



Parental Reading in Maryland

Background

Interventions early in life are essential for low-income children to enter school ready to learn, and are now understood to have powerful effects on the developing brain. Picture books and language in simple children's books enhances children's learning and vocabulary because of the conversations between parent and child which take place around books and stories. Rhyming books emphasize recurring patterns of sounds that are particularly helpful to the child when they then begin to sound out words and letters. Experts consider reading aloud "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading."

The Findings

UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families, and Communities on behalf of Reach Out and Read have been examining data from the National Survey on Children's Health (2003) on frequency of reading to young children across the country. A review of the Maryland data shows that:

- 51.1 percent of Maryland children age 5 and under are read to by their parents each day.
- Low-income children are less likely to be read to in Maryland. 39.5% of children in families earning less than 200% of the poverty are read to each day, compared to 55.0% of children in families earning between 200 and 399% of poverty, and 55.3 percent of children in families earning more than 400% of poverty.
- There are racial and ethnic disparities in reading to children. 47.7 percent of minority children are read to each day in Maryland, compared to 54.1 percent of white children.
- In Maryland, 50.4 of children age 3 and under are read to daily, compared to 52.6 percent of children ages 4 and 5.

Conclusion

There is substantial room for progress in increasing reading to young children in Maryland. By doing so, Maryland can reduce income-related, racial, and ethnic disparities in language development school readiness and school achievement. One proven approach to promoting reading is encouragement by a child's doctor or nurse along with the distribution of free books through the Reach Out and Read program.