

# FROM BABY'S FIRST WORDS

## Libraries Promote Early Learning

**E**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 low-income 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

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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



# ABOUT AMERICA'S LIBRARIES




**T**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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