A Report for Multnomah County Library

Preparing African American Children for Kindergarten:
A Library Planning Grant

April 2011

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary *1*

I. Introduction *4*

II. Needs Assessment Process *4*

- Advisory Committee
- Input through Focus Groups, Internet Surveys, and Key Interviews

III. Needs Assessment Findings *5*

IV. Recommendations *10*

- Community Engagement Pilot Project: Moving from community outreach to community engagement
- Enhancing Community Outreach for Existing Library Programs
- Removing Systematic Barriers

V. Implementation Approach *16*

VI. Appendices

Advisory Committee Briefing Paper *17*

Community Input Process *31*

List of Key Interviewees *32*

Findings from Focus Groups, Key Interviews, Library Employees *33*

Summary of community feedback on draft recommendations *37*

Executive Summary

Purpose of the Action Plan

The goal of this project, *Preparing African American Children for Kindergarten,* is to provide Multnomah County Library with the information it needs, based on a community assessment, so that the library can develop a community-driven, culturally appropriate and effective action plan to help African American children be ready to learn to read by the time they enter kindergarten. This report provides a framework to guide Multnomah County Library efforts. It is one part of a community response to a call to action to address the achievement gap before it starts. The recommendations have been developed with input from African American parents and grandparents, community-based service providers, government officials, business and foundation leaders, and library staff, managers, and supervisors. An advisory committee played a key role in processing input and advising the Consultant Team throughout the development of the recommendations.

Library Mission

The mission of Multnomah County Library is to enrich lives by fostering diverse opportunities for all people to read, learn, and connect. The library has a long-standing commitment to promoting early childhood literacy. Its early childhood services delivered in the library and through outreach programs serve children from birth to kindergarten, and their families, teachers, and caregivers. The expected outcome of public library early literacy outreach activities is to bring about a change in the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of children, parents, caregivers and professionals who work with young children. The desired long-term impact is that children will be ready to learn to read when they enter kindergarten.

Needs Assessment Findings

The planning process included focus groups, interviews, surveys, Advisory Committee discussion, a review of local and national research, and a review of Multnomah County Library early childhood library programs. Following is a list of key findings. A detailed discussion of these findings is presented in pages five to nine of this report.

- Libraries play a key role in school readiness;
- A shift from intervention to prevention will be required to close the achievement gap;
- Transformational change is required to close the achievement gap;
- Access to opportunity is an important strategy to address race-based gaps and disparities;
- Community engagement is more effective than community outreach;
- Barriers to school success are encountered before and after a child begins school;
- African American parents and grandparents have clear ideas for strategies to help them prepare their child to be ready for school; and
- Enhanced outreach programs should build from the library's strong foundation.

Action Plan Recommendations

The Recommendations encompass a three-pronged approach to address the challenges and opportunities identified through the community input process, our review of significant research on the achievement gap and related topics, and our understanding of the depth and breadth of the related programs Multnomah County Library currently provides.

The Proposed Library Service Plan incorporates three key recommendations:

- Development of an innovative **community engagement pilot project** to be designed and implemented in collaboration with one or more African American community organizations;
- **Enhancement of outreach efforts** to build awareness of and participation in current library programs which support the efforts of African American families to prepare their young children for school success;
- **Systems change strategies** to reduce/remove structural barriers to African American families benefiting fully from Library programs designed to support school success.

Detailed actions for each of these three general recommendations are presented in pages ten through sixteen of this report.

Library Implementation

The library can implement many of the proposed strategies to support increased participation by African American children and families through existing library resources. Other strategies will require a renewed commitment by library leadership to intensify the library's effort to make children and families of all cultures feel welcome at the library, and prioritization of strategies to hire and retain a greater number of staff able to work effectively within an African American cultural context and welcome African American families in the library's programs and facilities. The proposed peer-to-peer community engagement pilot project will require new funding. Multnomah County Library has a unique opportunity to advocate for Library Services and Technology Act funding to support development of a library partnership with community-based organizations and families to test the recommended peer-to-peer communication model. All strategies will require the library to work in partnership with families, community-based organizations, and the schools as a critical partner to close the achievement gap.

Conclusion

The library can provide significant support for the efforts of African American families to prepare their children for kindergarten. The library has deep knowledge of early childhood development, and awareness of strategies that support full development of young children's intellectual potential. The library has extensive resources for families with young children, and a clear commitment to partner with community organizations to expand access to library resources. The proposed recommendations are designed to test a variety of innovative strategies to engage African American families who are not currently participating in library services, as well as strategies to increase engagement and enhance effectiveness of library services for families who are participating in current library programs.

Preparing African American Children for Kindergarten: A Library Planning Grant

I. Introduction

The recommendations for Multnomah County Library to help African American Families prepare their young children for kindergarten encompass strategies in three key areas: innovative community engagement, enhanced outreach efforts, and system change. These strategies emerged from a community input process and a review of local and national research. The plan marks a significant change for Multnomah County Library, building upon its strong foundation in community outreach to a focus on community engagement to reach African American families.

II. Needs Assessment Process

The Multnomah County Library sought and received federal grant funding from the Library Services and Technology Act through the Oregon State Library to develop a community-driven, culturally appropriate and effective set of recommendations to help African American children be ready to learn to read by the time they enter kindergarten. The library selected the consultant team of Cliff Jones, Kay Sohl, and Marlene Woodward to develop the recommendations. In the summer and fall of 2010, the consultants conducted a community-focused needs assessment process and completed a review of national and regional literature on school readiness strategies. Multnomah County Library convened an Advisory Committee of community leaders, library staff, and public partners to provide guidance throughout the grant process. Advisory Committee members included: Reiko Williams, Portland Public Schools; Eileen Hollins, Black Parent Initiative; Elaine Harrison, Albina Early Head Start; and Patricia Welch and Ebonee Bell, Multnomah County Library.

The needs assessment included a review of research on the achievement gap between Black and White students; cultural competence of educators to educate students of all backgrounds and cultures; brain development; library best practices at the national and local levels; and a comprehensive review of the related programs Multnomah County Library provides.

Guided by advice from the Advisory Committee, outreach efforts focused intensely on the challenges confronted by lower income families, especially families involving young parents and those in which grandparents or other older extended family members have assumed primary parenting responsibilities.

Non-profit organizations recruited African American parents and grandparents to attend five focus groups held in North, Northeast, and outer Southeast Portland. In total, fifty-two people participated. A parent survey was completed by 31 parents. The Consultant Team held key input interviews with representatives from Self Enhancement Inc. (SEI), Portland Community Reinvestment Initiative (PCRI), Black United Fund, Albina Early Head Start, State Health Division - Office of Multi-Cultural Health, and the Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Division. The Consultant Team also held meetings with library staff, supervisors, and managers to obtain their input.

The Consultant Team prepared a draft report for discussion with the Advisory Committee. The Consultant Team utilized multiple strategies to obtain community feedback on the draft report, including inviting study participants and library employees to complete an electronic feedback

survey; in-person and telephone interviews with representatives from the Urban League, Black Parent Initiative, City of Portland Mayor's office, Multnomah County Chair, SEI, and the Portland Schools Foundation; and review and discussion of this feedback by the Advisory Committee.

III. Needs Assessment Findings

The appendix includes the Consultant Team's Briefing Paper, which provides an overview of local and national research on the achievement gap, a summary of library best practices, and a summary of innovative community engagement efforts. Following are key excerpts from the Briefing Paper.

1. Libraries play a key role in school readiness

The National Center for Education Statistics provides evidence of a strong, positive link between the amount of children's materials circulated by public libraries and fourth-grade reading scores. A 2008 article in the *School Library Journal* reports findings that indicate that storytimes, lap-sit programs, and other library services for young children increase the likelihood that children will do well in reading. There is also evidence that the more a child is read to at an early age by his/her parents, the more likely the child will be ready to learn.

The mission of Multnomah County Library is to enrich lives by fostering diverse opportunities for all people to read, learn, and connect. The library has a long-standing commitment to promoting early childhood literacy. Its early childhood services delivered in the library and through outreach programs serve children from birth to kindergarten and their families, teachers and caregivers.

2. Shifting from intervention to prevention to close the achievement gap

Researchers and educators use the term "achievement gap" to describe the difference between how well children from low-income families and minority children perform on standardized tests compared with children from higher-income families and White peers. A number of recent reports at the national and local level provide statistics showing the achievement gap between White students and African American students and call for a shift in addressing the achievement gap from one of intervention to a focus on prevention.

A recent study commissioned by the Black Parent Initiative provides insight into factors associated with the academic achievement gap between Black and White students in Multnomah County. The 2009 study, *"A Deeper Look at the Black-White Achievement Gap in Multnomah County,"* includes the following findings:

- The achievement gap exists between Black students and White students when they enter school and this gap does not change with Black students tending to stay about 1.5 grades of achievement growth behind White students. This suggests that Black and White students are learning at similar rates while they are attending Multnomah County schools.

- The study looks at the hypothesis that Black-White disparities in socio-economic status (SES) are largely responsible for the observed Black-White achievement gap. Free and reduced price lunch is used as a proxy for SES. Seventy-nine percent of Black students qualify for free or reduced price lunch. The data shows that the achievement gap is smaller when students are grouped by socio-economic status.

- Black students are more likely than White students to change schools from one year to the next. Research shows that moving and changing schools disrupts the academic, social and emotional life of students.

- Black students are more likely to have a teacher who is new to their school compared with White students, especially in the middle grades. There is evidence that teacher turnover rate may negatively impact student performance.

- A number of elementary, middle, and high schools provide programs in which Black students learn at a higher rate than the countywide average for Black students; these programs have also been successful in Black students closing the achievement gap with White students in their own schools. The study recommends that these schools be investigated for best practices.

The Urban League of Portland's "*2009 State of Black Oregon"* report calls on community organizations to "focus and organize in order to help close the achievement gap" between Black and White students. This library project is one part of a community response to this call to action and is designed to investigate strategies appropriate for a public library to address the achievement gap before it starts.

3. Transformational change is required to address the achievement gap

John Powell notes, in his presentation, Structural Racism: The Civil Rights Struggle for the 21st Century, "Including people where they once were excluded is a step in the right direction, but it is not enough. We need to examine the policies and politics which led to their exclusion in the first place." "Family transmission of property and the family transmission of differential educational opportunities are the two great mechanisms sustaining the class structure of contemporary societies," Roberto Mangabeira Unger, from *Democracy Realized: The Progressive Alternative* (1988), referenced in the same presentation.

Powell's work at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity charges us to look at access to opportunity in addressing race-based gaps and disparities. **Powell calls for moving from transactional change – incremental gains within existing arrangements - to transformational change – to stop pursuing avenues which do not show measurable results and adopt new approaches that reform the structures that are creating and perpetuating the inequity.**

A central question related to this analysis is – What are the opportunity structures or institutional arrangements that have created barriers and which ones will create access for African American families in preparing their children for kindergarten?

Another factor to consider in preparing a child to be ready for kindergarten is the ability of educators to educate students of all backgrounds and cultures once they arrive at school. The Oregon Department of Education's definition of cultural competence includes the "requirement that individuals and organizations have a defined set of values and principles, demonstrated behaviors, attitudes, policies and structures that enable them to work effectively in a cross-cultural manner". The Oregon Department of Education's definition is also important related to library hiring and training.

4. Access to opportunity is an important strategy to address race-based gaps and disparities

Our review of current research makes it clear that ***access to opportunity is an important strategy to address race-based gaps and disparities.*** Research has identified several key strategies to reduce the achievement gap:

- focusing on a child's early experiences to optimize brain development;
- providing quality preschools;
- engaging and support parents;
- focusing on reading; and
- providing adequate funding for public schools, and providing smaller elementary school classes.

5. Community engagement is more effective than community outreach

Community engagement strategies that build relationships with the community ***and engage the community in project design, planning and implementation have been shown to be more effective than community outreach strategies that are designed to educate the community about an organization's purpose.*** . The **Harlem Children's Zone**, a non-profit organization located in New York City, **Baby College Program** is an example of a successful community engagement strategy. A team of outreach workers go door to door to recruit parents. Children's Zone staff members and peer educators explain principles of brain development and the key role parents play in the development of language and reading skills. The staff and educators give concrete examples of parent behaviors which will increase academic success when children enter school. Parents who receive training are ambassadors in the community to recruit other parents.

6. Barriers to school success are encountered before and after a child begins school

Throughout the community assessment process, African American parents, grandparents, and key leaders in the African American community identified environmental, financial, and racial structural barriers that have a negative impact on African American children's success in school. In the words of one African American parent – *If African American parents are worrying about paying the rent, buying food, getting a job it is a big wall to being a one-on-one parent. Survival comes first. If parents are not trained or educated to get a job it is hard to be worrying about school for their kids.*

Other barriers identified are:

- many parents don't understand the importance of parents reading to children;

- parents do not have the age-appropriate tools they need; and
- many children's books lack African American photographs and stories

In our conversations with African American parents and grandparents about preparing children for school success, we heard comments about the problems families encounter once a child enters school, including:

- the number of kids to a teacher is too high;
- there is a lack of communication between teachers and parents;
- there are very few minority teachers;
- there needs to be greater parent involvement; and
- grandparents raising grandchildren need tutors for their grandkids.

Input from parents, grandparents and African American community leaders is in full accord with findings in current research regarding the barriers to school success experienced by African American children even when they enter school well prepared. The Library may be able to develop programs within its mission which help African American families cope with barriers to success within the schools. Additionally, the Library can play a key role in supporting community-wide efforts, recommended in this report to close the achievement gap, that are outside the scope of services provided by the library.

7. **Strategies recommended by African American parents and grandparents**

In focus groups, interviews, and surveys, African American parents and grandparents shared a number of ideas on what would be useful to them to help them prepare their child to be ready for school, including:

- parent orientations/classes/group discussions;
- information on what kids need to know when they enter school;
- availability of fun, educational activities such as books, flash cards, educational videos, music CDs; and
- tips on how to teach your child while doing everyday activities such as shopping, cooking, driving, getting ready for school.

African American parents and grandparents were excited about the Baby College model of peer recruitment and peer engagement in teaching brain development. They were also in favor of using social media, especially cell phones and Facebook, to reach parents to spread the word about the importance of parents reading to their children and to let people know about library programs.

Ideas for how the library could reach more African American families more effectively included:

- involving African American men;
- increasing library selection of books of interest to the Black community;
- offering an African American story time using hip hop, music, and movement;
- designating an area of the library for kids to dress up, act out books, put on a play;
- sprucing up library community board;
- having more computers; and
- encouraging parents who use the library for adult needs to participate in parent/child-focused activities

Outreach/community engagement suggestions included initiating or expanding library efforts to:

- partnering with African American Sunday School/church schools to promote interactive reading;
- making library books available at beauty and barber shops;
- training Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS)staff who work with families to model interactive talking and reading;
- training DHS Self Sufficiency case managers on library resources;
- conducting more extensive training in the Raising A Reader program for home health nurses;
- conducting a public media campaign on the importance of reading to children;
- working with existing websites to mobilize connections between the library's website and websites focusing on African American activities and interests; and
- having story time in the park.

8. Plan recommendations should build from the library's strong foundation

Multnomah County Library is nationally recognized for its children's programs and outreach efforts. It promotes early literacy by focusing on parents and caregivers. The goal is to provide parents and caregivers information, materials, and the necessary skills so that they will increase the amount of time they talk and read aloud and interactively with their children. Outreach staff collaborates with various school districts on kindergarten readiness initiatives and classes. Additionally, Central Library and all neighborhood libraries provide storytime activities.

Throughout the community input process, participants noted the strength of existing library efforts and recommended that the study's recommendations build upon the success of these existing strategies to provide additional support for caregivers, as well as parents, grandparents, and teachers.

IV. Action Plan Recommendations

The recommendations encompass a three-pronged approach to address the challenges and opportunities identified through the community input process, our review of significant research on the achievement gap and related topics, and our understanding of the depth and breadth of the related programs Multnomah County Library currently provides.

The recommendations include:

- Development of an innovative **community engagement pilot project** to be designed and implemented in collaboration with one or more African American community organizations;
- **Enhancement of outreach efforts** to build awareness of and participation in current library programs that support the efforts of African American families to prepare their young children for school success; and
- **Systems change strategies** to reduce/remove structural barriers to African American families benefiting fully from library programs designed to support school success.

Recommendation 1: Community Engagement Pilot Project: Moving from community outreach to community engagement

Context: Each child's family serves as the child's first teacher. The experiences that young children have before entering school have tremendous power to impact their ability to succeed in school. Highly stressed families are least likely to access existing programs that support early child development. Consequently, families who most need support to prepare their children for school success are in many cases the least likely to participate in existing library programs.

Recommendation: In collaboration with an African American led community-based organization, the library and the community organization would design and implement a peer-led communication and education model through which African American parents will deepen their understanding of early brain development and awareness of strategies that parents can use to support their child's development and eventual school success. Working together, the library and the community-based organization will seek funding to implement the peer-to-peer pilot project to involve young parents who are not engaged with existing parent education and support efforts.

The pilot project would be modeled after the success of the Harlem Children's Zone Baby College program and adapted as needed for the Multnomah County community. The project would recruit, train and employ a peer education team of young African American parents to learn and share information about brain development and strategies to support success. Peer education team members would recruit young African American parents who are not connecting with other community resources to learn how they can help their children succeed in

school. Peer team members would lead discussions with participating parents, providing information about the potential for each child to succeed in school and life, the role of language development in later learning, the impact of parent /child interaction, and practical strategies drawn from their own experiences to support development of children from birth onward. Peer-led discussions would also focus on preparing parents to be advocates for their children as they enter school, including building their understanding of school expectations and confidence in their ability to help their children be successful. The Latino Network's Parent Organizing Project may also be a useful model to learn about successful grassroots parent recruitment strategies.

The peer-led education program would utilize incentives and rewards to connect with parents who are currently least engaged with community resources such as libraries, Head Start or intensive parenting support programs. Potential partner organizations include Self Enhancement Inc., Black Parent Initiative, and Healthy Birth Initiative. These organizations have expressed an interest in having conversations with the library on the possibility of collaborating on this effort. Other organizations that will be excellent resources for the pilot project are: The Children's Institute, Social Innovation Partners, Multnomah County Commission on Children, Families and Community, and the Chalkboard Project.

The pilot project would also develop and support a peer communication team comprised of young African American parents working together to devise social media, texting, and other effective communications strategies to reach peers with messages about brain development and ways parents can help their children be successful. The peer communication team would guide efforts to involve young African American parents to participate in discussions with the peer education team program (described above) and in other activities to support brain and language development in their children. Strategies employed by *Text4baby*, a national program that uses text messages to provide information and reminders to pregnant women to improve their health and the health of their babies, could be a valuable resource for this approach.

The peer communication team would also explore potential strategies for reaching African American parents via public advertising campaigns. A campaign could focus on public transportation, including the possibility of posting on the interior of Tri-Met buses and light rail ideas for fun interactions with young children that promote school readiness skills. The communication team could also function as a peer communication resource for partnerships developed between the library and other organizations to conduct a broad-based public service advertising campaign, including print, television, radio and billboards, which promote the message of the importance of reading to children from birth.

In a second phase of the pilot project, the peer communication and education teams could replicate the successfully developed models with teams involving African American grandparents or other extended family members raising young children.

Recommendation 2: Enhancing Community Outreach for Existing Library Programs

Context: The Multnomah County Library has developed outstanding programs to bring books and storytelling skills to children and families outside library settings through childcare, health care, and social service providers. However, there are many African American families that do not participate in these programs.

Recommendation: Build upon the success of these programs by developing new partnerships and expanding others. Enhanced outreach strategies would include:

- Developing new partnerships with beauty and barber shops serving African Americans to provide access to books, and training in strategies to open conversations about the importance of reading to very young children;
- Providing training for Sunday/church school teachers to help them encourage children's language development and provide support and models to their students. Building on library expertise with the Early Words program for child care providers, the program would focusing on interactive reading techniques for use during Sunday/church school and on identifying opportunities to help parents support their children's development;
- Training for the staff who work in Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) programs that have the potential to reach African American families, such as the DHS Equity Taskforce, the Foster Parent Program, and Self Sufficiency;
- Providing info on African American-focused library programs in the materials distributed through the Books While You Wait Program;
- Providing more extensive training in the Raising a Reader program for Healthy Birth Initiative home health nurses - focusing on specific techniques for use in home visits to model language development activities and reading activities;
- Distributing children's books to grandparents at Loaves and Fishes Meal sites or through Meals-on- Wheels and other senior programs; and
- Exploring opportunities to expand the Books While You Wait program to include distribution of children's books to visitors' waiting areas at the Multnomah County jails and the Columbia River Correctional Institution.

The enhanced outreach component would also draw upon the insights and strategies developed by the pilot project peer communication team to use social media and other techniques to build awareness of library programs and resources among parents who do not currently utilize the library to support their child's development, including parents who may themselves depend heavily on the library for computer access for their own internet access. The pilot project peer

communication team could also be asked to suggest new names and ways to promote existing parent education programs so that the descriptions and names resonate with and motivate participation by younger African American parents.

Recommendation 3. Remove Systematic Barriers

Context: The community input process highlighted the extent to which many African American families of all income levels and age ranges encounter barriers to meeting their children's needs both within library programs and within the school system. Consequently, the systems change strategies within these recommendations include efforts to increase cultural competency within the library itself, and the identification of opportunities for the library to participate in community-wide efforts to eliminate racial, cultural, and economic disparities, which can benefit all African American families and the community as a whole.

African American parents and grandparents expressed very clearly their concerns about not always feeling supported and welcome in libraries and in schools. The review of local and national studies reflects the reality that many African American children confront significant barriers to success both before and after entering school.

System change strategies are designed to ensure that all African American families feel welcome at the library and to increase the knowledge of families from all cultures of the richness of the African American culture.

Recommendations: Address structural barriers within the library that limit effective participation by African American parents and children. Examine new strategies in which the library can support families with school-age children.

The recommendations include barrier-removing strategies focused explicitly on children and families, as well as additional strategies focused primarily on adult programs:

A. Strategies to support increased participation by African American children and families include:
   - Developing and promoting explicitly Black Culture-focused story times and programs at libraries, including program activities that engage children and families through movement, music, dance , and art;
   - Scheduling parent/child-focused events in the evening or on weekends, as well as during weekday times;
   - Offering the Reading is Grand library program developed by the Black Caucus of the American Library Association;
   - Offering more resources to help parents cope with the stress of parenthood – focusing on parental desire to help their children succeed;

- Further developing early childhood and primary-aged collections to include more "cool things to read," including sports, pop culture, and African American culture, with special emphasis on items of interest to boys and men;
- Exploring opportunities to expand current adult literacy to parents through the churches, positioning adult literacy efforts as a form of personal support for stressed parents;
- Redesigning children's spaces within libraries to include space for fantasy play, dress up, and hands-on manipulative activities; and
- Offering fun parent/child interactive games on computers located in adult use areas (where parents currently access the internet), as well as computers in children's areas.

B. Strategies to support increased African American parent participation in adult-focused library programs would include:
   - Continuing the effort initiated through the selection of *The Other Wes Moore* as the 2011 Everybody Reads book, working towards the selection of another book by an African American author for future Everybody Reads programs (including potentially using the announcement of the Everybody Reads selection as a kick-off for the initiatives discussed in these recommendations);
   - Working with the peer communication team to evaluate potential strategies for the library to work with existing websites to mobilize connections between the library's website and websites focusing on African American activities and interests;
   - Developing more effective communication strategies to engage African American parents who use library computers by increasing their awareness of and comfort with utilizing the resources of the library to help them prepare their children for school success. Community input suggests that many young African American parents are using the libraries to meet their own needs for internet access but lack awareness of resources or encounter barriers to utilization of resources for their children or for themselves as parents. The peer communication team developed through the pilot project may have a key role to play.
   - Promoting programs that help adults improve their own literacy while working to help their children. Community input suggests that the terms "parenting" or "parent education," and the word "literacy" do not resonate with many African American parents. The peer communication team could help identify terms and descriptions that would engage African American parents more effectively.

C. Strategies to continue and intensify the Library's effort to recruit and retain staff who reflect the cultural diversity of the communities that the library serves, including African American staff members in both professional and paraprofessional roles include:

   - Developing a long-term recruitment and retention strategy for staff with specialized expertise in African American culturally-specific population needs and interests. This

could be modeled after the recruitment and retention strategy for linguistic minority populations;

- Providing a structure within the library for staff to support full participation by African Americans. Train all existing staff/managers/supervisors as ambassadors to make culturally specific populations feel welcome at the library and to show respect for a culture when doing outreach. Recognize while there are many strategies through which the library can increase interest in library activities among African Americans, people who do not feel welcome once they engage with the library probably won't return; and
- Increasing staff cultural competency, which will be a critical element to the success of all barrier-clearing efforts described above. The library also needs cultural competency training for staff, and additional training and resources to prepare managers and supervisors to manage change processes and ensure accountability for effective library support for African American patrons and program participants.

D. Strategies to develop a stronger working relationship with schools

Although this community outreach effort is focused on the Library's efforts to help African American families prepare their children for kindergarten, a growing body of research, consistent with the experiences reported by participants in our focus groups, acknowledges the reality that many African American children confront daunting barriers to success once they enter school, regardless of the extent to which they are prepared for school success. Structural barriers within the public schools frequently prevent effective participation by African American parents and create low expectations for African American children. Addressing the complex issues of structural barriers to African American children's success within the public schools requires community-wide effort.

Strategies for working in partnership with families, community organizations, and the schools themselves to remove these barriers within the schools, include:

- Actively participating in the Cradle to Career initiative. An emerging effort that was brought to our attention during interviews with key leaders is the Cradle to Career initiative developed through the collaborative efforts of the Leaders Roundtable, Portland State University, the City of Portland, Multnomah County, and the Portland Schools Foundation. This initiative integrates early childhood development with K-12 and community college strategies to confront structural barriers. The library as a department of Multnomah County is represented by Multnomah County in this effort. As planning efforts move from general to specific initiatives, the library should explore opportunities to integrate efforts initiated through these recommendations into the Cradle to Career initiative;
- Expanding the library's efforts to provide useful resources for African American community-based tutoring and mentoring programs, including improved

communication about the library's existing free, online tutoring services. Children being raised by grandparents and other older family members confront additional barriers when their caregivers find school curriculum unfamiliar and homework assignments confusing. Access to free tutoring and homework help are essential for school success; and

- Examining current collaborations between the library and schools to ensure these programs are culturally appropriate and supportive of African American families.

V. Implementing the Recommendations

Many of the proposed strategies can be implemented through existing library resources, such as increasing strategies to support increased participation by African American children and families. Other strategies will require a renewed commitment by library leadership to intensify the library's effort to make children and families of all cultures feel welcome at the library, and to hire and retain a staff able to culturally engage and welcome African American families in the library's programs and facilities. Other strategies will require new funding, such as the peer-to-peer innovative community engagement strategy. Multnomah County has a unique opportunity to advocate for funding through the Library Services and Technology Act for a library partnership with community-based organizations and families to develop a peer-to-peer communication model to help prepare African American children for school success. All strategies will require the library to work in partnership with families, community-based organizations, and schools as critical partners to close the achievement gap.

Appendices

I. Advisory Committee Briefing Paper

Preparing African American Children for Kindergarten

Advisory Committee Briefing Paper 6/24/2010

Project Goal
The goal of this project, *Preparing African American Children for Kindergarten,* is to provide Multnomah County Library with the information it needs, based on a community assessment, so that the library can develop a community-driven, culturally appropriate and effective action plan to help African American children be ready to learn to read by the time they enter kindergarten.

Project Approach
We will engage the community in this needs assessment effort in a number of different ways. Working under the guidance of a grant Advisory Committee, the Consultant Team, which includes Cliff Jones, Kay Sohl, and Marlene Woodward, will conduct key interviews, hold community conversations, and provide opportunity for broad input through electronic surveys. A Resource Council consisting of representatives from non-profit organizations, public entities, and interested individuals will act as a sounding board at strategic points during the project.

Library service impact on readiness to learn
The mission of Multnomah County Library is to enrich lives by fostering diverse opportunities for all people to read, learn, and connect. The National Center for Education Statistics provides evidence of a strong, positive link between the amount of children's materials circulated by public libraries and fourth-grade reading scores. A 2008 article in the school Library Journal reports findings that indicate that storytimes, lap-sit programs, and other library services for young children increase the likelihood that children will do well in reading. There is also evidence that the more a child is read to at an early age by his/her parents the more likely the child will be ready to learn. Multnomah County Library has a long-standing commitment to promoting early childhood literacy. Its early childhood services delivered in libraries and through outreach programs (described on page 4) serve children from birth to kindergarten and their families, teachers, and caregivers.

The achievement gap
The Urban League of Portland's *2009 State of Black Oregon* report calls on community organizations to "focus and organize in order to help close the achievement gap" between Black and White students. This library study is one part of a community response to this call to action and is designed to address the achievement gap before it starts.

Researchers and educators use the term "achievement gap" to describe the difference between how well children from low-income families and minority children perform on standardized tests compared with children from higher-income families and White peers. A number of recent

reports at the national and local level provide statistics showing the achievement gap between White students and African American students and call for a shift in addressing the achievement gap from one of intervention to a focus on prevention.

A recent study commissioned by the Black Parent Initiative provides insight into factors associated with the academic achievement gap between Black and White students in Multnomah County. The 2009 study, *"A Deeper Look at the Black-White Achievement Gap in Multnomah County,"* includes the following findings:

- The achievement gap exists between Black students and White students when they enter school and this gap does not change with Black students tending to stay about 1.5 grades of achievement growth behind White students. This suggests that Black and White students are learning at similar rates while they are attending Multnomah County schools.

- The study looks at the hypothesis that Black-White disparities in socio-economic status (SES) are largely responsible for the observed Black-White achievement gap. Free and reduced price lunch is used as a proxy for SES. Seventy-nine percent of Black students qualify for free or reduced price lunch. The data shows that the achievement gap is smaller when students are grouped by socio-economic status.

- Black students are more likely than White students to change schools from one year to the next. Research shows that moving and changing schools disrupts the academic, social and emotional life of students.

- Black students are more likely to have a teacher who is new to their school compared with White students, especially in the middle grades. There is evidence that teacher turnover rate may negatively impact student performance.

- A number of elementary, middle, and high schools provide programs in which Black students learn at a higher rate than the countywide average for Black students; these programs have also been successful in Black students closing the achievement gap with White students in their own schools. The study recommends that these schools be investigated for best practices.

The impact of socio-economic status on disparities in early learning is also found in a 2009 study conducted for the Council of Chief State School Officers – *Disparities in Early Learning and Development: Lessons from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort.* This study found that the most consistent and prominent risk factors for disparities in child cognitive, social, behavioral and health outcomes are low income and low maternal education. The study concludes that these disparities are evident at 9 months of age and have increased by 24 months of age.

The Children's Institute 2009 publication, *Is Oregon Ready to Learn? Improving Oregon's Kindergarten Readiness Survey* emphasizes not only the importance of parents and caregivers in preparing a child to be ready for kindergarten, it also emphasizes the importance of the school and the community's readiness to prepare, welcome, and support children and their families.

Cultural competence
Another factor to consider in preparing a child to be ready for kindergarten is the ability of educators to educate students of all backgrounds and cultures. The Oregon Department of Education's definition of cultural competence includes the "requirement that individuals and organizations have a defined set of values and principles, demonstrated behaviors, attitudes, policies and structures that enable them to work effectively in a cross-cultural manner".

John Powell notes, in his presentation, Structural Racism: The Civil Rights Struggle for the 21st Century, "Including people where they once were excluded is a step in the right direction, but it is not enough. We need to examine the policies and politics which led to their exclusion in the first place." "Family transmission of property and the family transmission of differential educational opportunities are the two great mechanisms sustaining the class structure of contemporary societies," Roberto Mangabera Unger, from *Democracy Realized: The Progressive Alternative* (1988), referenced in the same presentation.

Powell's work at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity charges us to look at access to opportunity in addressing race based gaps and disparities. Powell calls for moving from transactional change – incremental gains within existing arrangements; to transformational change – to stop pursuing avenues which do not show measurable results and adopt new approach's that reform the structures that are creating and perpetuating the inequity.

A central question related to this analysis is – What are the opportunity structures or institutional arrangements that have created barriers and which ones will create access for African American families in preparing their children for kindergarten?

Starting early to optimize brain development
A vast body of research shows the importance of a child's early experiences in optimizing brain development. This research looks at the importance of exposing a child to developmentally appropriate activities beginning at the time of birth. It looks at the critically important role that parents and caregivers have in providing a child with a variety of learning experiences during his/her early years and the importance of the support of the community for children and their families.

The Timing and Quality of Early Experiences Combine to Shape Brain Architecture (2007) reviews the scientific evidence on brain development. It concludes that a child's brain is optimally programmed to benefit from specific types of experiences at different ages. "A child's ability to interpret what they see changes over time as their brain circuitry is built. Thus, it is important that experiences provided in the earliest years are appropriate for the young child's stage of development. Reading a picture book with a toddler who is learning to speak, for example, provides an important opportunity to point to and talk about the pictures, not to focus on the written words. The ability to decode written language comes later, when the appropriate, higher level brain circuitry will be built."

The Harlem Children's Zone, Baby College project reports interesting information from several studies that address the achievement gap. "A child from a low-income neighborhood entering first grade has, on average, been given 25 hours of one-on-one picture book reading, compared with up to 1,700 hours for a typical middle-class child (Marilyn Jager Adams, *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*, MIT Press, 1990). By age three, children from families on

welfare have a cumulative vocabulary of 525 words; three-year-olds from professional families have a vocabulary of 1,116 words (Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*, Paul H. Brooks Publishing Co., 1995)."

A recent article by David Kirp, *Bridging the Achievement Gap***,** cites the following factors that must be met to reduce the achievement gap:

- Good preschools (research shows that Head Start graduates who go to underfunded public schools show no long term impact; graduates who go to well-funded schools are more likely to graduate from high school)
- Smaller elementary school classes (reducing class size to 14 or 15 students has been shown to achieve academic gains)
- Focus on reading (Success for All – emphasizes reading skills, support for teachers and tutoring for students, and solicits parents to be educators)
- Alter attitudes about intelligence (college students exposed to studies of brain development demonstrating the plasticity of intelligence achieved better grades)
- Link schools to their communities (community schools open before and after school, six days a week, mentoring programs)
- Pay attention to character building programs (Green Dot and Knowledge is Power), which change students' attitudes about the value of hard work, have been shown to narrow the achievement gap ("Invisible Students: Bridging the Widest Achievement Gap," David L, Kirp. This article is a chapter in *Building Healthy Communities: A Focus on Boys and Young Men of Color*)

Best practices in early literacy

Recommendations from the *Disparities in Early Learning and Development: Lessons from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort* provide a good summary of best practices recommended by brain development research.

- ***Start Early*** - Interventions should be high-quality, comprehensive and continuous for children ages 0 to 5.
- ***Target Low-income Children*** – As income is the most prevalent risk factor at 9 and 24 months, children in low-income households should be the main targets of early interventions.
- ***Engage and Support Parents*** – Given that maternal education is also noted as a prevalent risk factor, early childhood interventions should include a parental education component.
- ***Improve the Quality of Early Care Settings*** –Two promising ways to address the quality of early care environments is to focus on curriculum development and professional development within both home-based and center-based settings that serve infants and toddlers.

Multnomah County Library's current early literacy outreach efforts

Multnomah County Library's current plan for improving the language and literacy skills of children entering school in Multnomah County incorporates best practices for children's programs based on early literacy research and best practices for outreach:

- Start at birth or earlier;
- Educate children's significant caregivers about the importance of creating language and literacy rich experiences and environments that will help children develop essential early literacy skills which prepares them for reading success;
- Create language and literacy rich experiences and environments for children by providing access to children's books in family childcare homes and childcare centers and by reading aloud to children and reading interactively; and
- Partner with community agencies, schools, and other service providers to build relationships with low-income families.

Multnomah County's outreach strategy to promote early literacy is to focus on parents and caregivers who have the opportunity to talk with and read to children every day. The goal is to provide parents and caregivers information, materials, and the necessary skills so that they will increase the amount of time that they talk with and read aloud and interactively with their children. Multnomah County partner agencies are listed on pages 11 and 12. An additional strategy is to provide storytime experiences at shelters, Head Start and child care programs, reaching children whose families might face barriers in attending programs in library buildings.

<u>Current outreach efforts to parents include:</u>

- <u>Born to Read community partners.</u> Information on reading to your child is shared with parents at social service agencies, high school teen parent classes, substance abuse programs, and parent-child development centers;
- <u>Reach out and Read.</u> Partnership with Multnomah County Health Department. A free book and a "prescription" for parents to read is given to parent when children up to age five come to clinics for routine health visits;
- <u>Mother Goose Series.</u> A family-centered learning program that encourages parents to read to their children daily and take an active part in their children's learning;
- <u>New Parent Gifts.</u> First-time parents receive a welcome baby gift from the library, which includes a new book, DVD, and application for baby's first library card;
- <u>Books While You Wait.</u> The library places bins of library books in public service waiting rooms to be used by parents and children waiting for appointments;
- <u>Every Child Ready to Read@ your library</u>. Created by the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), the program emphasis is on the development of pre-reading skills through interaction between the child and their parent/ or caregiver by focusing on reading aloud and engaging in related activities.

<u>Current outreach efforts to childcare providers include:</u>

- <u>Book Delivery Program.</u> Loan of children's books to childcare centers, family childcare providers, and Head Start facilities;

- Early Words. A professional development training series for childcare and education providers created by Dr. Christyn Dundorf, Early Education and Family Studies Department Chair at Portland Community College. Trainings and mentoring in early literacy provided to center and family childcare providers;
- Raising a Reader. A reading motivation program in which the library provides storytime, child care provider and parent education, and book bags for children in childcare centers, Head Start centers, and in family homes in partnership with Multnomah County Health Department.

Current in-library services at Central Library and all 18 neighborhood libraries include:

- Storytime. An interactive lapsit and storytime model for parents with infants, tiny tots, toddlers and preschoolers. Activities include repetition, movement, rhyme, interaction, stories, language enrichment, and music. Storytimes for families who speak Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) and Russian are at designated libraries;
- Storytime: It's In the Bag. Placed in six libraries, these 50 themed bags for babies, toddlers and preschoolers include five books and a toy or puzzle on child-focused topics;
- Website. Lists programs for parents birth to six; programs for children, including storytime and special events, and books, posters, and videos promoting early literacy that can be purchased from the library; and
- Social media. Facebook is used to announce library events, receive comments from library users, post photos, and videos. Twitter provides library users with short, updated messages in a timely matter to those who have signed up to receive these messages.

Multnomah County Demographics

In designing the community engagement process and service plan, it is important to know where African American families reside in Multnomah County and to have knowledge of the library's geographic service areas that include a high percentage of African American families.

Six percent of the 726,855 people living in Multnomah County are Black (43,611), according to 2008 census information. Data provided in the State of Black Oregon Report states that, 23% of Blacks live in North Portland, 55 % live in the City of Portland; and 80% live in the Portland Metro Area (Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington counties). The report also notes that in 1990, 50 percent of Oregon's Black residents lived in North Portland. The percentage living in the Portland Metro Area remains at 80%.

The following chart provides demographic information by branch library within a 2-mile radius of each library. The data has been sorted by African American population and then by % of children under 5 years of age (for the entire population). Since radii data overlaps in some cases, data is not mutually exclusive (people can be counted twice).

Highlighted in the following chart are libraries with service areas that serve 2,000 or more African Americans with 5% or more children less than 5 years of age.

Service Radius	Multnomah County Population	Multnomah County Under 5	*Multnomah County % under 5*	African-American	*% African-American*
North Portland	61,738	4,141	7%	14,823	24%
Albina	84,532	4,510	5%	14,561	17%
Kenton	44,800	3,367	8%	9,021	20%
Hollywood	104,126	5,202	5%	7,357	7%
Northwest	50,617	1,536	3%	4,455	9%
Midland	85,940	6,357	7%	3,991	5%
Gregory Heights	57,505	3,686	6%	3,846	7%
Central	61,475	1,463	2%	3,326	5%
Belmont	97,736	4,455	5%	3,121	3%
St. Johns	28,588	2,264	8%	2,574	9%
Rockwood	73,724	6,046	8%	2,248	3%
Holgate	87,588	5,932	7%	2,200	3%
Woodstock	74,952	4,461	6%	1,448	2%
Gresham	55,985	4,479	8%	1,125	2%
Fairview-Columbia	37,565	3,330	**9%**	982	3%
Troutdale	45,268	3,712	8%	909	2%
Capitol Hill*	29,897	1,592	5%	709	2%
Hillsdale	43,231	1,970	5%	703	2%
Sellwood-Moreland	39,177	1,703	4%	478	1%

Source: Multnomah County Library 2008 estimates (by Census tract) extracted through ArcView GIS.
Note: Above totals do NOT add up to the countywide total pop figures because there is population outside of the service radii; also, many service radii overlap; population includes only Multnomah County residents.

Outreach models

Public Library Early Literacy Outreach models

The expected outcome of public library early literacy outreach activities is to bring about a change in the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of children, parents, caregivers and professionals who work with young children. The desired long-term impact is that children will be ready to learn when they enter kindergarten.

If we look at this from a logic model framework, the library provides various activities such as, storytimes, book bags, and teaching parents and caregivers skills to read interactively with children. The expected outcome is that parents will read interactively with their children on a daily basis and caregivers will read on a daily basis to children in their care. The long-term impact will be that children will be ready to learn when they enter kindergarten.

The California State Library and North Bay Cooperative Library System launched its Early Learning with Families (ELF) initiative in the summer of 2006. The goal of this initiative is to help further strengthen public libraries role in helping families, caregivers and childcare providers acquire the resources and skills necessary to support the healthy development of young children from birth through five years of age. Best practice models used at libraries throughout the California State Library system include:

1. Every Child Ready to Read. Created by the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), the program emphasis is on the development of pre-reading skills through interaction between the child and their parent/ or caregiver by focusing on reading aloud and engaging in related activities.
2. Family Place Libraries. The model's focus is on engaging with families with young children in a family-friendly place, integrating partnerships with community specialists, outreach to various groups in the community and ongoing support through staff development and technical assistance.
3. Mother Goose on the Loose. This is an interactive lapsit and storytime model especially for parents with infants, toddlers and preschoolers. Activities include repetition, movement, rhyme, interaction, stories, language enrichment and music.
4. Raising a Reader. A book bag is delivered through early learning and preschool programs. Quality children's books are made available to preschoolers and brought home so they can be read and shared with their families. Children are given a special bag for use when borrowing library books and resources. www.pcf.org/raising_reader/program
5. Sure They Are Ready to Read. Library S.T.A.R. Library S.T.A.R. is a training program for library staff. It is based on child development research and incorporates strategies to use with infants, toddlers and their parents and caregivers to promote pre-literacy skills through lapsits and interactive storytimes.
6. Touchpoints. T. Berry Brazelton M.D., pediatrician and author, pioneered the Touchpoints approach to understanding how infants and toddlers grow and develop. In this approach, professionals who work with families are able to support parents and

caregivers during the challenges faced by young children as they progress through periods of growth. In addition to enhancing this understanding, Touchpoints training presents a model of interaction with and support for families that is based on the recognition of parents' strengths and expertise.

The Black Caucus of the American Library Association, Chicago, recently launched **Reading is Grand! Reading is Grand!** a program to promote intergenerational literacy, which targets grandparents raising grandchildren. BCALA offers a toolkit to help libraries plan and implement family literacy programs.

Oregon's Library Development Services, Early Literacy Initiative provides on its website an extensive catalogue of outreach programs at libraries in Oregon. The site also provides electronic links to exemplary programs across the country. The 41 libraries in the Hennepin County Library system in Minneapolis, Minnesota are highly regarded for exemplary early literacy programs.

Public Library Community Organizing

Recently, one of New Haven Connecticut's branch libraries transitioned from conducting community outreach to community organizing. **A distinction is drawn between "community outreach -- educating people about the library's purpose and opportunities inherent to its mission", and "community organizing -- which uses the "value of the library as an institution to build relationships between individuals, community stakeholders and the local government to have an impact on the community's daily life".** A branch library was closed in a socio-economically challenged geographic area. A Patrons Board was formed to help raise monies for a new branch. This board acted as a development resource for the library and included leaders from New Haven's business, civic, philanthropic, and nonprofit arenas. Library staff saw the importance of engaging neighborhood residents, non-profit groups, and business owners in both planning for library services, the design of the new library building, and visioning how a community space will be used. Success of community engagement efforts was seen in an increase in neighborhood volunteerism, number of new grants received, and neighborhood use of library programs and the community room.

The San Francisco Public Library established Affinity Centers as a way to reach out to diverse communities. These centers are dedicated spaces that house collections and sponsor programs designed to meet the library needs of various underserved segments of the community. A private fund raising effort raised sufficient funds to create Affinity Centers for African-American, Hispanic/Latino, Chinese, Filipino-American, Gay & Lesbian and environmental communities. The African American Affinity Center has a collection of in-library-use materials that serves as an introduction to African American and African history and culture. Events, resources, staff, and other services focusing on African Americans are provided.

Chicago's One Book, One City program's book selection in 2010 was Toni Morrison's "A Mercy". Discussions of themes involving race and multicultural were held throughout the year at different locations.

Multnomah County Library's Black Resource Center located at the North Portland Branch offers materials relating to the African American experience, as well as works by African Americans and other people of African descent. Books, videos, CDs, audio tapes, magazines, and newspapers are available. Works created by African and Caribbean writers, musicians and videographers are also available. The collection houses material for children, teens and adults.

These outreach models do not speak directly to early literacy; however, they illustrate what we feel is key to developing working partnerships within a community. Successful community projects engage the community in project design, planning and implementation.

Other Community Outreach/Community Engagement models

There is a wide spectrum of community engagement, civic engagement, and community involvement models. We have selected a few examples to illustrate community engagement efforts that might be used as models for library community engagement.

Collaborating with Non-Profit Organizations. The Harlem Children's Zone, a non-profit organization located in New York City, operates Baby College. The goal of Baby College is to provide everyone in the Harlem Children's Zone who is expecting a child or raising children between the ages of 0 and 3 with the information and support necessary to bring up happy and healthy children who enter school ready to learn. A nine-week course is held on Saturday mornings at a local public school. The curriculum for the college was developed as a collaborative effort between Dr. T. Berry Brazelton (author of Touchpoints referred to under National Library Models) and The Baby College staff. Children's Zone staff members and peer educations work with new parents to cultivate parents parenting skills and knowledge. They explain the principles of brain development and the key role parents play in the development of language and reading skills. Concrete examples of parent behaviors, which will increase academic success when children enter school, are given. The college collaborates with a group of health care professionals and organizations to provide a range of health-related services. Outreach to the community is conducted through a variety of means—going door to door to recruit new participants, setting up tables with information about the program in populated areas, and through mailings and phone banks. Critical to the success of this program is the engagement and empowerment of parents in all aspects of the program.

Joshua Sparrow, Director of Special Initiatives at the Brazelton Touchpoints Center, writes, in a 2008 article, "New Approaches to Optimizing Child Development And Breaking the Cycle of Poverty," that engagement is key to reaching families that have historically been difficult to reach. *"In some settings, parent 'education' programs are offered in lieu of other services addressing families' basic survival needs, without recognizing the critical role of the conditions and contexts in which childrearing occurs. Approaches such as Touchpoints that promote parental engagement, empowerment, social connectedness and emotional availability are additive to but not a replacement for services that address the wide range of health, educational, nutritional, housing, legal, and other material needs of materially impoverished families. Yet such approaches are particularly effective for programs serving families living with poverty from minority cultures that have traditionally been considered 'hard-to-reach,' unlikely*

to engage, and have good reason to be skeptical and even suspicious of healthcare, educational, and social programs."

Collaborating with Public Health Organizations. Another model used by a number of communities is to provide first time parents and teen mothers with home visits from a public health nurse. The nurse provides important information on prenatal care, child development and family planning. Home visits begin during pregnancy and continue through the child's second birthday. Multnomah County has a number of programs of this nature. Descriptions provided by Multnomah County on its website of these programs are: "*The Nurse Family Partnership* is a program for women and their families who are expecting their first child. Each mother is partnered with a registered nurse early in her pregnancy and receives ongoing home visits that continue through her child's second birthday. This is an evidence-based program with goals that include improving pregnancy outcomes, improving child health and development and improving the economic self-sufficiency of families." *Early Childhood Services* are provided by community health nurses and community health workers and include childbirth, parenting, community resources and nutrition. *Healthy Start/Welcome Baby Program* works with first time parents to identify families that need support. First time parents and teen parents are visited during their hospital stay and home visits are offered for parents who need more support. The purpose of the *Healthy Birth Initiative* is to reduce disparities in perinatal health among African American Women. "Services include home visits, education, and support groups from pregnancy through the child's second year of life. A community mobilization intervention model works to involve the community in improving health outcomes."

A 2000 report on a comprehensive outreach model used by the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) to improve children's access to health care looks at how to remove barriers to services identified by families and by the health care delivery system. Barriers include: lack of transportation; language and cultural barriers; hours that conflict with work schedules; and stressful living conditions and situations that make the importance of obtaining health care a low priority unless a problem becomes a dire emergency. Solutions to addressing these barriers include: offering bus tokens or vouchers to help ease transportation problems; expanding hours to better accommodate working parents' schedules; and home visit programs.

Using Internet Websites/Social Networking. Library websites designed to provide information to a community about library programs and resources is a widely used outreach method. The use of Facebook and Twitter to promote library events is becoming more widespread. To be effective, websites must be kept current, engaging, and must be easy to navigate.

A project conducted by Hermiston, Oregon's public library in 2008 contains an interesting observation about the use of current technology. The library partnered with the Umatilla County Housing Authority to present regular story times at Housing Authority sites. The library gave parents literacy kits to promote parents reading to their children on a one-on-one basis at home. Parent participation was extremely low. Strategies suggested to increase participation were: conducting programs at different times (often parents work full time) family parties; more engaging flyers; and use of technology. They suggest that the program's assumption that families with low-incomes do not have home computers does not take into consideration that families use the Internet, email, and cell phones. Collecting email or cell phone information to use to text and distribute program information and the use of Facebook or a MySpace account linked to the library's website are outreach strategies that should be explored.

Constructing Social networks is an evolving community engagement strategy. The Constructing Social website suggests a five-phase plan for community engagement using the Internet. The first phase, **launch,** is to seed the community you are interested in engaging with "starter content" that provides incentives for participation. Second, **awareness** is outreach efforts to reach your target market through bloggers, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, or email to individuals to let them know about your initiative. Third, **interaction**, occurs once you have created awareness in your target community and you want to create participation. Suggested ways to do this is through surveys, polls, and ratings. These are seen as easy to respond, non-threatening ways to engage people. Fourth, in the **participation** phase, options are given for how an individual can participate and ways that participation can be recognized. Options include: idea sharing, video/photo uploads, profile building, and friending. Fifth, **advocate phase,** is where individuals connect with others and spread the word through blogs, connections to Facebook, and other ways. A recognition system is noted to be key in all phases.

List of Multnomah County Library community outreach partners

Reach Out and Read Contacts (Multnomah County Health Clinics)

Northeast Health Clinic
La Clinica
North Portland Health Clinic
Mid-County Health Clinic
East County Health Clinic
School-Based Health Centers
NARA Indian Health Clinic
Children's Community Clinic (potential site)

Contacts for Born to Read and Parent Education Outreach

Letty Owing Residential Treatment Center
New Directions Residential Treatment
VOA - Women's Residential
Nara Residential Treatment
Project Network Residential Treatment Facility
DePaul Treatment Residential Treatment
Bradley Angle DV Shelter
Yolanda House DV Shelter
Raphael House DV Shelter
My Sister's House / Transitional Housing
White Shield / Residential Programs for Parents
Portland Public Schools / Teen Parent Services
Centennial High / Teen Parents
Insights for Teens
Meek Pro-Tech High
IRCO - Services for Immigrants and Refugees
Africa House / through IRCO

Neighborhood House Parent Child Groups
Woodmere Sun School
Siletz Tribal Head Start
Albina Head Start
Children's Relief Nursery
VOA Family Nursery

Approximately 100 Raising a Reader affiliate sites reach over 34,000 children. Children take home red book bags each week and then exchange them the following week for new titles--all year long. Sites include Head Start and child care centers and home-based child care providers.

Book delivery program. Approximately 250 child care centers, child care providers & Head Start classrooms receive a book delivery of 50 books every two months.

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II. Community Input Process

Focus Groups

We worked with a number of community organizations to recruit African American parents and grandparents for the focus group sessions: North Portland Library, Healthy Birth Initiative (HBI), Albina Early Head Start, Portland Community Reinvestment Initiative (PCRI) and the Oregon Department of Human Services/Child Welfare Division. Focus group participants received a $25 gift certificate and dinner; childcare was provided. Focus groups were held in North, Northeast, and outer Southeast Portland. In total, fifty-two people participated in the five sessions.

Parent Surveys

Thirty-one parents completed a parent survey. Parent surveys were completed by parents and grandparents during an Albina Early Head Start Parent Orientation session. Focus group participants were asked to distribute cards to friends and family with information on how to complete the on-line survey and enter a drawing for a $50 gift certificate.

Resource Council

Twelve community leaders who had expressed interest in this project received an invitation from the Multnomah County Director of Libraries asking them to act as a sounding board at strategic points during the project. Resource Council members received the email invitation to comment on draft recommendations via a telephone interview, in-person interview or to complete the internet feedback survey. Two resource council members were interviewed in-person and one was interviewed via telephone. Names of individuals completing the internet survey were not collected nor were people asked to identify themselves as resource council members.

Library Staff

Twelve staff members attended a focus group session with the Consultant Team. Staff members shared their experiences and knowledge of current library programs, new approaches to working with African American families who already use the library, and suggestions for how the library can reach families who may never attend library programs.

Library Managers and Supervisors

The Consultant Team facilitated a discussion at a regularly scheduled meeting of library managers and supervisors (SuperMan). Participants were asked to share their perspectives on the role the library can play in preparing young African American children to be ready to learn by the time they enter kindergarten.

Key Interviews

The Consultant Team held input interviews with representatives from Self Enhancement Inc., (SEI), Portland Community Reinvestment Initiative (PCRI), Black United Fund, Albina Early Head Start, State Health Division - Office of Multi-Cultural Health, and the Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Division.

Interviews to obtain feedback on the draft recommendations were held with representatives from the Multnomah County Chair; Black Parent Initiative (BPI), and Portland Schools Foundation and with resource council members from the City of Portland, Mayor's Office; Urban League, and SEI.

Electronic Feedback Survey

The Consultant Team emailed invitations to complete an electronic feedback survey on the draft recommendations to:

- Focus group participants
- Key informants interviewed during the plan development process
- All library staff/supervisors/managers
- Community leaders serving on the Resource Council for the planning process
- CEO of The Library Foundation

Sixty-two people completed the electronic survey. Of these, 44 were library employees, eight African American parents/grandparents, two non-profit staff, three government staff, and five community members. People were asked to indicate their affiliation according to the categories listed above. Those interested in receiving updates on the project had the opportunity to provide their email address.

III. List of key interviewees

Key Interviews - Input	**Key Interviews – Feedback**
Maxine Fitzpatrick, Deborah Turner – PCRI	Marcus Mundy, Urban League
Elaine Harrison, Albina EHS	Charles McGee, Black Parent Initiative
Larry Dalton, Jennifer Bren, DHS	Kali Thorne Ladd, Mayor Adam's Office
Tony Hopson, SEI	Tony Hopson, SEI
Carol Cheney, State Health Division, Office of Multi-Cultural Health	Jeff Cogen, Multnomah County Chair
Adrienne Livingston, Black United Fund of Oregon	Dan Ryan, Nate Waas Shull – Portland Schools Foundation
Cornetta Smith, Tameka Brazile, Aisha Campbell – Healthy Birth Initiative	

Preparing African American Children for Kindergarten

Key Findings from *focus groups, key interviews, library staff, managers, and supervisors*

I wasn't on a routine as a kid. I try to put my son on a routine so he knows what is coming next. He knows when it is time to do homework. I sit with him when he does his homework.

The best time to read to your child is to take advantage of a situation. At the grocery store, talk about the colors in the produce department; ask them to find something green, or ask them to count the apples going into the bag.

I've learned by watching other parents, trying something new, I don't want to be stuck in the same spot. My oldest daughter says she sees the difference. I have friends who are very impatient. They say, "how can you be so patient with your kids". I say, "I have learned to be patient". A lot of parents are learning from other parents.

If African American parents are worrying about paying the rent, buying food it is a big wall in being a one on one parent. Survival comes first. If they are not trained or educated to get a job it is hard to be worrying about school for their kids.

– comments made by parents during focus group sessions

Findings compiled from input process

Barriers to African American children being ready for kindergarten *(all input sources)*

- Time to read – immediacy of situation dealing with food, shelter, clothing – parents meeting basic needs
- Message of importance of parents reading to children doesn't get to parents
- Parents who have low functioning in reading – shy away from teaching their children
- Literacy is not a good name – it's what library uses but it scares parents away
- Parents having age-appropriate tools
- Lack of recognition of African Americans in books, library, schools
- Lack of support networks – to provide mentors and role models for children
- Lack of information – parents not aware of available resources
- Structural barriers – environmental, financial, racism, schools
- Transportation to resources; library events
- Number of kids to teacher in schools a problem
- Communication between teachers and parents – need to change parents/grandparents fears of what happened when they went to school
- No minorities as teachers
- Different learning styles – there should be more learning through interaction
- Need more African American parents active in the schools/parent involvement

- Grandparents raising grandchildren need help for kids with homework

Who African American parents of young children look to for guidance *(parent survey and focus groups-percentages are for responses to survey)*

- Parents (62%) Grandparents (31%)
- Preschool teacher/child care provider (55%)
- TV Programs (37%)
- Relatives (41%)
- Friends (31%)
- Websites (31%)
- Neighbors (27%)
- Churches (24%)
- Library (17%)
- Sports "stars", coaches, players
- Hip Hop musicians

Radio stations that parents/grandparents listen to and frequent use of social media and other sources of information *(parent survey and focus groups)*

- KBMB, KBOO, The Fish, 107.5, Z100
- Facebook (48%), web searches (72%)
- Texting
- Email
- *Portland Observer*, *Skanner*
- Community center at apartment building

When to start reading to child (*parent survey)*

- Soon as child is born (84%)
- 3 months old (3%)
- 1 year (3%)
- 18 months (6%)
- 3 years (3%)

Information/help useful to prepare child to succeed in school *(parent survey, key interviews, focus groups)*

- List of what kids need to know when they enter school – what to expect manuals – examples of what's appropriate by age
- Information on what I can do at home
- Fun, educational activities – books, flash cards, educational videos, music CDs
- Parent orientations, classes, group discussions – but don't call it a parenting class
- Reading with your child at home
- Playing school with kids at home
- Have ABC's on walls in bedroom

- Play games such as “where is the red apple”
- Parents learn from each other – watch what other parents do---learn from what they do right and what they do wrong
- Be a support system when your child goes to school – show teachers you are interested
- Expose child to other children before they go to school so they learn to get along/to interact with other kids
- Sit with them when they are doing homework
- Get your kids used to a routine

Best conversations/communications/time to read to your kids *(focus groups)*

- Take advantage of situation – at grocery store talk about colors; at home talk about what’s in the house
- Best conversation time is meal time
- Best conversation time is right after school
- Have books in the car for kids to read when you are driving around
- Choose one day a week to get together and talk about everything
- Have family meetings twice a week
- Read before bed
- Anytime you have spare time
- When you are getting dressed in morning, getting ready for bath
- Anytime they ask a question

Ideas for how library can reach African American families *(all community input sources)*
On-site library programs

- Reach parents in order to reach children -- parents learn how to work with child while child learns -- Parents and children learning together – combine adult literacy and child literacy when parents come to library to study for GED – engage in message of parents reading to children
- Involve men (display books/materials with African American men reading to children; make men feel comfortable at libraries; make link with sports activities; make link with barber shops)
- Increase library selection of books of interest to Black community
- More games and puzzles
- Involve grandparents
- Parent engagement – children act in plays involving reading – invite parents and use as opportunity to get message of importance of parents reading to children;
- Hip Kid Hop – hip hop LL Cool J-type library reading program for kids
- Black story time using hip hop, having fun, taught by African American librarian at branch libraries with high population of African American families
- Free books – get info out about Title Wave
- Area in library for kids to dress up, act out books, do a play
- Spruce up library community board

- Need more computers for kids
- More African American employees at library
- Have African American writers come to library
- Schedule events on weekends and evenings
- More family nights
- Advertise storytime and have more consistent schedule
- Send fliers out from schools
- Use Facebook to send a message about storytime, post updates
- Use incentives to get parents who don't participate – free books; link up with ice cream parlor

Outreach *(all community input sources)*

- Barber/hair salons – books in tubs – info on parents/children reading together (PSU - Dr. Harold Briggs communication with Katie O'Dell, MCL)
- Baby College-type program offered with library partnering with non-profit agencies – taught by someone you can relate to culturally
- DHS social service assistants opportunity for home coaching/modeling reading – telling people about library services
- DHS Self Sufficiency/TANF – meets weekly with parents, possibility of handing out info about the library
- DHS – Books While You Wait include flier about library programs
- Public media campaign (social media; slogan – Prepare kids for college by getting them ready for kindergarten)
- Tutors for children of grandparents raising grandchildren
- Library go to people in community centers at Community Development Corporations and HAP housing
- More in-depth training for HBI home health visitors on modeling reading
- Work with PCRI's Thriving Families program to include reading goals
- Everybody's texting – could have a message and ask people to pass it on
- Library button on Facebook to post information
- African American and African women's group – talk about everything – mental health, parenting
- African American parents and grandparents to be able to Google African American Community Portland and get info about what is going on in Portland
- Have storytimes at the park
- Form a partnership with the churches
- Advertise on bus

Preparing African American Children for Kindergarten Project

Summary of Community Feedback on Draft Recommendations

I. Feedback Process:

The Consultant Team utilized multiple strategies to obtain community feedback on the draft recommendations, including:

A. Emailing invitations to complete an electronic feedback survey to:

- All focus group participants
- All key informants interviewed in the project development process
- All library staff/supervisors/managers
- Resource Council members

B. The Consultant Team conducted in-person and telephone interviews to obtain feedback from key community leaders, including:

- Marcus Mundy, Urban League
- Charles McGee, Black Parent Initiative
- Kali Thorne Ladd, Mayor Adam's Office
- Jeff Cogen, Multnomah County Chair
- Tony Hopson, SEI
- Dan Ryan, Portland Schools Foundation

II. Feedback Summary

Sixty-two people completed the electronic survey. Of these, 44 were library employees, eight were African American parents/grandparents, two were non-profit staff, three were government staff, and five were community members.

A. Overall Positive Response to the Draft Recommendations

Survey respondents were asked to rate the value of the recommendations and to make suggestions for additional strategies. 67% of all respondents found the recommendations very useful and another 26% of respondents rated the recommendations as somewhat useful, reflecting an overall highly positive response to the strategies recommended in the draft plan. Seventy-five percent of respondents considered the recommendation for a proposed pilot project modeled after Baby College a valuable approach and 63% of respondents rated the proposed peer communication team pilot project by as very valuable. These ratings were consistent across library staff and other respondents.

B. Contrasts Among Respondents

While most responses to the questions were consistent among library employees and parents answering the survey, there are a few notable exceptions. Parents ranked design of children's spaces to include place for fantasy play, dress up and hands on activities

significantly higher (71%) than did library staff (25%) and ranked offering parent/child interactive games on computers (57%) compared with library staff (18%). Even though a small number of African American parents responded to the survey, the Consultant Team heard these two recommendations consistently in focus group sessions attended by 52 parents/grandparents.

C. Highest-ranked Strategies:

All respondents ranked these strategies highest by all respondents were:

- Development of explicitly Black culture-focused story times;
- Scheduling parent/child-focused events in the evening or on weekends as well as during weekday times;
- Offering the "Reading is Grand" library program;
- Further developing early childhood and primary-aged collections to include "cool things to read;"
- Offering more resources to help parents cope with the stress of parenthood; and
- Expanding efforts to provide useful resources for community-based school tutoring and mentoring programs

D. Additional Strategies Surfaced in the Feedback Process

Additional strategies proposed by survey respondents and key interviewees focused on:

- acknowledging diversity with regard to economic status within the African American community;
- acknowledging the library's opportunity to celebrate African American culture and to provide opportunities for both African American families and families from all cultures to learn more about African American culture;
- acknowledging the importance of supporting African American children and families in the schools;
- hiring additional African American staff and utilizing existing staff more effectively;
- training library staff on more effective strategies to engage Black families;
- providing a library-wide initiative and structure within the library for staff to support African American culture and families;
- learn from the success of library's bilingual program and incorporate these strategies into program—for example, recruiting staff, staff involvement in program planning, program strategies;
- developing an implementation and evaluation strategy; and
- developing a strategy to strengthen the library's work with African American students in public schools.

II. Proposed changes to recommendations based on feedback:

Review of the feedback has resulted in several key revisions to the draft recommendations, including:

A. Revisions to Enhance Clarity:

1. Library Staffing and Program Structure

- Express more clearly the importance of recruitment and retention of staff with African American culturally-specific expertise. Acknowledge more explicitly the potential value of modeling recruitment and retention efforts on strategies utilized successfully through the library's initiatives to better serve bilingual populations.
- Clarify the need to provide a structure within the library for staff to support and celebrate African American culture. Recognize the need to train all existing staff/managers/supervisors as ambassadors to make culturally-specific populations feel welcome at the library and to show respect for a culture when doing outreach. Make more explicit the connection between increasing interest in library activities among African American families and implementing changes at branch libraries to ensure that African Americans will feel welcome once they engage with the library.
- Design a structure for implementation of the recommendations to include library leadership, oversight, staffing, funding, and evaluation.

2. Library Role in Community Efforts.

- Clarify the need for the library to participate actively in community-wide efforts such as Cradle to Career to explore strategies through which the library can support the efforts of the public schools to better serve African American students.
- Integrate in the library's approach to its collaborations with the schools what was learned from research and community members that the experiences of African American children once they enter school have the potential to reduce the impact of even highly effective preparation strategies.

B. Revisions to Include Additional Outreach Strategies

There were many ideas for how the library can expand outreach efforts. Here are some of the suggestions that have been added to the recommendations:

- Using text4baby, a program that uses text messages to parents with information and reminders to improve their health and the health of their babies, as a resource for the pilot peer communication project;
- Distributing children's books to grandparents through Meals on Wheels or other senior programs;
- Attending Columbia River Correctional Institution family nights and distributing books;

- Expanding recommendations for training the staff working in DHS programs to include staff training for the DHS Equity Taskforce and Foster Parent Program.