

# REL Appalachia Ask A REL Response

Family and Community Engagement, Literacy  
May 2020

## Question:

What does research say about the best ways educators or organizations can engage families in reading with their children from early childhood to grade 8?

## Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about engaging families in reading with their children. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask A REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for peer-reviewed articles and other research reports on family engagement in reading with their children. We focused on identifying resources that specifically addressed how educators and organizations can engage families in reading with their children from early childhood to grade 8. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance.

## References

Compton-Lilly, C., Ellison, T. L., & Rogers, R. (2019). The promise of family literacy: Possibilities and practices for educators. *Language Arts*, 97(1), 25–35. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340464365\\_The\\_Promise\\_of\\_Family\\_Literacy\\_Possibilities\\_and\\_Practices\\_for\\_Educators](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340464365_The_Promise_of_Family_Literacy_Possibilities_and_Practices_for_Educators)

*From the introduction:* “The authors review the field of family literacy and describe promising practices to support the work educators do with families...In this article, we attend to how literacy scholars, particularly those working in the United States, have researched and

responded to the home literacy experiences that children bring to classrooms. We have focused our research on literacy practices in families and draw upon our extensive literature review of the field (Compton- Lilly, Lewis, & Rogers, 2012) to help educators make sense of family literacy practices and the potential role they can play in creating meaningful school literacy experiences for children.”

Cook, S. (2016). *Integrating technology in early literacy: A snapshot of community innovation in family engagement*. Washington, DC: New America. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED570877>

*From the report:* “As a growing number of young children across the country are using media and interactive technology on a daily basis, the conversation has shifted from whether technology is appropriate to use at all to how it should be used to best support children’s early language and literacy development. A new brief released today, *Integrating Technology in Early Literacy: A Snapshot of Community Innovation in Family Engagement*, analyzes the impact of early learning and family engagement programs around the country. In conjunction with the release of this brief, the *Integrating Technology in Early Literacy (InTEL)* map, available through New America’s Atlas tool, has been updated to show where innovative programs are located, how the programs are designed, and what ‘evidence of impact’ they are able to share. ‘Evidence of impact’ refers to what role a technological intervention has in improving child outcomes, adult behaviors in interacting with children, or teacher practice. The programs were assigned the categories strong, promising, emerging and developing based on this criteria. Based on programs with the strongest evidence of effectiveness, the following policy recommendations were made to help ensure success for children and families: (1) Add assessments that examine whether and to what degree families are experiencing disparities in digital access. (2) Create new channels for communication and resource-sharing between public libraries, public media outlets, school districts, and publicly-funded institutions. (3) Fund independent and peer-reviewed research about what works and what does not in the digital media and literacy learning arena. (4) Use grant programs and federally-funded competitions to support organizations that are working to create digital teachers and media mentors. (5) Map and track innovation emerging from states and communities.”

Epstein, J. L. (2013). Summary: School, family, and community partnerships to improve students’ reading and literacy skills and attitudes. Paper presentation in B. W. Toso (Ed.), *National Conference on Family Literacy. Research Strand Conference Proceedings*, (pp.15– 22). Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED574455>

*From the conference proceedings:* “The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) presents, alongside the Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy at Penn State University, these proceedings from the research strand at the 22nd National Conference on Family Literacy. Through these sessions, NCFL’s conference continues to provide the latest research in family education efforts and the practical applications of that research. This annual dissemination of and focus on research findings is critically important to our nation’s family engagement in education movement. These proceedings include papers that

emphasize parents' engagement in their children's growth as learners and the essential role that culture plays in relationships between families and schools."

*From the research paper:* "This is a summary of published and forthcoming reviews of the literature on family involvement with students on reading and literacy skills. Four main conclusions are discussed:

- School-based programs of school, family, and community partnerships can correct the historic pattern that only some families become involved with their children's reading and literacy learning.
- Subject-specific family and community involvement activities are more likely than generic involvement activities to improve students' reading, writing, and other literacy skills.
- The quality of programs and practices of school, family, and community partnerships counts.
- Researchers must continue to improve the depth of studies on family and community involvement for students' reading, writing, and other literacy skills.

We discuss six implications of the confirmed research results for improving policy and practice. It is clear that parents could become engaged with their children on reading and related activities if teachers and school-based partnership teams had professional development and on-going technical assistance to put effective programs in place. A few activities conducted by schools in the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University are included to illustrate how schools at all grade levels are developing their partnership programs to engage parents, other family, and community partners with children to improve reading skills and attitudes."

Hindman, A. H., & Morrison, F. J. (2011). Family involvement and educator outreach in Head Start: Nature, extent, and contributions to early literacy skills. *The Elementary School Journal*, 111(3), 359–386. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/5028/b800f32ef2cc0471bb40d305c866b7abc605.pdf>

*From the abstract:* "The Head Start program endeavors to provide preschoolers with high-quality learning opportunities, in part through fostering family involvement. This exploratory study addressed the paucity of empirical research regarding the nature of educator outreach and family involvement in Head Start and their contributions to children's development of the academic and social foundations of literacy. Participants included 3,100 children and families enrolled in the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) study, their classroom teachers ( $n = 286$ ), and their center directors ( $n = 222$ ). Findings revealed that families regularly engaged in the learning and schooling of their children and that Head Start educators regularly reached out to families. Family involvement and educator outreach were selectively associated with children's decoding, vocabulary, and positive approaches to learning. This study clarifies how families and teachers bridge the home-school gap in Head Start preschool programs and thus contribute to children's early literacy skills."

Kosanovich, M., Lee, L., & Foorman, B. (2020). *A kindergarten teacher's guide to supporting family involvement in foundational reading skills* (REL 2020-016). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED602032>

*From the introduction:* “This Kindergarten Teacher’s Guide provides information for kindergarten teachers on how to support families as they practice foundational reading skills at home. It serves as a companion to the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade. Both guides present four research-based recommendations and how-to steps: the WWC guide is for teaching children at school, and this guide is to help teachers support families in practicing foundational reading skills at home. The information in this Kindergarten Teacher’s Guide is designed to assist teachers in supporting out-of-school literacy activities that are aligned to classroom instruction, informed by student need, grounded in evidence-based practices, and facilitated by ongoing parent-teacher communication. The Teacher’s Guide provides a framework for literacy support activities presented during schools’ family literacy nights and parent-teacher conferences. This Teacher’s Guide includes: (1) Recommendation Reminders that provide a snapshot of each recommendation and how-to steps from the WWC guide; (2) Teacher Scaffolds that model the language teachers can use with families to describe a specific skill, why it is important in learning to read, and how to support that skill; (3) Family Resources that contain evidence-based literacy activities with easy-to-follow plans, and materials that teachers model and share with families; and (4) Family Literacy Videos that show families engaging their child in activities related to the skills teachers modeled during family literacy nights or at parent-teacher conferences.”

Toso, B. W., & Grinder, E. L. (2016). *Parent engagement and leadership opportunities: The benefits for parents, children, and educators* (Practitioner’s Guide #6). University Park, PA: Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED587534>.

*From the introduction:* “In this brief we argue for incorporating leadership training and opportunities into parent involvement and family literacy programs, first as a means to support parents in having a meaningful voice in social and educational issues and second to offer educators a better understanding of the benefits of working with and supporting parents as equal partners in school and community endeavors. Ultimately, we argue that family literacy programming is an ideal venue to develop and offer parent leadership opportunities.”

### *Additional Ask A REL Responses to Consult*

Ask A REL Midwest at American Institutes for Research. (2015). *What research is available on evidence-based practices to engage families in literacy development for students in grades 6–12? Which strategies are effective for supporting language development at home for English learner students?* Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midwest/askarel/2019/family-literacy-engagement.aspx>

## *Additional Organizations to Consult*

Family Reading Partnership: <http://www.familyreading.org/>

*From the website:* “We are a broad-based, locally grown coalition of individuals, businesses, schools, libraries and other organizations. We have joined forces to ‘create a culture of literacy’ by promoting family reading practices throughout our community.”

National Association for the Education of Young Children: <https://www.naeyc.org/>

*From the website:* “The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a professional membership organization that works to promote high-quality early learning for all young children, birth through age 8, by connecting early childhood practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children. The association comprises nearly 60,000 individual members of the early childhood community and more than 50 Affiliates, all committed to delivering on the promise of high-quality early learning. Together, we work to achieve a collective vision: that all young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential.”

- Reading: <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/literacy>

National Center on Improving Literacy: <https://improvingliteracy.org/>

*From the website:* “The National Center on Improving Literacy (NCIL) is a partnership among literacy experts, university researchers, and technical assistance providers, with funding from the United States Department of Education. Our Mission is to increase access to, and use of, evidence-based approaches to screen, identify, and teach students with literacy-related disabilities, including dyslexia.”

- Parents and Families: <https://improvingliteracy.org/family>

Raising a Reader: <https://www.raisingareader.org/>

*From the website:* “Raising A Reader’s mission is to engage caregivers in a routine of book sharing with their children from birth through age eight to foster healthy brain development, healthy relationships, a love of reading, and the literacy skills critical for school success.”

Reading Rockets: <https://www.readingrockets.org/>

*From the website:* “Reading Rockets is a national public media literacy initiative offering information and resources on how young kids learn to read, why so many struggle, and how caring adults can help. We bring the best research-based strategies to teachers, parents, administrators, librarians, childcare providers, and anyone else involved in helping a young child become a strong, confident reader. Our goal is to bring the reading research to life — to spread the word about reading instruction and to present ‘what works’ in a way that parents and educators can understand and use.”

- For Parents: <https://www.readingrockets.org/audience/parents>

## Methods

### *Keywords and Search Strings*

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- (“parent engagement” OR “family participation” OR “family literacy” OR “family literacy night\*” OR “parent-child book reading”) AND (“promising practice\*” OR “best practice\*”)
- (read\* OR “literacy development” OR “literacy promotion” OR “reading habit”) AND (famil\* OR parent\* OR guardian\*)

### *Databases and Resources*

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

### *Reference Search and Selection Criteria*

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors:

- Date of the publication: Searches cover information available within the last 10 years, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- Reference sources: IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols receive highest priority. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- Methodology: The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.
- Existing knowledge base: Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on May 26, 2020. URLs, descriptions, and content included here were current at that time.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by education stakeholders in the Appalachia region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia (REL AP) at SRI International. This Ask A REL response was developed by REL AP under Contract ED-IES-17-C-0004 from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, administered by SRI International. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.