Gap” Through Family Engagement

Raising A Reader Offers Evidence-Based Parent Engagement and Early Literacy Program

Bethesda, MD —Nov. 19, 2014—At a time of increased attention to the “word gap” between young children from low-income families and those from higher-income families, a new Child Trends report examines the growing evidence of the success of Raising A Reader, a national early literacy and parent engagement program.

In [Connecting the Dots: Raising A Reader Builds Evidence Base for its Parent Engagement and Early Literacy Program](#), Child Trends details the findings from nearly two dozen evaluations of Raising A Reader, an evidence-based, light-touch, and low-cost parent engagement program serving primarily low-income families throughout the country, however also reaching into all socioeconomic levels.

Raising A Reader is a national nonprofit, which, through work with direct service agencies, helps families develop sustainable home literacy routines essential to language and literacy development. Currently active in 34 states, the program reached more than 130,000 children and their families in 2013.

Child Trends examined the research and evidence base for Raising A Reader, and reported that:

- Raising A Reader is grounded in a strong foundation of research that highlights the importance of family involvement in promoting children’s literacy.
- Raising A Reader has established a strong emerging evidence base of the effectiveness of its program model through numerous small-scale evaluations in a wide variety of sites across the country. Parents who completed the Raising A Reader program were more likely to share books with their children more frequently, more likely to have established a reading routine and had an increased awareness of the importance of reading with their children. Several studies found that parents reported positive changes in their children’s reading behavior.
- Several studies show Raising A Reader’s effectiveness in improving children’s reading development.
- Raising A Reader is now building on previous studies as it prepares for a large-scale, multi-site random assignment impact evaluation, in order to inform its effective growth and expansion.

- Lessons for the broader field include focusing on a program’s developmental trajectory rather than studies in isolation.

The White House, the American Academy for Pediatrics, Too Small to Fail, the business community and others have called for action in response to long-standing research findings that in the first few years of life, a young child from a low-income family hears roughly 30 million fewer total words than his or her more affluent peers. This word gap can lead to disparities in vocabulary, school readiness, long-term educational and health outcomes, earnings, and family stability, even decades later.

"As the nation addresses these issues, it is valuable to look at how best to scale promising low-cost programs such as Raising A Reader that can help prepare young children for success in school and life," said Child Trends Senior Program Area Director Karen Walker, and the brief’s co-author.

[The report](#) presents Child Trends' research findings as it works with Raising A Reader to prepare for a more comprehensive examination of its program. Researchers consider this kind of randomized control experimental study the “gold standard” for evaluating an intervention’s impact. It will examine the effectiveness of Raising A Reader across its multiple settings serving different populations and will provide key information to guide Raising A Reader as it expands its reach.

"We are pleased at the validation Raising A Reader received in the findings of this new research study," said Raising A Reader National Executive Director Gabrielle Miller. "Raising A Reader was founded on a commitment to evidence-based practice which is integrated throughout our work, and we look forward to what we can learn from our next large-scale randomized trial."

As part of the preparation for this large-scale study, Child Trends conducted several smaller studies in the past couple of years. A pilot study in San Diego had promising findings, both with respect to parents’ participation in activities to learn book-sharing skills, and in their reported use of those skills.

The Child Trends [report](#) also examines 21 earlier evaluations gathered during 15 years of the Raising A Reader program. These earlier studies found parents who completed the Raising A Reader program were more likely to share books with their children more frequently, more likely to have established a reading routine, and had an increased awareness of the importance of reading with their children. Several studies found parents reported positive changes in their children’s reading behavior. For example, following participation in a Raising A Reader program, parents reported their children were more likely to ask questions, and more likely to turn the pages in a book while reading with the parent.

About Child Trends childtrends.org

Child Trends, based in Bethesda, Md., is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that provides valuable information and insights on the well-being of children and youth. For 35 years, policymakers, funders, educators and service providers in the U.S. and around the world have relied on our data and analyses to improve policies and programs serving children and youth. In June 2014, Child Trends launched the Child Trends Hispanic Institute to add to the knowledge base on the fastest-growing group of children in the U.S. Our work is supported by foundations; federal, state and local government agencies; and nonprofit organizations. Child Trends has more than 120 employees and annual revenue of about \$14 million.

About Raising A Reader RaisingAReader.org

Raising A Reader is a 501c3 charitable organization dedicated to helping families develop, practice and maintain literacy habits for children ages 0-8 that are critical for a child's success in school and in life. The Raising A Reader program is implemented through a network of community partners that comprise more than 2,500 locations across the country. Partners include public school systems, libraries, afterschool programs, community agencies and other organizations both public and private. Headquartered in Redwood City, California, Raising A Reader was founded in 1999 and has served more than 1.25 million families nationwide. More information is available at www.RaisingAReader.org.

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