

“Why should our school system select a Read To Them program?”

Are there benefits grounded in reading research?”

Literacy Research in Support of One District, One Book and One School, One Book

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What follows is a sampling of literacy research, spanning six decades, that supports the elements of the One District, One Book and the One School, One Book programs and their far-reaching potential to improve students’ reading achievement and to close achievement gaps.

Research on the Impact of Reading to Children at Home

Dolores Durkin (1966) did two seminal longitudinal studies in California and New York on children who were reading before beginning first grade. Over 5100 rising first graders were given a word identification test; 49 were identified as early readers and given additional reading and IQ tests. Durkin reported these key findings: (1) as a group the early readers still surpassed their non-early-reading peers in reading achievement even after 6 years in school, and (2) all of the early readers were read to by parents before beginning school. Subsequent research also showed that shared story reading experiences at home are linked with children’s literacy achievement in school (e.g., Heath, 1982; Teale, 1984; Wells, 1986).

The National Commission on Reading examined over 10,000 research projects done in the 25 years prior to the 1983 study to determine what practices help children’s reading development. The Commission’s report, Becoming a Nation of Readers (Anderson et al., 1985),

included these significant findings: (1) “The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children (p. 23) and (2) “It [reading aloud] is a practice that should continue throughout the grades” (p. 51).

The 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading was given to over 27,000 students in grades 4, 8 and 12. The assessment also collected information from all tested students on home support for reading. A key finding was that more frequent discussion of reading at home was associated with higher reading proficiency (White & Dewitz, 1996).

The 2001 and 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS) surveyed hundreds of thousands of 4th graders in 35-40 countries, including the United States. The studies looked at reading comprehension scores for students and gathered information on home influences on children learning to read. Findings for both studies included the following: (1) students 4th grade reading achievement was positively related to their parents engaging them in early literacy activities before school, such as reading to them and telling stories, and (2) students from homes with more than 100 children’s books performed much better on reading assessments than students from homes with less than 10 books (Shiel & Brozo, 2006).

Research on the Effects of Parental Outreach and Involvement

Teachers reaching out to parents to buttress at-risk children’s reading success can yield positive results. The U.S. Department of Education’s (2001) Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance in Title I Schools tracked student progress from 3rd to 5th grade in 71 high poverty rate schools. Researchers found that reading test score growth between grades 3 and 5 was 50% higher for students whose teachers and schools reported high levels of early parental outreach than for students who had low levels of parental outreach reported for grade 3.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) synthesized 31 studies, including experimental and quasi-

experimental designs, that looked at the link between student achievement and assorted parent and community involvement approaches. Many of the studies found that “students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, were more likely to earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs, be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits... and graduate and go on to postsecondary education” (p. 7). Henderson and Mapp also noted that “programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children’s learning at home are linked to higher student achievement” (p. 25).

The Need for Programs Such as One District, One Book and One School, One Book

Reading Across the Nation: A Chartbook (Russ et al., 2007) reveals that there is a tremendous need for parental outreach for many children to encourage reading aloud to them at home. Using data from the National Survey of Children’s Health (2003), Russ et al. reported that: (1) less than half of children under age 5 are read to daily by parents/family members in the United States and (2) “In virtually every state minority and low-income children are less likely to be read to every day than their non-minority and higher income peers” (p. 5).

Read To Them’s programs promote the practice of reading aloud to children at home, a chief indicator of reading success in school, provide schools with accessible means for getting all parents to participate, and are suitable for any school -- from Title I to rural to suburban. These factors combine to give One District, One Book and One School, One Book significant potential for positive impact over time in improving students’ reading achievement and closing achievement gaps.

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