



Indicator: The school provides parents (families) with practical guidance to encourage their children's regular reading habits at home. (5186)

Children learn the skill of reading at school, but they acquire the habit of reading at home. Once established, this habit will stay with a child through school and beyond school. As an adult, he or she will continue to find time at home to read and learn. (ADI, 2011)

The “curriculum of the home”—the bundle of attitudes, habits, knowledge, and skills that children acquire through their relationship with their family and that facilitates their school learning—is more predictive of academic learning than the family’s socioeconomic status (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Redding, 2000, 2006). Walberg (2007) notes, “cooperative efforts by parents and educators to modify alterable academically stimulating conditions in the home have had beneficial effects on learning for both older and younger students” (p. 96). Teachers can help each student’s family members to be aware of what they can do outside of school to encourage their child’s academic success at each age and grade level (Casper, Lopez, & Wolos, 2006/2007; Kreider, Casper, Kennedy, & Weiss, 2007; Walberg, 2007). In one study, migrant parents participated in sessions available throughout their child’s kindergarten year that helped them engage their children in academic activities linked to their children’s curriculum in school; when initially compared to a control group, small differences were found. However, the treatment group scored (statistically) significantly better when measured at the end of first grade and again at the end of fifth or sixth grade (St. Clair & Jackson, 2006; St. Clair, Jackson, & Zweiback, 2012). This suggests that equipping families with “new abilities to nurture their children’s language skills leads to positive and lasting reading outcomes for their children” (St. Clair et al., 2012, p. 9).

Based on his recent meta-analysis (Jeynes, 2012), Jeynes (2013) recommends:

First, school leaders and teachers can enhance the efficacy of parental involvement by offering advice to parents on the most vital components of voluntary expressions of family engagement, such as setting high expectations and adopting parenting styles that are associated with positive student outcomes. This guidance is particularly important because many parents do not realize how powerful and effective these factors are in promoting positive student outcomes. Second, the school can take an active role in encouraging parental engagement in areas such as checking homework and shared reading activities, given that school-based guidance appears to increase the efficacy of those particular behaviors. (para. 9)

Dotger and Bennett (2010) propose that teachers and school leaders need both preservice training and ongoing professional development, including practice in engaging with a variety of family contexts, to develop the necessary skills to foster effective school–home partnerships. “When school staff have a better understanding of their students’ home cultures, families’ parenting practices, home contexts, home crises, or significant family and community events, they can develop processes and strategies to bridge school-based and home-based activities and increase support for student learning” (Ferguson, 2008, p. 14). One study found that student performance in math and

reading improved at a 40–50% high rate when teachers reached out to parents in these three ways:

- Met face-to-face with each family at the beginning of the school year
- Sent families materials each week on ways to help their children at home
- Telephoned routinely with news on how the children were doing, not just when they were having problems or acting up (Westat & Policy Studies Assoc., 2002, cited in Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007, p. 94)

“Efforts to encourage family reading activities result in the children’s improved reading skills and interest in reading. Programs that include both parents and children are more effective than programs that deal with only the parents” (Redding, 2000, p. 22). Reading School–Home Links, available from the U.S. Department of Education, are one example of student assignments that require parent–child interaction, link to school learning, and simultaneously educate parents about school learning (Redding, 2006). Schools should take advantage of creative ideas and myriad opportunities (open house, conferences, family nights, informal conversations, newsletters, websites, PTA/PTO or School Community Council meetings, workshops, etc.) to promote the curriculum of the home:

Even small improvements in the amount and quality of academically constructive hours outside school are likely to have more than moderate learning effects while contributing little or nothing to schools costs. (Walberg, 2011, p. 70)

Example: Excerpts from *Reading at Home: A Solid Foundation Course for Parents* (ADI, 2011)

When little children see their parents read, they are fascinated by the mystery of messages held inside tiny images of ink on paper. When children are older, they are impressed that parents know so much because they read. But simply seeing parents read is not enough to sustain a child’s interest in reading. More important is the bond of interaction between parent and child that surrounds the act of reading. When children are small, they enjoy being held and read to. When children are older, they enjoy talking about reading.

Talking about reading is a family activity that keeps alive the child’s desire to read and encourages the child’s

habit of reading. Why do parents not talk to their children about reading? Probably because of one or more of the following barriers:

- They are too busy for conversations with their children.
- They do not read much themselves.
- They think their children are not interested in what they read.
- They are not interested in what their children read.

When children read aloud, they learn the patterns and phrases of language, they become aware of punctuation, and their spoken vocabulary improves. When we listen to our children read aloud, we can help them with difficult words. We also become aware of their reading pace and level. When we read aloud to our children, we can introduce to them material they may not choose to read themselves. The next step in helping our children develop good reading habits is to read aloud with them. In reading aloud with a child, we can:

- Read to the child.
- Listen to the child read.
- Take turns reading and listening with the child.

Because our goal is to increase our children’s enthusiasm for reading, we must be enthusiastic ourselves. When we read aloud, we should feel comfortable. If listening to our children read is more comfortable to us than reading to our children, that is fine. Most important of all is the mood of the session. Reading aloud should be fun.

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