

TALKING POINTS FOR LIBRARY STAFF

The period of early childhood development is unique—physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially.

- The human brain achieves approximately 85% of its adult size by age 2 - years and 90% of total growth by age 3.
- This period of growth corresponds to a young child’s attainment of important developmental milestones, including emotional regulation and attachment, language development, and motor skills.
- Researchers at the University of Wisconsin have found that short-term visual memory—a key element in brain development—expands significantly in the second half of the first year of life. What’s more, by the time they reach their first birthdays, babies have as much short-term visual memory as that of an adult.
- Short-term visual memory is crucial for infants trying to learn about the world around them. Babies must be able to remember an object they have seen before but are not looking at – a skill that helps them start comparing objects to learn what makes them similar and different.

Early literacy theory emphasizes a natural unfolding of skills through the enjoyment of books, the importance of positive interactions between young children and adults, and the critical role of literacy-rich experiences.

- By focusing on the importance of the first years of life, we give new meaning to the interactions young children have with books and stories.
- Looking at early literacy development as a dynamic developmental process, we can see the connection (and meaning) between an infant mouthing a book, the book handling behavior of a two year old, and the page turning of a five year old.
- We can see that the first three years of exploring and playing with books, singing nursery rhymes, listening to stories, recognizing words, and scribbling are truly the building blocks for language and literacy development.

Children’s early experiences with books are among the most significant indicators for their success in learning to read in school, and supportive efforts that begin very early in life are the most successful.

- Children whose parents read to them become better readers and perform better in school.
- Other family activities, such as telling stories and singing songs also encourage children’s acquisition of literacy skills.
- Based on early literacy research from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development of the National Institutes of Health and the experience of 14 demonstration sites nationwide, *Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library*®, a joint project of the Public Library Association and the Association for Library Service to Children, divisions of ALA (www.pla.org/earlyliteracy.htm), incorporates the most recent evidence-based research on early literacy development and the crucial role of the parent and caregiver.

Research in the field of emergent literacy indicates that parents are the best “teachers” to get their children ready to learn to read.

- Public libraries have an important role to play in emergent literacy development.
- Young children’s emergent literacy skills—what they know about reading and writing before they can actually read or write—serve as the building blocks for their later efforts. Children learn these skills before they start school, beginning in infancy.
- Many parents and other caregivers, though, need to be taught the importance of early literacy. They need expert guidance regarding how to develop critical pre-reading skills so that their child enters school ready to learn to read.
- Research confirms that reading success starts with young children enjoying library storytimes. Preschoolers’ earliest experiences with books and reading are important; parent and caregiver knowledge can build on those experiences.
- Results from *Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library*® suggest that before attending parent training sessions, many parents of 0-23 month

olds were the least likely to share books and use the library, but after attending the sessions, they dramatically increased their frequency of use.

- In storytime programs that are based on early literacy research, library staff assumes responsibility for helping parents and caregivers understand their key role with their children in early literacy development. At appropriate moments in the storytime program, library staff can share specific ways parents and caregivers can help their children and encourages them to provide valuable literacy experiences at home.

Family plays the most important role in a young child's life.

- Parents have the primary responsibility for nurturing, teaching, and providing for their children. It is the relationship between parent and child that is the most critical for the positive development of children.
- Children need supportive, nurturing environments.
- The new economy has brought changes in the workforce and in family life. These changes are causing financial, physical, and emotional stresses in families, particularly low-income families. Moreover, increasing numbers of new immigrants are challenged to raise their children in the face of language and cultural barriers.
- Consequently, the role of parents and the condition of families should be central concerns for policymakers interested in promoting school readiness. Therefore, states should consider these recommendations and policy options to support the role of families.

Early childhood development programs that these programs have substantial payoffs.

- Investments in high quality early childhood development programs consistently generate benefit cost-ratios exceeding 3-to-1—or more than \$3 return for every \$1 invested.
- The economic and social benefits from these investments amount to much more than just improvements in public balance sheets. By improving the skills of a large fraction of the U.S. workforce, these programs raise the gross domestic product, reduce poverty, and strengthen U.S. global competitiveness.
- Recent writings of James J. Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics, and of Art Rolnick, senior vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, point to the positive economic benefits that result from investments in early care and education. Rolnick writes that early childhood investments yield “extraordinary public returns.” By his calculations, the internal rate of return on the Perry Preschool program, a high-quality preschool intervention program for three- and four-year-olds, yielded an internal rate of return of 16 percent, 12 percent of which was returned to society.

Investments in early childhood development programs reduce crime.

- Investment in quality pre-kindergarten now will save taxpayers money in future crime costs. That is why investment in high-quality pre-kindergarten programs was endorsed by the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police and the Oregon State Sheriffs’ Association, as well as national law enforcement organizations such as the National District Attorneys Association and the Fraternal Order of Police.
- Recent economic policy research shows that crime rates and the heavy economic costs of criminality to society are likely to be substantially reduced as well.
- The Committee for Economic Development (CED), a nonpartisan research and policy organization of some 250 business leaders and educators, concluded that, “Society pays in many ways for failing to take full advantage of the learning potential of all of its children, from lost economic productivity and tax revenues to higher crime rates to diminished participation in the civic and cultural life of the nation... Over a decade ago, the CED urged the nation to view education as an investment, not an expense, and to develop a comprehensive and coordinated strategy of human investment. Such a strategy should redefine education as a process that begins at birth and encompasses all aspects of children’s early

development, including their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth.”

Helping children succeed in school is especially important in Oregon.

- Without public help, tuition in a child care center in Oregon averages \$5,580 annually for a child in pre-kindergarten. This is more than the average annual tuition at a state university.
- In Oregon, state and federal Head Start programs together served approximately 11,800 children in 2002. More than 6,200 children from low-income families were left unserved by the state Head Start program. This means that only 18 percent of all 3- and 4-year-olds were served by public programs.
- A survey of Oregon kindergarten teachers showed that kindergarten children who participated in pre-kindergarten were more prepared for school than those who did not attend pre-kindergarten. To quote the recent report from Oregon’s Department of Education, “Early intervention is vital if [children] are to be ready for school.
- The most effective way to reduce the number of children who will eventually drop out of school is to intervene during the early years to reduce the risk factors that can impede their ability to learn and succeed in school.
- High quality, comprehensive preschool programs such as Oregon Head Start Pre-kindergarten, have been shown to dramatically raise children’s abilities at school entry, increase early and later achievement test scores, reduce grade repetition and placement in special education, and boost graduation rates. High quality pre-kindergarten programs give children a head start to achieve success in school and in life.”

What is school readiness?

- School readiness is a term used with increasing frequency to describe expectations of how children will fare upon entry to kindergarten.
- Years of research into child development and early learning show that school readiness is defined by several interrelated developmental domains. These domains— physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge—are all important, build on one another, and form the foundation of learning and social interaction.
- School readiness encompasses children’s curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, their physical and mental health status, their ability to communicate effectively, their capacity to regulate emotions, and their ability to adjust to the kindergarten classroom environment and cooperate with their teachers and peers.
- Ready children are those who, for example, play well with others, pay attention and respond positively to teachers’ instructions, communicate well verbally, and are eager participants in classroom activities. They can recognize some letters of the alphabet and are familiar with print concepts (e.g., that English print is read from left to right and top to bottom on a page and front to back in a book).
- A successful transition to kindergarten impacts the family, the school and the community, as well as the child.
- In Oregon, we measure and report on early indicators of success. Readiness for school is, in fact, one of the Governor’s three goals for children in his Charter for Children, and the Oregon Department of Education as well as the Oregon Commission on Children and Families has placed a new emphasis on this.

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