



January 27, 2022

INFORMATION  ACTION

**SUBJECT: FIRST 5 CALIFORNIA EARLY LITERACY EFFORTS**

**Strategic Plan Priority Area:** Family Functioning

**Goal:** All families have the knowledge, skills, and resources to support their children’s optimal development.

**SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE**

Promoting child literacy is an important strategy to close the achievement gap. Leveraging existing programs to consistently reach families in familiar settings is critical to successful early literacy in California. Implementation and support of comprehensive book distribution programs is an effective way to introduce families, including those who are new to their communities and the United States, to early literacy practices, books, and resources.

Early literacy programs encourage parent/child bonding, promote resiliency, and provide positive mitigation against adverse childhood experiences. While ensuring children have access to books is critical at any time, the pandemic has heightened stress among parents and children, making it more crucial than ever that children have access to books in their home.

To truly prepare children for California’s future and reduce achievement disparities, a solid foundation of early literacy skills is required. Roots of the achievement gap start long before children enter kindergarten. A major indicator for later school success is language and early literacy development, and disparities in early vocabulary growth between children from low socioeconomic status (SES) and high SES families can manifest themselves in children as early as 16 months of age (Cannon & Karoly, 2007).<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the importance of getting books into households with young children as a key literacy strategy, California must provide ongoing support for book distribution and literacy programs for its youngest residents.

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<sup>1</sup> Cannon, Jill S., and Lynn A. Karoly. 2007. Who Is Ahead and Who Is Behind? Gaps in School Readiness and Student Achievement in the Early Grades for California’s Children. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

This item will highlight current early literacy strategies in the state and provide additional context as to why an investment in an early literacy program is so important for the future of California.

## **Early Literacy Efforts in California**

A wide body of research demonstrates exposure to books and positive parenting practices, such as being read to in the first three years of life, are critical to robust brain development.

First 5 California's (F5CA) *Talk. Read. Sing.*<sup>®</sup> campaign was initiated based on the importance of a word-rich environment to support the brain development of infants and toddlers. This signature campaign encourages parents and caregivers to prioritize talking, reading, and singing, and provides parent-friendly messages about the importance of early brain development. Related to the *Talk. Read. Sing.*<sup>®</sup> campaign, UCLA researchers, analyzing data from the California Health Interview Survey, concluded: "More than three-quarters of California parents of children ages 0 to 5 years currently read and sing to their children three days a week or more. Furthermore, most parents of children from birth to 5 years old in California recall messages of the *Talk. Read. Sing.*<sup>®</sup> social marketing campaign. However, parents who are foreign-born or who speak Spanish at home are less likely to read or sing to their young children than both their U.S.-born counterparts and those who do not speak Spanish at home. Therefore, widening the reach of the *Talk. Read. Sing.*<sup>®</sup> message remains important, particularly for targeting parents who speak Spanish at home and parents who are immigrants." (Ryan-Ibarra and Becker, 2019)<sup>2</sup>

F5CA also invests in the *Kit for New Parents* delivered to families at the birth of their child through hospitals, home visiting programs, and family resource centers throughout the state. Kits include a book and other materials with resources that help families utilize the materials.

In 2021, the State Commission authorized the repurposing of unspent contract funds to support the California Family Book Distribution Partnership which provided over 730,000 books to approximately 111,364 families through coordination with local First 5 commissions and existing Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL) Programs. Leveraging community relationships and existing programs resulted in quickly delivering books and early literacy tips to families. Partnerships with local First 5s and established early literacy programs create ideal platforms to build a robust, sustainable literacy experiences for families in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> Ryan-Ibarra S, Becker, T. 2019. Parental Reading and Singing to California's Young Children – Trends, Predictors, and Association with the *Talk.Read.Sing.*<sup>®</sup> Campaign. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.

In addition, there are several other state agency-led literacy efforts, many of which include F5CA representation in advisory and implementation roles. These include:

- WIC Books for Kids (California Department of Public Health)
- Literacy focus of the Early Math Project (California State Board of Education)
- Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant (California Department of Education)
- Grade Level Reading Campaign (State Superintendent of Public Instruction)
- Taskforce on Literacy/Biliteracy (State Superintendent of Public Instruction)
- Shared Vision Community Partnership Grants for Early Learning and Out-of-School Time Programs (California State Library)
- Dual Language Learner Pilot (F5CA)

### **Program Description**

The Administration has dedicated \$10 million in the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2022–23 for book distribution for early childhood. F5CA is asked to match that \$10 million for a total investment of \$20 million. This matched funding will be used to strengthen existing efforts that support early literacy, child development, and family functioning in partnership with the California Department of Public Health.

F5CA can assist in administering this funding in a cost-effective and efficient way to get more books in the hands of more children, resulting in a high-impact, low-investment on-going program. A total investment of up to \$10 million would achieve this goal and will be presented in April 2022.

### **Impact of Reading on Child Development**

Reading to children ages 0 to 5, as well as exposure to books, has been shown in myriad studies to have profound positive impacts on cognitive development that lasts well beyond a child's fifth birthday. Children who are read five books per day, for example, hear an estimated 1.4 million more words than children who are read only one book per day. This is commonly referred to as the "million-word gap," and significantly impacts a child's vocabulary development and school performance (Logan, Justice, Yumus, & Chaparro-Moreno, 2019)<sup>3</sup>. Exposure to books in the home also has been shown to be strongly correlated to a child's educational performance and reading

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<sup>3</sup> Logan JAR, Justice LM, Yumus M, Chaparro-Moreno LJ. When Children Are Not Read to at Home: The Million Word Gap. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*: March 20, 2019.

test scores. The more books a home has, the better a child does in school. Importantly, the effect of each additional book is highest in homes with the fewest books (the law of diminishing returns), and households in low socioeconomic categories. Variety is as important as volume when it comes to books effects on cognitive development. While many programs that distribute books focus on concept books (shapes, colors, animals, etc.), exposure to narrative books is important to develop language and cognitive development.

Daily reading, singing, and storytelling are recognized as positive parenting practices which research shows have significant impacts on child development, as well as reducing toxic stress in children, a recognized adverse childhood experience. Children who are not read to at all, for example, have been shown to have their risk of developmental delays increase by over 50 percent. Reading together and engaging in active questioning about what is in the books provides an opportunity for socialization, bonding, and even fun. Access to books is the foundational element that enables families to engage in these important activities with their young children.

## **SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND ACTION**

In January 2020, the Commission was presented with examples of programs and organizations providing books and early literacy supports to young families. Presentations were given on four models used in several counties in California: Little by Little, DPIL, Raising a Reader, and Reach Out and Read.

In April 2020, staff requested the Commission commit \$44,595,000 over three years to launch the California Reads Together Initiative, which was not approved.

In May 2020, staff revised the program design and requested \$5.5 million over one year for the California Family Book Distribution Partnership. The Commission approved \$1.5 million of redirected funds from another contract for that project.

## **FISCAL DETAIL**

Proposed funding for an early literacy partnership with the California Department of Public Health is \$10 million from the Education account.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

A. First 5 California Early Literacy Efforts PowerPoint