

**Nashville Public Library  
Early Literacy Project**

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## Introduction

The Nashville Public Library (“NPL”) has a long history of leadership in children’s services and literacy. In addition to hosting an extensive collection of children’s literature and literacy resources at its main library and 21 branches throughout the county, NPL offers a variety of innovative programming for children and families. One example is the 86-year tradition of producing and performing literature-based marionette shows for children through Wishing Chair Productions, NPL’s troupe of professional performing artists. NPL hosts workshops and teacher trainings for educators and parents; offers curriculum resources for teachers; provides tours and school visits; and partners with Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools to ensure all students have access to books.

In 2002, NPL leadership, including then-director Donna Nicely and Research and Special Projects Administrator, Elyse Adler, visioned a larger community role for the library related to early literacy. The library’s puppet shows and interactive programming had consistently received positive response and overwhelming demand from the community, providing a launching point for a larger effort. In conjunction with then-Mayor Bill Purcell’s citywide call to action around early childhood education NPL assembled a panel of early childhood experts from a broad range of institutions and perspectives, including the Mayor’s Office of Children and Youth, McNeilly Center for Children, the Nashville Area Association for the Education of Young Children, Tennessee Performing Arts Center, Tennessee State University, and Vanderbilt University to address two questions: *Is there a need for NPL to support early childhood education? How could NPL co-create a program to meet this need?* Community partners and experts agreed that NPL’s puppetry program had potential to be a powerful educational tool for teachers, young children, and their families. What was missing were educators on staff to develop curriculum for the puppet shows, to teach educators how to use NPL’s resources, and to model best practices for reading aloud to young children.

What followed was Bringing Books to Life’s (“BBTL”) pilot program in 2003-2004. Childcare agencies who had been instrumental in the program’s initial design became partners in its implementation. The program became fully funded by the Nashville Public Library Foundation in 2005 and experienced significant growth in the first few years.

Bringing Books to Life is approaching its twenty-first year of serving Nashville’s early childhood education community and is well-positioned to deepen and expand its early literacy reach, in concert with a citywide call to action to increase literacy rates for Nashville’s children.

Bringing Books to Life is unique among Nashville’s literacy programs for its long-term support of childcare and early education programs. Currently, BBTL has 177 active partner programs who receive at least one program service per year. BBTL staff believe there are additional supports BBTL can provide to partner programs, as well as new ways to reach children and families who are not part of the early childhood educational system (i.e. those who utilize family, friend or neighbor care, stay-at-home parents and caregivers).

In 2021, NPL leadership began to vision a potential Bringing Books to Life expansion strategy. The Nashville Public Library Foundation (“NPLF”) was poised to lead a major fundraising campaign to support the expansion efforts, but the library’s early literacy programs had never undergone an outside evaluation.

In 2022, NPL and NPLF leaders met with Lisa Wiltshire, a Nashville-based early literacy consultant and expert, to embark on an early literacy program expansion research and evaluation project.

The project was designed to answer four questions:

- What are the greatest needs in the Greater Nashville community related to early literacy?
- What works to improve literacy outcomes for young children?
- What are the program strengths of Bringing Books to Life?
- How can the Nashville Public Library meet the needs and shared goals of the community with its early literacy programs?

In the fall of 2022, the project began with a comprehensive study of BBTL programming. With the help of Liz Atask, BBTL’s manager, Lisa conducted interviews and focus groups with staff to assess program strengths, outcomes, challenges, needs, and ideas for expansion. Several years of data tracking participation rates, teacher, and parent surveys were collected and analyzed to identify specific program strengths and weaknesses.

In the winter and spring of 2023, with the help and coordination of BBTL leadership, Lisa conducted focus groups and interviews with teachers and directors from a representative sample of 40 childcare centers and pre-k programs across Davidson County. Additional interviews were conducted with parents and family members who had participated in BBTL family workshops.

In the spring and summer of 2023 Lisa analyzed and synthesized data from the focus groups and interviews to identify 40 recommendations from teachers, directors, and parents with respect to Bringing Books to Life program expansion. The recommendations were subsequently synthesized with additional data, staff input, and interviews to include the 5 major recommendations and 11 sub recommendations included in this report.

Also in 2023, Lisa met with leaders and staff from community partner agencies to collect information on their early literacy programs to identify potential duplication in efforts and opportunities for collaboration with the library. With input, assistance, and feedback from researchers and early childhood directors and educators, Lisa examined research studies, textbooks, policy briefs, reports, academic standards, instructional guides, and outcome evidence from the field to identify the most effective teaching and learning practices in early literacy for children ages 0-5, all of which are included in this report.

In March 2023 NPLF and NPL leaders hosted a meeting with board members and funders to provide a “sneak peek” into the project findings, followed by a question-and-answer session with specific input provided by participants which was integrated into the final report.

In June 2023, Lisa met with NPLF and NPL board members, leaders, and staff to present project finding recommendations. Feedback from the session provided valuable input which was included in the final report. Additionally, with coordination and assistance from Liz Attack, Lisa collected staff input on recommendation feasibility, timeline, and staffing projections, which were integrated in the final recommendations presented in this report.

In September 2023, Lisa presented a high-level overview of the project findings to the Nashville Public Library and Nashville Public Library Foundation board and funders.

Between October 2023 and May 2024, the culminating white paper with full findings from the research project was finalized.

This project has been an enormous undertaking involving the work and input of many people.

Special thanks go to Liz Attack, the Bringing Books to Life staff, and library leadership who provided open access to data, valuable feedback, and thought partnership all along the way.

The Nashville Public Library Foundation leadership, board, and staff were instrumental in providing project guidance, feedback, and presentation assistance.

Leaders and staff from organizations across Davidson County and the state contributed valuable input, data, research, ideas, and feedback integrated in this report. They include Peabody College at Vanderbilt University, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, the United Way of Greater Nashville, Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee, The Governor’s Early Literacy Foundation, the Tennessee Department of Education, the Tennessee Department of Human Services, and the Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral Agency.

More than 120 early childhood educators and child care directors from programs across Davidson County provided inestimable input, feedback, data, and ideas for this report.

## Glossary of terms

Nomenclature referring to the earliest years of a child's life and the programs and professionals who interact with them varies by context. For the purposes of this paper, terms used are defined below.

**Literacy** – Literacy includes reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

**Early literacy** – Early literacy refers to literacy in the first eight years of a child's life, birth through third grade. This paper's scope and context focuses on the first five years.

**Early childhood** – Early childhood refers to the first eight years of a child's life, birth through third grade. This paper's scope and context focuses on the first five years.

**Kindergarten** – Kindergarten ("K") refers to the first year of required formal schooling for children in Tennessee. Children are typically ages 5-6 when they begin kindergarten.

**Pre-kindergarten** – Pre-k ("Pre-k") refers to the year just prior to kindergarten. Pre-k programs can be public or private but for the purposes of this paper include only public programs operated and run by the school district. Children attend pre-k programs in classrooms housed in elementary schools, early learning centers, or community-based sites. Funding for pre-k programs comes from state, local, and federal allocations, and parent tuition or fees. Pre-k attendance is voluntary in TN.

**Pre-k teacher** – A pre-k teacher is an education professional who teaches in pre-k classrooms. Requirements include a bachelor's degree in education, early elementary, or other related field and a current Tennessee teaching certificate from an eligible licensure program.

**Child care** – Child care refers to a licensed or certified program that provides care, supervision and education for children ages 6 weeks to five years. Child care providers include centers (13 children or more), family child care homes (5 to 7 children), group child care homes (8 to 12 children) and drop-in child care centers (flexible hours and ages). Funding for child care providers comes from tuition or fees paid by parents, state reimbursements for child care certificates, and private funding.

**Informal child care** refers to child care provided by parents, family members, neighbors, and unlicensed operators who typically care for small numbers of children in a home or informal setting. Funding is nonexistent except for informal or contractual arrangements made between parents and care providers.

*\*Note: Day care is a term that was historically used to describe child care. In the field of early education, day care does not reflect the full nature and scope of child care's importance, requirements, and program delivery.*

**Child care educator** – A child care educator is an education professional working in a child care center, group, or family home providing supervision, care, and education for children ranging in age from infancy to age 5. A child care educator must be 18 years of age and have a high school diploma or equivalent, with select exceptions in center-based care.

**Child care director** – A child care director is a professional who is responsible for the overall operations of a child care program. Child care directors must have a degree from an accredited four-year college, with exceptions based on years of related experience and select certifications.

**Head Start** – Head Start or Early Head Start refers to child care programs that serve children from infancy to age 5. The federal government funds Head Start programs through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Head Start serves low-income families and offers a range of services including early education, health and wellness, and family supports. In Nashville, the Metropolitan Action Commission administers and operates Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

**Head Start teacher** – A Head Start teacher is an education professional who teaches children ages 3-5 in Head Start programs. Requirements include a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or related field. Early Head Start teachers care for and teach children from infancy through age 3. Requirements include an Infant/Toddler Child Development Associate (“CDA”) Credential or equivalent coursework and training in early childhood development.

**Early childhood educator/teacher** – Early childhood educator/teacher refers to education professionals who teach young children in pre-k, child care, and Head Start programs. Although qualifications and pay vary across programs, all educators are responsible for early learning and supporting children to reach developmental benchmarks. Educator is a term that reflects the skills, knowledge, and professionalism required to teach young children and support their healthy growth and development, irrespective of setting. Educator and teacher are used interchangeably.

**Caregiver** – Caregiver refers to any adult who provides supervision and care for an infant or toddler. The term includes educators, parents, relatives, siblings, and other informal care providers.

**Adults** – In this paper adult is used to describe anyone who interacts with children from ages 0-5. The term includes educators, parents, relatives, siblings, informal care providers, and other professionals (i.e., program directors, specialized coaches, therapists, health care providers, etc.).

**Infant** – An infant refers to a child from birth through 12 months of age.

**Toddler** – A toddler refers to a child ages 1-3.

**Child** – Child or young child refers to children ranging in age from 0-5. Children older than 5 are defined as school-age.

## An Urgent Need for Early Literacy

Literacy is a cornerstone to success in life.

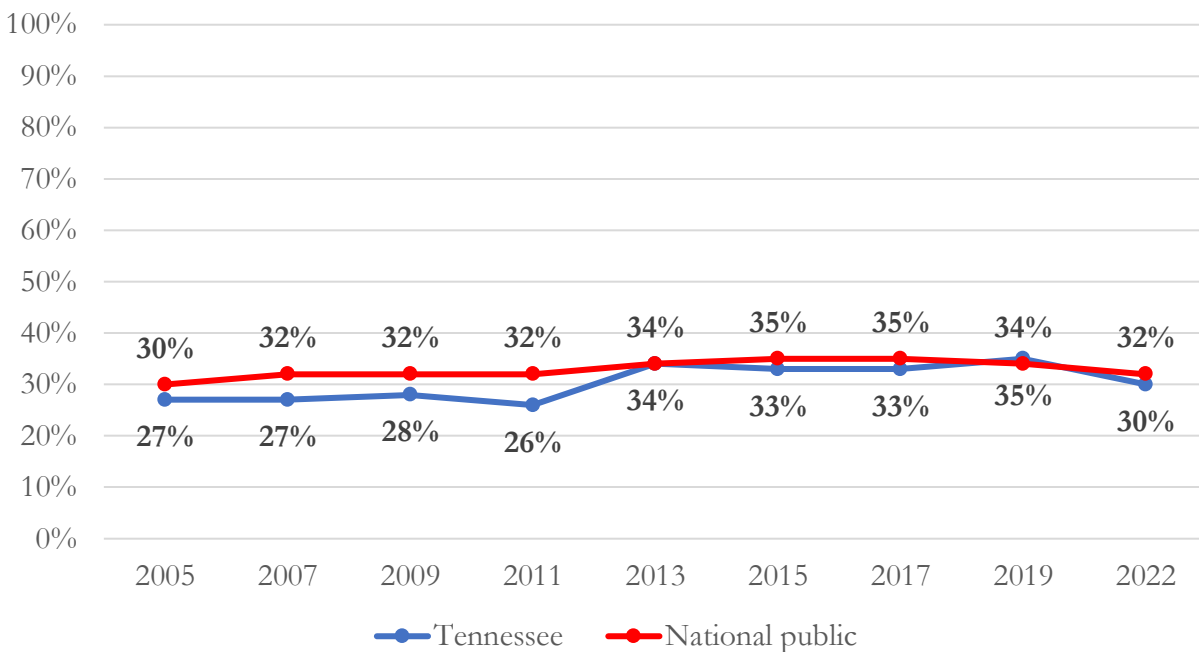
Students who are not reading proficiently in third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. For children living in poverty the number jumps to eight (Hernandez, 2012).

By 2031, 72% percent of jobs in the United States will require postsecondary education and/or training. Only 28% of jobs in 2031 will go to workers with a high school diploma or less (Carnevale et al., 2023).

### Literacy matters.

Tennessee, like the rest of the country, has experienced low literacy rates for more than two decades. In 2011 Tennessee ranked 42<sup>nd</sup> in the nation on 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading based on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (“NAEP”), also known as the Nation’s Report Card. Tennessee’s performance has improved (currently ranked 39<sup>th</sup>) but is still below the national average (Nation’s Report Card, 2024).

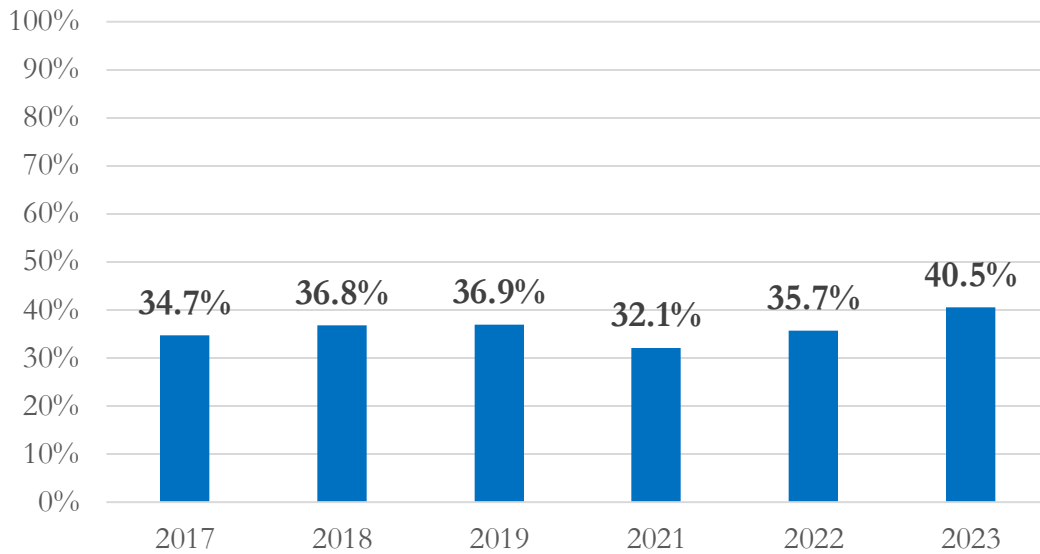
The most recent NAEP scores reveal that **30% of Tennessee’s 4<sup>th</sup> grade students are reading at or above grade level** (Nation’s Report Card, 2024).



\*Source: [Nation’s Report Card, Tennessee state profile, 2024](#)

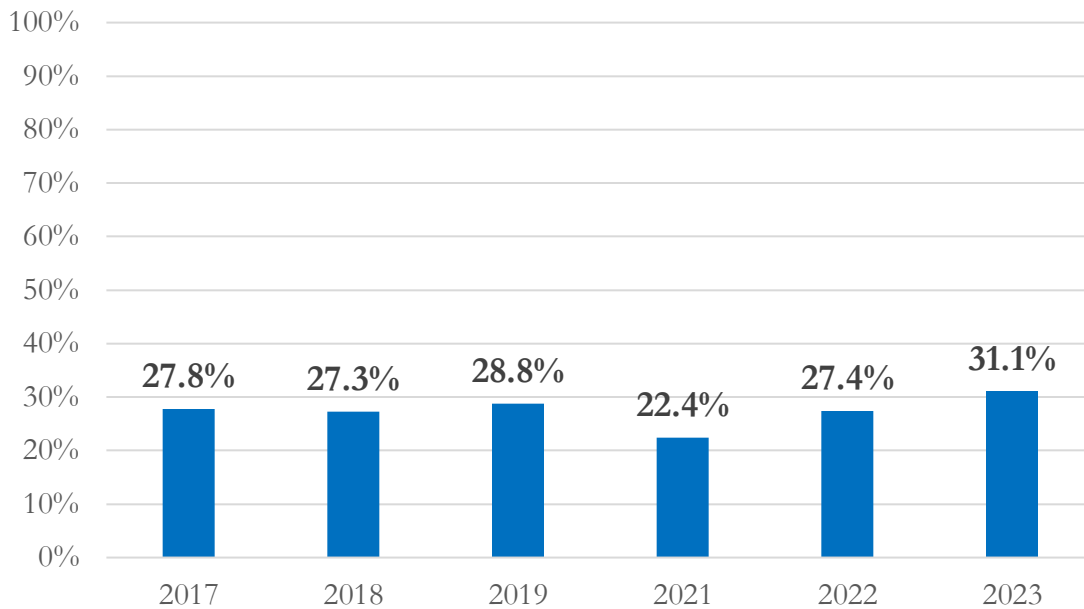


Tennessee’s annual statewide assessment, the [Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program](#) (“TCAP”) results show the same trend, with a recent improvement in 2023 scores (TDOE, 2023).



Source: [TDOE state assessment files, 2023](#)

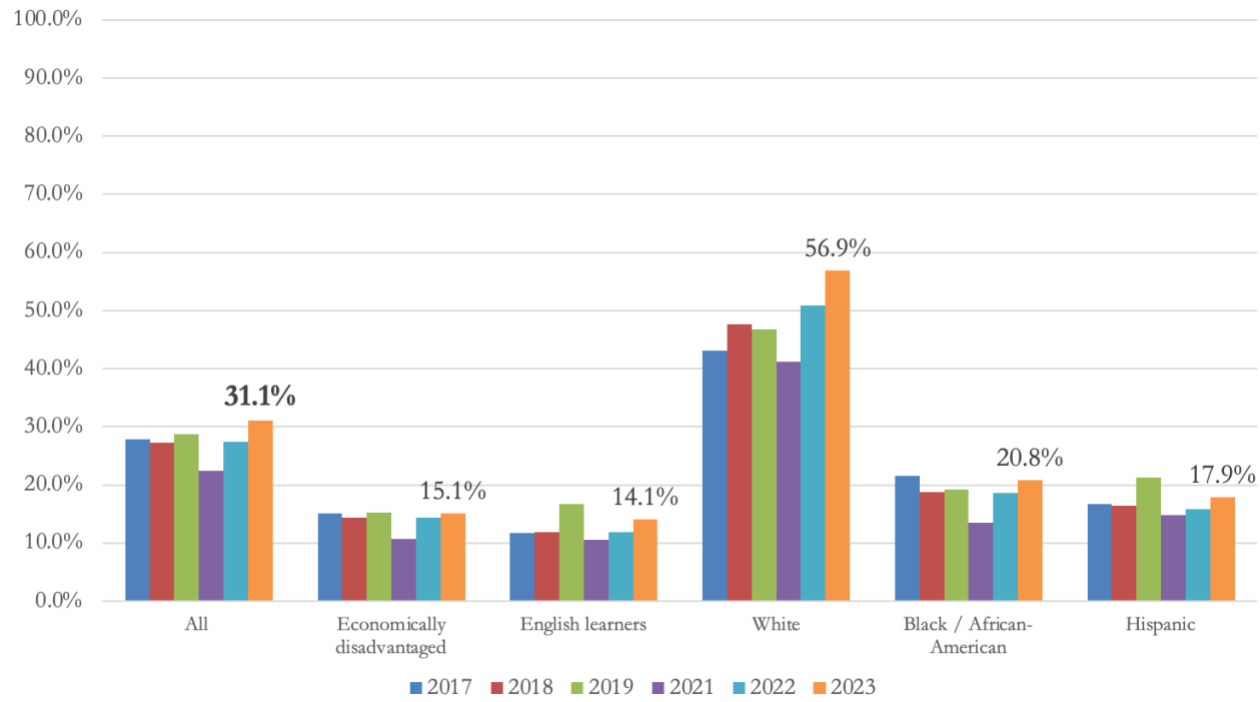
Metro Nashville Public Schools’ 3<sup>rd</sup> grade assessment results mirror state trends (TDOE, 2023).



Source: [TDOE district assessment files, 2023](#)

**As of 2023, only 31% of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students in MNPS are reading on grade level.**

## Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Third Grade Reading Proficiency as measured by TCAP



*Source: [TDOE district assessment files, 2023](#)*

A deeper dive into the numbers reveals a troubling trend.

### **Achievement gaps between student groups have remained persistently intractable.**

Economically disadvantaged students score significantly lower than non-disadvantaged students and students overall. English learners' scores tend to increase as students transition out of the EL program in their later elementary years, though overall scores remain at the lowest end of the distribution. Gaps are most significant between White, Black, and Hispanic students, reflecting a consistent trend year over year, and one that continues into upper elementary and middle school.

### **The data point to a critical need for examination of the multiple factors that contribute to certain subgroups being overrepresented in struggling reader categories.**

The good news is a 2023 rebound in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade literacy scores fueled by a series of targeted changes and investments made at the state and local level.

## What changed between 2021 and 2023?

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted student learning and caused significant declines in student achievement across the board, including 3<sup>rd</sup> grade literacy rates. In response to the crisis Tennessee moved quickly to set in motion a series of initiatives to combat learning loss.

### Tennessee Department of Education

In 2021, leveraging \$60 million in federal relief funding and \$40 million in federal grant funding, the [Tennessee Department of Education](#) launched [Reading 360](#). The initiative includes comprehensive training for educators, resources for parents, and high dosage tutoring programs for struggling students. The [Tennessee Reading Research Center](#) at University Tennessee, Knoxville was established to evaluate early literacy program progress. State laws were enacted, including the [Tennessee Literacy Success Act](#) requiring foundational literacy skills instruction, improved teacher preparation programs, and high-quality instructional materials. In 2022 all early grades educator preparation programs adopted new foundational skills standards and the [Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act](#) was passed, providing summer literacy programming for rising kindergarten and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students (TDOE, 2023, October).

### Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (“MNPS”)

MNPS also launched a series of initiatives including [Promising Scholars](#), a summer learning program, [Accelerating Scholars](#), a high impact tutoring program, new intervention programs, and [Literacy Reimagined](#), with a targeted focus on improving foundational early literacy skills to boost student performance (MNPS, 2024).

### The Science of Reading

Significant change is happening in early literacy teaching across the country due to emerging research in the science of reading, an approach to teaching reading that emphasizes explicit phonics instruction. Phonics refers to an understanding of how letters and sounds connect and how those sounds combine to make words. It sounds simple but acquisition of phonics skills and the ability to apply those skills to decode words is complex. Teachers must instruct beginning readers in the foundations of language via a systematic and structured progression from knowledge of the alphabetic principle to how sounds combine to make words. At the same time, teachers need to be intentional in their approach to help students build their vocabulary and knowledge about the world through multiple instructional strategies across content areas. Eventually, teachers help students weave phonics and vocabulary skills with conceptual and foundational knowledge together like strands in a rope, which results in the ability to read grade-level texts (Petscher et al., 2020).

**Most teachers in the United States weren’t trained in this framework.**

In a 2023 examination of teacher preparation programs, The National Council on Teacher Quality found that **only 25% of teacher preparation programs nationwide covered all the core elements of scientifically based reading instruction** (NCTQ, 2023). Forty percent of educator preparation programs were found to teach outdated teaching practices, rooted in a less structured approach that relies heavily on teacher choice and professional judgment. These practices are based on a belief that reading is a natural process that requires minimal explicit instruction (NCTQ, 2023). This has translated to students in early elementary classrooms receiving basic phonics instruction, but not in the explicit, systematic way researchers have found to be most effective for developing foundational reading skills (Petscher et al., 2020).

States that have seen literacy gains have implemented comprehensive policies focused on teacher training and coaching in the science of reading, high-quality instructional materials, parent education, and retention (Excel in Ed, 2024). The results are pointing in the right direction. **Comprehensive, sustained investments in K-3 early literacy interventions have made a difference.**

Improving literacy rates at scale will require more.

## **What needs to change?**

Most early literacy instruction begins in elementary school. Research supports an earlier start. Before formal school instruction begins, young children need to develop essential early language and literacy skills that are the development precursors to reading (Newman & Dickinson, 2011, 2013).

Children develop these skills in the first five years of life.

**Recent advancements in neuroscience have illuminated the first five years as the most pivotal and dynamic for brain development.** Every second, an infant's brain forms one million neural connections, building the architecture for all later cognitive functioning. The brain is at its highest level of plasticity during the first five years, meaning it is more susceptible to the quality of environment and experiences than at any other time in the human life span. Positive interactions build a healthy brain. Negative interactions or the absence of interactions inhibit brain development (Harvard Center on the Developing Child, 2024).

**Language acquisition is rapid and significant in the earliest years of life.** At birth, infants can discern differences between the phonetic units (basic sounds) used in all the world's languages (Eimas, 1997; Kent & Miolo, 1996; Kuhl, 2004). During their first year of life infants learn to recognize the speech sounds of their primary language, enabling them to learn and communicate in their native language (Jusczyk, 1997; Kuhl et al., 2005; Lundberg, 2009). Between the ages of two and five oral language and vocabulary develop rapidly, especially when children are nurtured and engaged in positive, stimulating environments (Harris et al., 2011, pp. 49-60; Harvard Center on the Developing Child, 2024; Otto, 2013).

**This is significant because oral language development is the foundation for all language and literacy learning.**

A substantial body of research within developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, education, linguistics, human genetics and neuroscience has illuminated the importance of oral language as the precursor and conduit for essential foundational skills that determine the ability to read and write.

**The most powerful predictors of reading and writing proficiency in third grade are phonological processing, vocabulary, and print awareness** (Cabell et al., 2024; Dickinson et al., 2003; Lonigan et al., 2009; Layes et al., 2020; Lundberg, 2009; Newman & Dickinson, 2013; Samuel & Decker, 2023). Children develop phonological processing and vocabulary through oral language (increasingly sophisticated practice with listening, speaking, engaging in positive, stimulating interactions) and print awareness by exposure to books and print materials. Children with higher levels of these skills profit more from formal instruction, learn to read sooner, and read better than children with less of these skills (Newman & Dickinson, 2013; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Scarborough, 2017).

Low-income children are at high risk for reading difficulties if they experience a lack of sufficient oral language development in their first five years and a lack of exposure to books and print material.

**Studies have found that children with larger oral vocabularies in the first two years of life arrive at kindergarten better prepared academically and behaviorally than their peers** (Lee, 2010; Marulis & Newman, 2013; Morgan et al., 2015; Fernald et al., 2012). By age 3, vocabulary gaps between children from the wealthiest and poorest families widen exponentially, resulting in a gap of up to 30 million words (Golinkoff et al., 2018; Hart & Risley, 2003, Logan et al., 2019). By the time children enter kindergarten early language and literacy gaps are significant with the highest disparity between children living in poverty and their economically advantaged peers, as well as between White, Black, and Hispanic children (Ahmad & Hamm, 2013; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005; Vernon-Feagens et al., 2013).

Early language and literacy gaps at kindergarten entry mirror reading proficiency gaps in third grade.

**To significantly increase the percentage of children reading proficiently in third grade, all children must have access to high-quality early language and literacy experiences in their first five years of life.**

## Essential Early Literacy Skills and Teaching Practices

### **Literacy is complex.**

Literacy requires mastery of a comprehensive set of interrelated skills and knowledge developed cumulatively over time, beginning at birth.

In Tennessee, third grade English Language Arts (“ELA”) proficiency (e.g. reading proficiency, literacy proficiency or reading on grade level) is measured across thirty-five interrelated academic standards. Each standard includes specific skills that develop in tandem with the accumulation of content knowledge as a child progresses from kindergarten through third grade (TDOE, 2017).

To understand the connection between early childhood experiences and third grade reading outcomes it is important to backward map literacy standards to kindergarten readiness skills and then map those kindergarten readiness skills to the learning experiences young children need to be prepared for success in school. With knowledge, resources, and supports parents, caregivers, and early childhood educators can help young children in their care become strong readers.

Third grade literacy standards are grouped in four domains: foundational literacy, reading, writing, and speaking and listening.

### **Foundational literacy skills are the basic building blocks of literacy. Every child must acquire foundational skills to be able to read.**

Foundational skills include print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, word and sentence composition, fluency, and vocabulary.

#### **Standard #1: Print Concepts**

Print concepts is an understanding of the organization and basic features of print.

Kindergarten readiness (TDOE, 2018) is measured by a child’s ability to:

- Handle books appropriately, right-side-up, turning pages one at a time, and front to back;
- Recognize that spoken words can be written and read;
- Understand that words are made up of alphabet letters;
- Recognize familiar uppercase letters and common lowercase letters; and
- Distinguish between pictures and words.

Young children learn from observation and interaction. Caregivers of infants and toddlers support print concept awareness by **reading books to children**; giving children opportunities to hold and explore age-appropriate books; and talking with children about what they see in illustrations.

Caregivers and educators working with children ages 3-5 support print concept awareness through **interactive read alouds; talking about illustrations in picture books; and identifying letters.**

An interactive read aloud is distinct from a read aloud, where an adult reads a book to a child. During an interactive read aloud adults engage children in dialogue and questions about the book before, during, and/or after the reading. Both types of reading are beneficial for children. **Because young children learn through interaction, interactive read alouds are especially important.**

To increase print concept awareness, interactive read alouds where adults track (e.g. point to) words as they are read from left to right and top to bottom help children see and understand directional print, as well as how text is connected to speech.

Children increase their knowledge about print concepts through **frequent opportunities to self-select books from a library** and explore the texts independently, or with other children.

## Standard #2: Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is an understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds.

Kindergarten readiness (TDOE, 2018) is measured by a child's ability to:

- Recognize and discriminate between rhyming words in spoken language;
- Begin to pronounce and identify syllables in familiar words and words in a sentence;
- Begin to blend and segment onsets and rimes of single syllable spoken words;
- Begin to isolate and pronounce the initial, final, and/or medial vowel sounds (phonemes) in two- and three-phoneme (VC or CVC) words, excluding CVC words ending with /l/, /r/, or /x/; and
- Identify whether two words begin or end with the same sound.

**Caregivers of infants and toddlers support phonological awareness through serve and return interactions.** Serve and return occurs when an infant or toddler attempts to communicate with an adult through eye contact, facial expressions, sounds, gestures, and movement (the serve). The adult responds with similar modes of communication as well as words and simple sentences (the return). Nurturing and responsive serve and return interactions between caregivers and young children stimulates the development of one million neurons per second, building essential brain architecture for cognitive functioning and early literacy skill development (Harvard Center for the Developing Child, 2024).

**The more language a child hears, the more their phonological awareness develops.**

Infants and toddlers benefit from experiences where they can listen to a variety of sounds not only in language but also in nature, music, songs, and rhymes. Adults support children’s emerging knowledge of phonemes by naming sounds and helping children imitate sounds they hear in speech, nature, and music (i.e., making a “moo” sound for a cow).

Conversations are a primary means for developing phonological awareness, particularly when they are extended with multiple turn-taking between children and adults (or other children). **The oral language development that results from children’s active use of language in rich dialogue is the most essential contributor to phonological awareness.**

Read alouds with books, nursery rhymes, poetry, and humorous verse (i.e. tongue twisters in Dr. Seuss books) using repetitive letter-sound combinations and word blends promote phonological awareness, especially when adults identify and exaggerate rhymes and blends.

As children enter preschool they benefit from games where they can practice identifying syllables (i.e., stomping, clapping, drumming) and imitating sounds in words and songs.

Phonological awareness is especially important during the earliest years of a child’s life because of the volume of oral language development needed to support phonological processing, or the ability to connect sounds (graphemes) to letters (phonemes). **Poor reading scores in third grade are correlated with poor phonological processing. When a child can’t perceive individual sounds, they have difficulty connecting print to language.** (Newman & Dickinson, 2011).

### Standard #3: Phonics and word recognition

Phonics and word recognition is the ability to know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills when decoding isolated words and in connected text.

Kindergarten readiness (TDOE, 2018) is measured by a child’s ability to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of one-to-one letter sound correspondence by producing the most frequent sound for familiar consonants;
- Recognize high-frequency words by sight, including own name and other familiar words in the environment; and
- Begin to decode regularly spelled CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) words.

**Caregivers of infants and toddlers support emerging phonics skills through read alouds with books containing rhymes and alliteration.** As well, sharing stories orally, listening to music, and singing songs provide valuable opportunities for young children to listen to and imitate sounds, forming the foundation for recognizing and producing consonant phonemes.



As children become preschool age, they build phonics and word recognition skills through **frequent interactive read alouds using familiar text**. Children learn through repetition so reading the same books multiple times builds phonics skills, as well as vocabulary and comprehension.

Games, play and activities that build children’s phonics skills include picture sorts matched to familiar rhymes or words, interactive reading to identify and sound out letters in familiar CVC words, and games where children identify letters in print and the environment.

Additionally, early math games and activities where children identify patterns reinforces children’s ability to recognize consonant-vowel patterns in familiar words.

**Children build word recognition skills through immersion in print rich environments at home and school.** Print extends beyond books to include any items with letters and words such as signs, schedules, lists, labels, cards, periodicals, and developmentally appropriate e-books. Print used to label things a child uses in daily activities should be correlated with an associated picture, such as a box of pencils labeled “pencils” in legible script. This allows children to practice recognizing familiar, meaningful words multiple times daily in purposeful activities.

#### Standard #4: Word composition

Word composition is the ability to know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills when encoding words (i.e. writing or orally composing).

Kindergarten readiness (TDOE, 2018) is measured by a child’s ability to:

- Begin to recognize the difference between upper and lowercase letters;
- Begin to print the distinctive features of letter forms (circle, line, diagonal, crossed lines); and
- Begin to print familiar letters, such as letters in own name.

Word composition is not applicable to infants and toddlers who are developing their early literacy skills through oral language. **That said, as with every other early literacy skill, read alouds benefit young children by providing rich oral language experiences that undergird all later literacy learning, including word decoding and encoding.**

Preschool-age children develop word composition skills by experimenting with a wide variety of drawing and writing materials, including art supplies, paper, pens, crayons, markers, chalk, or any other material that leaves a mark or impression on a tangible object. Children under the age of five are not expected to write letters and words, but they do benefit from purposeful practice with writing and drawing in everyday activities. This can include observing adults write (i.e. making a grocery list or signing a document); writing their name or drawing a picture representing them (i.e., to label their cubby, sign a card, etc.); and drawing a picture to represent people, places, or things.

## Standard #5: Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.

Kindergarten readiness (TDOE, 2018) is measured by a child's ability to:

- Interact with text to support comprehension, and
- Use illustrations to retell story events in familiar picture books.

**Interactive read alouds are a powerful learning tool for young children when familiar books are read multiple times and new types of text are introduced with adults listening to and asking questions related to the stories and/or information presented in the text.** Preschool-age children develop fluency each time they are engaged in an interactive read aloud, particularly with dialogic questioning, referred to as dialogic reading.

Dialogic reading involves asking questions before, during, or after a read aloud that promote children's higher cognitive functioning. Examples include: what do you think will happen next? (prediction); why did the character do that? (inductive reasoning); and have you ever felt like the character? (text-to-self connection). These types of questions develop critical thinking and comprehension skills, aiding fluency.

**Quantity and quality matter. Children in preschool should ideally hear a minimum of 2-3 books read aloud each day, including familiar books read repeatedly, and new books.**

**Selecting high-quality books to read with children is an essential teaching practice.**

Books to be used in interactive read alouds should be developmentally appropriate and matched to the right level of vocabulary and comprehension to stretch children's current cognitive capabilities (e.g. introduces new words or a familiar character in a new setting). Books should reflect children's interests, culture, and language to increase motivation and build confidence, two essential skills in a strong reader. (Note: Bilingual and multilingual texts benefit all children, including children who do not speak one or more of the languages included in the text).

Oral storytelling is a valuable way for children to develop fluency especially when familiar stories are told repeatedly, with variation. **Retelling stories children have heard or read with an adult provides children valuable practice employing foundational skills and strengthening oral language development.**

Picture walks are also an effective fluency-building tool. Picture walks are read alouds where children take on the role of reader by composing and articulating narratives following illustration sequences. Picture walks can be used with wordless books or books with text. Retelling stories and participating in picture and text feature walks develop comprehension skills that improve third grade reading scores.

## Standard #6: Sentence Composition

Sentence composition is command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when speaking and conventions of standard English grammar and usage, including capitalization and punctuation, when writing.

Kindergarten readiness is measured by a child's ability to:

- With modeling or verbal prompts, orally produce complete sentences;
- Follow one-to-one correspondence between voice and print when writing a sentence or sentence fragment, or when rereading a dictated sentence;
- Use frequently occurring nouns and verbs when speaking and in shared language activities;
- Form regular plural nouns when speaking and in shared language activities;
- Understand and use question words (interrogatives) when speaking and in shared language activities;
- With prompting and support, use the most frequently occurring prepositions when speaking and in shared language activities;
- With prompting and support, produce and expand complete sentences in shared language activities; and
- Begin to recognize that a name begins with a capital letter.

Children develop sentence composition skills with many of the same practices necessary for print concepts, phonics, word composition, and fluency. Interactive read alouds, picture walks, and word recognition games support children's emerging understanding of sentence structure and grammar.

**The most important practice for sentence composition skills is oral language development.**

Young children develop word and sentence composition skills through frequent multiple-turn-taking conversations with other children and adults across diverse settings and contexts. **Every turn-taking exchange (back and forth as in serve and return) provides opportunity to learn and refine the use of standard English grammar and conventions in speech.**

Children benefit from opportunities to engage in conversation and interactions with children of diverse abilities, ages, languages, and backgrounds. Multilingual and sign language learning is advantageous for all learners when supported and scaffolded appropriately by adults. Language skills, such as knowledge of sentence structure and sequencing, are transferable between languages even when specific conventions between languages are different.

**Adults support young children's developing sentence composition skills through modeling and scaffolding English grammar and conventions.**

Scaffolding is a term used to describe a teaching technique where an adult gradually decreases the amount of support they give a child until the child can demonstrate mastery of a skill independently. An example is a child pointing to a picture in a book and exclaiming, “The duck swim in the water!” The adult responds to what the child said using proper verb tense, “Yes, the ducks are swimming in the water!” Learning is reinforced by reading the same book again and prompting the child to state again what is happening in the picture. This is practiced repeatedly until the child uses the correct verb tense and sentence structure, with the adult continuing to model correct use.

**Emerging language learners acquire sentence composition skills through repetition and practice.** Misuse is common in emergent speakers. Restating is an effective scaffolding technique because it encourages approximations and child talk, while also prompting correct language use.

Scaffolding naturally occurs in conversations between children, particularly children of different ages or abilities. **Pairing children in a play-based activity that requires conversation is an effective teaching technique for developing sentence composition skills.** As well, adult-facilitated group conversations that occur in meeting or circle times provide rich opportunities for language learning, especially when time is provided for multiple children to share their ideas, thoughts, and answers to questions related to stories, curriculum topics, or their personal interests.

### Standards #7-9: Vocabulary Acquisition

Vocabulary acquisition is demonstrated by an ability to determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

Kindergarten readiness (TDOE, 2018) is measured by a child’s ability to:

- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on pre-k conversations, reading, and content;
- Identify new meanings for familiar words and apply them accurately;
- Use the most frequently occurring inflections and affixes as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word;
- With guidance and support from adults, explore word relationships and nuances in word meanings;
- Sort common objects into categories to gain a sense of the concepts the categories represent;
- Demonstrate understanding of frequently occurring verbs and adjectives;
- Make real-life connections between words and their use;
- Distinguish shades of meaning among familiar verbs describing the same general action. (i.e., jog/sprint); and
- Use words and phrases acquired through conversations and books.

**Caregivers of infants and toddlers support vocabulary acquisition through serve and return interactions in multiple contexts and settings.** These interactions are particularly helpful for vocabulary acquisition when they are focused on naming and describing a specific object or event. Explicit language instruction of opposite words such as up/down, hot/cold, or in/out or adjectives to describe familiar objects such as “big dog” and “soft bear” introduce new words and relevant concepts. Reading familiar books regularly is helpful for vocabulary growth, especially when adults intentionally use words from books in everyday conversations and interactions with children.

**As children become preschool age, they continue to build their vocabulary through increasingly sophisticated conversations across a variety of settings and contexts.** In child care and pre-k classrooms teachers intentionally design play-based activities to promote oral language development, the two most common examples being dramatic play and block building.

Dramatic play is a term used to describe young children’s play where more than one child is involved and the play is social, interactive, and child directed. In classrooms dramatic play centers (e.g. designated areas) typically have open-ended materials such as clothing and items found in homes, schools, hospitals, and other familiar places. Young children engage in dramatic play where they take on roles and act out scenes that mimic real life or imagined settings. **Dramatic play requires and develops complex oral language skills, particularly when play sequences last for an extended period.** Children negotiate their roles and action sequences as a movie crew would do during a shoot, developing a wide range of vocabulary to articulate the narrative.

The same kind of pretend play occurs in block building centers with room for movement and multiple children to engage in creating and acting out a scene with blocks as the focal point. Dramatic play sequences in block building activities build language, literacy, math, and social-emotional skills as children negotiate emotions, further building a child’s emerging vocabulary as they learn to name feelings and resolve conflicts. **Pretend play also builds a child’s imaginative capabilities including the ability to visualize a person, place, or thing not visible, an essential skill of strong readers.**

**Adults support children’s vocabulary acquisition during play sequences by introducing new words through questions.** An example is a teacher sitting next to children who are building a structure with blocks and saying, “Tell me about your building.” When the children respond the teacher assesses the meaning of the play and introduces new related words and/or concepts such as “Does your farm need a place to keep the horses? Maybe you can add a stable.” Even if the child has never seen a stable, the play itself will scaffold and reinforce the word meaning by applying it to the relevant context. It is important for adults to scaffold play versus directing the play so that children do the hard work of developing oral language skills and applying new words to contexts.

**Interactive read alouds and dialogic reading with challenging text build children’s vocabulary and emerging comprehension skills when educators use the opportunity to introduce and reinforce new words (nouns, verbs, and adjectives) and word relationships (prepositions, conjunctions).**

This instructional strategy is most effective with multiple exposures to new words. For example, a teacher might read a new book to the class in a read aloud. Then the teacher leaves copies of the book in a reading center where children have access to explore it independently and in pairs. Children often do their own picture walks, making meaning of the story with picture cues. The next day the book could be re-read again as an interactive read aloud with the teacher pausing before or during the reading to talk about a new word or concept. The teacher asks the children if they can guess the meaning, listening for their responses, and then prompting children to decode the word using picture cues or word inflections and affixes. Teachers can intentionally use the new word in conversations with children unrelated to the text and then re-read the same book or another book that uses the same word, pausing to provide children an opportunity to demonstrate their new understanding. As in other early learning instruction, teaching takes time and practice to solidify skill accumulation and knowledge.

**Experiential learning across subject areas increases children’s vocabulary and builds important foundational knowledge necessary for making meaning of text.** An example is a science curriculum focused on gardening. Hands-on gardening provides children rich experiences to gain new, sophisticated vocabulary including words such as habitat, harvest, and monarch butterfly. Children naturally gravitate toward new experiences rooted in exploration and discovery, so they are open to absorbing and constructing new knowledge. Relevance makes rigor possible.

## Reading skills are how readers make meaning of text.

Reading skills enable readers to make meaning of text accurately, fluently, and with increasingly sophisticated comprehension. Reading skills are built brick by brick beginning in the first years of life. **Before a child can decode printed text, they are learning to make meaning of sounds, words, sentences, and stories through conversation, oral storytelling, and books read aloud.** These experiences are vital for a child to be prepared for literacy learning in kindergarten through third grade. There are three primary categories of reading skills, beginning with key ideas and details.

### Standards #10-12: Key Ideas and Details

Key ideas and details include the ability to: 1) read closely to determine what a text says and to make logical inferences from it; 2) cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text; 3) determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize key supporting details and ideas; and 4) analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Kindergarten readiness (TDOE, 2018) is measured by a child's ability to (with modeling, prompting, and support from adults):

- Ask and answer questions about a story or informational text read aloud;
- Orally retell familiar stories including details;
- Orally identify a main topic and retell details of texts, discussions, and activities;
- Orally identify characters, settings, and events from a familiar story; and
- Orally identify connections between info in a text to personal experience or other text.

**Caregivers and educators support reading skills focused on key ideas and details by encouraging and prompting children to identify and ask questions about specific characters, settings, and events in stories.** Recall questions and retelling provide children practice identifying and remembering specific ideas and details from stories. This also provides educators a way to assess children's abilities and clarify misunderstandings.

**Text extensions are an essential skill-building practice where educators facilitate children to make text-to-self and text-to-world connections, both important skills for strong readers.**

Book selection is key. Books that reflect the culture, interests, and experiences of children enable them to relate text details to their own personal experiences. Experiential learning, such as puppet shows and dramatic play, help children make text-to-world connections when they relate text details to their experiences and understandings about people, places, and events in real life. Text-to-world connections prepare children for the rigor of interdisciplinary curricula in elementary, middle, and high school.

### Standards #13-15: Craft and Structure

Skills related to craft and structure include the ability to: 1) interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone; 2) analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of a text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole; and 3) assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Kindergarten readiness (TDOE, 2018) is measured by a child's ability to (with prompting and support from adults):

- Respond to questions about the meaning of unknown words in a story;
- Answer questions about the meaning of words and phrases in a text relevant to pre-K topic or subject area;
- Recognize common types of text;
- Recognize various text features;
- Answer questions about who is telling a story; and
- Answer questions about who is presenting ideas or information in a text.

Children develop craft and structure reading skills through the same practices that support their print concept awareness, vocabulary, and fluency skills, with a deeper dive into meaning within the context of a story and point of view.

**Caregivers and educators support craft and structure reading skills by modeling and prompting children to ask questions about unfamiliar words and decipher word meanings through visual/picture and language cues.** Book selection is important to ensure books include new vocabulary that is matched to children's content knowledge.

Hands-on experiences and activities that include text in the purpose of the activity (i.e. cooking) provide children practice connecting informational text to referent experiences and concepts, aiding their ability to make meaning of words and phrases in non-fiction texts as well as stories.

**Access to a wide variety of books and informational text is critical for children to build craft and structure reading skills. The more books' children explore, the greater their ability to recognize common features of texts.**

**Dictation is an effective instructional technique for multiple skills including craft and structure.** In dictation children become the author and illustrator of a story. The adults' role is to transcribe what a child says while they are speaking, writing the text exactly as children articulate it. This not only helps children build knowledge about point of view and author perspective, but it also



provides practice distinguishing specific print features, particularly if the teacher reads the story back with children, modeling editing for specific syntax and grammatical features.

**Interactive read alouds with more than one book written by the same author helps children develop understanding of point of view.** Dialogic reading focused on prediction (e.g. “What do you think will happen next?”) and/or asking children to create their own/alternative endings to a story provides practice applying their emerging knowledge of author point of view.

**Bookmaking develops multiple reading skills, including point of view, author perspective, and purpose.** Bookmaking can include any activity where a child or children are the authors and illustrators of a sequenced narrative or informational text. Bookmaking typically begins in early childhood with a child drawing a picture and articulating a short story or idea represented in their picture (e.g. drawing their family and talking about the family). It can also involve extended classroom activities where each child in the class creates one page for a whole-class book that contains a story or text about a pre-k topic. Through story creation children build essential skills of craft and structure, including author and illustrator point of view.

### Standards #16-18: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Integration of knowledge and ideas includes the ability to integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words; delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence; and analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics to build knowledge or to compare the approaches an author takes.

Kindergarten readiness is measured by a child’s ability to (with prompting and support from adults):

- Orally describe the relationship between illustrations and the story or informational text in which they appear;
- Orally compare and contrast the experiences of characters in a story to personal experience or to the experiences of characters in another familiar story; and
- Orally identify basic similarities and differences between two texts on the same topic.

**The ability to integrate knowledge and ideas requires higher order cognitive processing that develops through the repetition of increasingly challenging interactive read alouds, dialogic questioning, text extensions, and inquiry-based thematic curriculum.**

Interactive read alouds focused on distinguishing between text and illustrations helps children connect functions of distinct text features. Picture walks and bookmaking are also effective practices to develop children’s understanding of the connections between texts and illustrations.

**Dialogic reading develops children’s skills in analyzing text and making inferences.**

Examples are questions during story readings asking children why characters took certain actions, how they know an event might happen, or how two characters are the same or different.

**Dialogic questioning helps children develop metacognition, or skills involved in thinking about one’s own thinking.**

Metacognitive skills, including planning, self-monitoring, and self-assessment, form the foundation of the ability to delineate and evaluate reasoning (as in a text) and build knowledge about a topic or theme. Dialogic questioning can happen during book readings as well as in other classroom activities. Examples include questions asked while children are actively engaged with learning materials such as “Tell me about your [sculpture],” “Why did you place the small block on the top?” or “What will you add to your drawing next?”

**One of the most impactful methods of developing children’s ability to integrate knowledge and ideas is through text extensions or stretching the learning between books and experiences through inquiry-based, thematic curriculum.**

This type of curriculum is organized around units of study where children can explore topics and ideas over an extended period. Teachers organize books and learning materials to support children’s emerging knowledge of the topic being studied. Children make meaningful connections between books and real-life. An example might be reading *The Tiny Seed* by Eric Carle during a unit of study on plants and food. A science center might have cups of soil, seeds, and other items from nature; a dramatic play area might have shovels, trowels and boots; a small-group activity could include tasting foods that come from plants and cooking foods from plants; and the reading center might have informational texts about bugs, worms, bees, and other animals of interest that relate to the unit of study. These are powerful modes of extending the learning from books across many domains of instruction and helping children make text-to-self, text-to-text and text-to-world connections, an important skill for strong readers.

**Standard #19: Range of Reading and Text Complexity**

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity is the ability to read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Kindergarten readiness is measured by a child’s ability to:

- Listen and respond to stories and poems of appropriate complexity for pre-K; and
- Listen and respond to informational texts of appropriate complexity for pre-K.

**Repeated practice of interactive read alouds with a diverse range of texts and access to a wide variety of books and book collections, starting in the earliest years of life, are essential to building strong readers.**

## Writing skills are used to express meaning through text.

Writing skills develop in tandem with foundational and reading skills. **Children build writing skills first through oral language as they learn to express thoughts, ideas, and opinions verbally.**

As children's fine motor coordination develops, they experiment with materials that create cause and effect visual representations, gradually moving toward the ability to draw lines, shapes, and other markings resembling letters. Writing ability develops rapidly between pre-kindergarten and third grade as children progress through essential writing skills in text types and protocols, production and distribution of writing, research to build and present knowledge, and range of writing.

### Standards #20-22: Text Types & Protocol

Skills related to text types and protocol include the ability to: 1) write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence; 2) write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content; and 3) write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Kindergarten readiness is measured by a child's ability to do the following with modeling, prompting, and support from adults:

- Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and/or emergent writing to express a preference, opinion, or idea about a specific topic or text;
- Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and/or emergent writing to explain information about a familiar topic or informational text; and
- Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and/or emergent writing to narrate a single event.

Young children learn through interaction, experimentation, and repetition. **An effective way to support children's pre-writing skills development is to provide them with open-ended materials** including paper (all kinds and sizes), paint, pencils, crayons, markers, chalk, or anything related. This can be done with a writing center in a classroom and by providing writing and drawing supplies throughout the classroom (or home) for multiple purposes. Children benefit by practicing with other children either working separately (but side by side) or together.

**Modeling is another effective way to support the development of children's pre-writing skills.** When adults model purposeful writing in everyday activities, such as creating a grocery list, signing a card, filling out a form, or typing on a computer children see the importance and purpose of writing. They also begin to understand the sequenced process of writing: define a purpose; print or type script; edit and revise.

**Interactive writing activities (also called guided writing) where an adult facilitates conversation with a group of children while writing or drawing what the group says is a powerful way to build children’s analysis and reasoning skills about curriculum topics, events, or texts.** Skill building is enhanced by extended conversations where children listen to peers’ ideas, opinions, and reflections, building on each other’s ideas and thinking.

Bookmaking is an engaging and interactive activity to develop essential and complex pre-writing skills. In whole-class bookmaking each child creates one page of the book with illustrations and dictated text. Eventually the class assembles the pages into one book that creates a story or informational text about a curriculum relevant topic (i.e. how a plant grows).

**Bookmaking provides children valuable practice with collaborative thinking and writing, and at the same time reinforcing a combination of foundational, reading, and writing skills including developing and organizing writing appropriate to a task, purpose, or audience.**

Journals are another method for young children to engage in purposeful practice with writing. Caregivers and educators can provide a journal for a child to draw pictures related to their observations about the world. When paired with an activity such as planting seeds or building a project children develop valuable skills related to explanatory writing and attention to key ideas and details, a fundamental reading skill as well.

### **Standards #23-25: Production and Distribution of Writing**

Skills related to the production and distribution of writing include the ability to produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience; develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach; and use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

Kindergarten readiness is measured by a child’s ability to, with prompting and support from adults, respond to questions and suggestions from others and add details to strengthen drawing, dictating and/or emergent writing as needed (writing as defined by the text types and protocol standards).

**Caregivers and adults support children’s pre-writing skill development by talking to and asking questions about children’s drawing or artwork, building on what children say.** Questions prompt children to think about their drawing or writing, which often elicits ideas for additions or revisions.

**Dictation is an effective teaching technique to develop children’s revision skills.** In dictation, an adult prompts a child to share a story or narrate an event or idea and while the child talks the adult transcribes what they say word for word. Adults can prompt a child to add embellishments to their story; add a character or change an event in the story; and/or illustrate the story, event, or idea. Adding and revising is an essential writing skill that is acquired through cumulated practice beginning before a child can write independently.

**Sequential activities that require children to plan their work/play, sequence tasks, and change course as they integrate prior and new knowledge develop their ability to plan, revise, edit, and rewrite – all essential writing skills.** Examples of sequential activities include puzzles, block building, art projects, and dramatic play.

Experiential learning through events such as field trips provide opportunity for purposeful practice with writing and revising. Before a field trip teachers can ask children what they know and what they want to learn in the field trip. After the experience adults bring children together to review their original writing and add what they learned. These types of experiences provide valuable practice with collaborative editing, revising, and rewriting.

### **Standards #26-28: Research to Build and Present Knowledge**

Research to build and present knowledge is the ability to conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focus questions, demonstrating new understanding of the subject under investigation; integrate relevant and credible information from multiple print and digital sources while avoiding plagiarism; and draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Kindergarten readiness is measured by a child’s ability to do the following with modeling, prompting, and support from adults:

- Participate in shared research and writing projects, such as reading several books by a favorite author and expressing opinions about them; and
- Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

**Children learn how to participate in shared research and writing projects when they have opportunities to connect and extend book learning to related experiences, events, or other books with adults and peers.** Engaging experiences such as author studies and experiential learning connected to book characters (i.e. puppet shows with book themes) develop children’s conceptual knowledge, recall skills, and ability to gather relevant information from multiple sources to answer a question or explore a topic.

### Standard #29: Range of Writing

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Kindergarten readiness is measured by a child's ability to engage routinely in drawing, dictating, and emergent writing activities for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Children develop the ability to write for different purposes and over shorter and longer time frames from practice with all the above-mentioned activities in writing standards 20-28. **Practice and repetition build the pre-writing skills necessary for proficient reading and writing.**

## **Speaking and listening skills are used to listen to and communicate ideas, thoughts, opinions, and narratives.**

Speaking and listening skills begin at birth through oral language development. Children acquire language skills rapidly in the first five years of life especially with frequent practice listening to other people talk and expressing their own ideas verbally. **The ability to listen is a foundation for and complement to reading. The ability to speak is a foundation for and complement to writing.** Frequent practice with both skill sets culminates in third grade reading proficiency as demonstrated by the following essential skills.

### **Standards #30-32: Comprehension and Collaboration**

Skills related to comprehension and collaboration include the ability to prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with varied partners, building on others' ideas and expressing one's own ideas clearly and persuasively; integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media formats, such as visual, quantitative, and oral formats; and evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Kindergarten readiness is measured by a child's ability to do the following with modeling, prompting, and support from adults:

- Participate with varied peers and adults in collaborative conversations across activities throughout the day;
- Demonstrate appropriate conversational interactions including taking turns, listening, speaking, answering questions, and wait time;
- Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details, or by retelling, acting out, or representing key details through work in centers; and
- Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.

**Young children build comprehension and collaboration skills through frequent opportunities to actively participate in multi-turn taking conversations with other children and adults.** This begins in infancy with serve and return interactions and continues into the preschool years with small or whole group discussions, activities, and interactive read alouds.

Interactive read alouds are beneficial to speaking and listening skills when the teacher or adult asks recall, open-ended, or dialogic questions, inviting more than one child to respond and build on each other's' thoughts and responses. Child interactions are most engaging when they involve social, interactive play with props and materials (i.e. puppets) that are connected to narratives in books and oral stories or to personal and group experiences.

### Standards #33-35: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

Skills related to the presentation of knowledge and ideas include the ability to present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that: listeners can follow the line of reasoning; and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. As well, presentation skills include the ability to make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations; and adapt speech to a variety of contents and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Kindergarten readiness is measured by a child's ability to do the following with modeling, prompting, and support from adults:

- Describe familiar people, places, things, and events, and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail;
- Create representations and extensions of experiences or stories through writing, drawing, and open-ended materials in centers, and discuss them with others; and
- With modeling, guidance, and support, express thoughts, feelings, and ideas through speaking.

Young children develop speaking and listening skills when they have frequent opportunities to express their emotions, ideas, and opinions in conversations with other children and adults.

#### **Child talk is an essential component of literacy.**

Several studies of pre-k classrooms reveal that the time teachers spend talking is more than double the amount of time children talk. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills are developed when children have opportunities to practice their emerging oral language skills. **When child talk is increased, early literacy outcomes increase.**

To develop presentation skills, it is beneficial for children to practice speaking in front of more than one person. There are numerous opportunities for this to occur at home or in school. Parents can offer themselves and/or siblings or other family members as an audience to listen to a child share their favorite toy, game, or story. Educators can create opportunities for children to share an item from home and why it is important to them or to share a creation made in class with a larger group. For children who may be more hesitant to speak in front of a group, they can build speaking and listening skills in one-on-one conversations with trusted adults or through social interactions with other children, such as in dramatic or other pretend play. **When children are engaged in any form of conversation and communication, they build important literacy skills that result in proficient reading and writing.**



**Across all standards and skills, nine evidenced-based teaching practices emerge as the essential drivers for the development of children’s early literacy skills.**

	Foundational skills							Reading Skills				Early writing			Speaking and listening		
	Print concepts	Phonological awareness	Phonics and word recognition	Word composition	Fluency	Sentence composition	Vocabulary	Key Details and Ideas	Craft and Structure	Integration of Knowledge and Ideas	Range of Reading & Level of Text Complexity	Text Types and Protocol	Production & Distribution of Writing	Research to Build & Present Knowledge	Range of Writing	Comprehension and Collaboration	Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
Oral language development		★	★		★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★			★	★
Interactive read-alouds	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★		★		★	★
Dialogic reading	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★		★		★	★
Selecting high-quality books	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★			★			
Pre-reading practice	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★			★		★	★
Phonics instruction	★	★	★	★	★	★	★								★		
Text extensions					★	★	★	★	★	★				★	★	★	★
Purposeful practice with writing	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★			★	★	★	★	★	★
Interactive play		★				★	★			★			★	★	★	★	★

### 1. Oral language development

Oral language development includes serve and return interactions with infants and toddlers, conversations across contexts between children and adults, open-ended and dialogic questioning, and oral storytelling and retelling.

### 2. Interactive read alouds

Interactive read alouds occur when adults engage children in dialogue and questions about a book before, during, and/or after the reading.

### 3. Dialogic reading

Dialogic reading involves adults asking children questions before, during, or after a book reading that engage children in high order cognitive thinking including prediction, inferential reasoning, text analysis, and connection making to other texts and personal experiences.

### 4. Selecting high quality age-appropriate texts

Creating and curating classroom libraries and book collections with intentionality and knowledge ensures books are developmentally appropriate, high quality, and diverse.

### 5. Purposeful practice with reading

Purposeful practice with reading includes text exploration, modeling reading across contexts, and creating reading centers where children practice pre-reading skills.

**6. Phonics and letter instruction**

Phonics and letter instruction includes print rich environments, phonemic awareness, and games and activities that support word recognition, letter-sound identification and imitation, word composition, and early math skills.

**7. Text extensions**

Text extensions include project and activities that support the development of text-to-text, text-to-self and text-to-world connections including author studies, experiential book learning, and book-embedded inquiry-based curriculum.

**8. Purposeful practice with writing**

Purposeful practice with writing includes modeling, dictation, bookmaking, and writing centers.

**9. Interactive play**

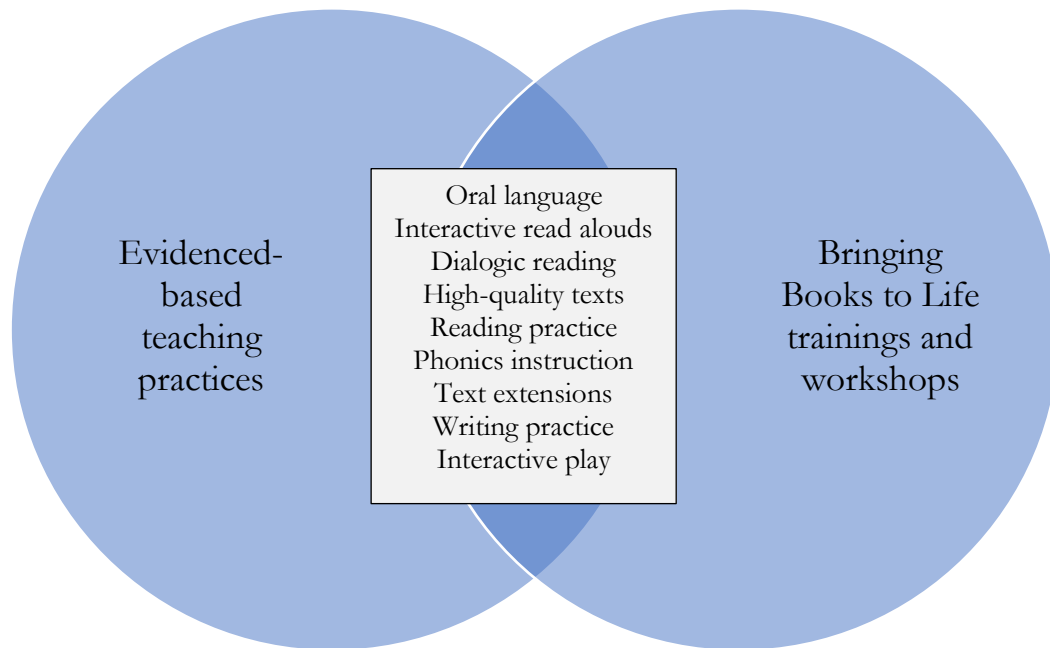
In child-directed interactive play two or more children role play in real or imagined scenarios involving extended conversations between children with scaffolding from an adult. Teachers guide interactive play by creating environmental conditions and providing learning materials for the play connected to curriculum and/or book themes and topics.

*Notes on essential skills and practices:*

- 1) *The teaching practices included in this report do not include discussion of accommodations and adjustments that should be made for children with special needs and/or for English learners. This goes beyond the scope of the project but should be considered for implementation of any strategy or initiative.*
- 2) *While this report mentions e-books, digital devices, and digital learning it does not provide extensive detail regarding new research emerging in the field of early childhood education around technology, AI, and digital teaching and learning. It will be important for the library and its literacy partners to stay connected to emerging knowledge and practice, especially as it relates to essential skills and teaching practices.*

## Bringing Books to Life Program Strengths

Bringing Books to Life (“BBTL”) offers workshops and trainings for parents and teachers that include **all nine evidenced-based teaching practices**, including additional practices that support children’s emerging early language and literacy skills.



**The two common denominators for evidenced-based early literacy teaching practices are books and conversation.** Six of the nine practices require access to books and print-rich environments and all nine practices require interactions between children and adults.

The important qualifier for both is quality.

Any age-appropriate book is beneficial to a child, but high-quality teaching and learning happen when the books selected and used are intentionally chosen to meet and stretch children’s language, vocabulary, and comprehension abilities. Motivation and learning are greater when books are selected based on their content relevance to children’s lives, as well as children’s interests. Multilingual books reflecting diverse cultures is especially important for complex reading skills and a strong basis of foundational knowledge. **Bringing Books to Life and library staff are experts when it comes to books and the best-positioned to advise and support parents and teachers in finding and using high-quality, developmentally appropriate children’s literature and informational text.**

Similarly, any positive conversation and interaction between young children and adults (or other children) is beneficial to oral language development, but high-quality teaching and learning happens when conversations are connected to books and are intentionally facilitated to advance children's cognitive abilities. The teaching expertise required to facilitate learning across multiple skills is cultivated when parents and teachers are trained and supported to know what to do, when, and how. **Bringing Books to Life staff teach parents and teachers how to use books to facilitate and extend early literacy learning and how to have higher-order cognitive conversations with children.**

Bringing Books to Life staff have specialized expertise in how to do interactive read alouds including dialogic questioning (e.g. dialogic reading). **This is significant because the most effective method to increase the instructional level of preschool teaching is through open-ended and dialogic questioning.** Bringing Books to Life staff teach parents and teachers how to read interactively and ask questions to enhance children's early literacy skills in ways that are accessible and engaging.

Program quality requires trainers and workshop facilitators who are educated and practiced in delivering high-quality instruction rooted in best practice. Quality can vary between facilitators. It will be important for library staff to be trained and continuously coached in how to deliver instruction in best practices so that program quality remains consistent and high.

Parents, caregivers, and early childhood educators support children's language and literacy learning when they are equipped with the right tools to succeed. Bringing Books to Life staff provides those tools through books, training, support, and encouragement anchored in best practices. The program reflects a belief that when the adults in a child's life are supported, every child can learn to read.

## Book Access

### Recommendation 1

#### Mini libraries

Provide child care centers mini libraries, stocked with high-quality children's literature and informational text

The Nashville Public Library has what every child in Davidson County needs. Books. The idea behind this recommendation is to bring books to children, where they are. Neighborhood libraries are wonderful resources, but it is not possible for every child to get to a library frequently enough to practice the literacy skills they need to become kindergarten ready.

#### Focus group findings

Across focus groups and interviews with directors and teachers from 40 childcare centers, only two centers described their classroom resources (e.g. books and learning materials) as adequate.

**Participants from all centers identified a lack of books as a primary challenge to their program quality.**

Child care centers operate on shoestring budgets, stretching funding to keep operations afloat. Income they do receive is mostly allocated to pay teachers, who are paid wages that on average fall below the poverty line. **Centers do not have funding for high-quality books and materials and must rely on staff ingenuity to secure resources for teachers and children.** One veteran childcare teacher told us, "If we need books, we just go find them ourselves." Teachers described traveling to their local library to check out books every two weeks, perusing yard sales on Saturday mornings, going to bookstores to ask for used or discarded copies, and collecting donations in their neighborhoods.

**Even when teachers were able to access books, they did not feel equipped to select age-appropriate high-quality literature.** Participants found local library staff to be helpful in finding and selecting books, but teachers shared frustration that they were not able to come to the library as often as they would like due to inadequate or unavailable transportation, little time outside work due to second and third jobs, and time needed to care for their families in evenings and on weekends.

Teachers and directors expressed excitement and gratitude for the Bringing Books to Life puppet truck visits where BBTL staff brought books and teaching kits for programs to keep. They resoundingly requested more puppet truck visits, books, and book bags for children to take home. Some participants shared positive experiences they had in the past with mobile libraries and library school buses that delivered collections of books for teachers and children to select and borrow.

When asked for suggestions regarding how the library could help child care staff find books and materials for their programs, participants responded with the following ideas and requests:

- Help finding books teachers could keep and use all year
- Training on how to select quality children’s literature
- Mobile library bus visits to their program, in addition to puppet show visits
- Book bags for children to take home and keep, including kindles with access to e-books
- Teacher resource centers at every library with books and lesson kits (to borrow and keep)
- Community lending libraries stocked by the local library branch, especially in book deserts
- Library staff and children’s authors to visit centers, bringing books to children (one participant offered to think of it like Santa Claus at Christmas)
- Help planning and arranging library field trips
- Parent resource bags with library cards, books, digital books, and lesson guides they can give out at open houses, holiday celebrations, and during the summer

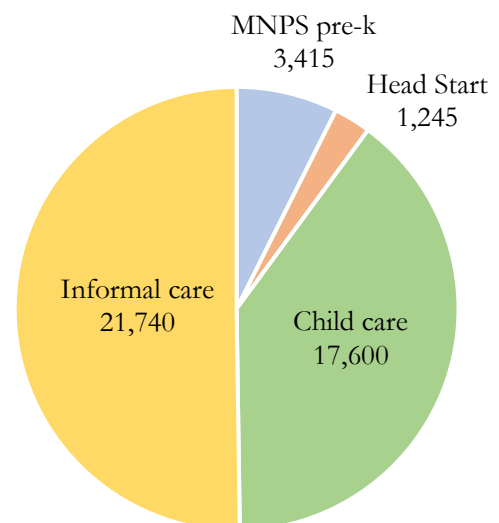
## Inequitable Book Access

**Inequity in book access is a pressing concern in Nashville, particularly for economically disadvantaged students.** Multiple state and local non-profits and funders support book access programs, including the [Governor’s Early Literacy Foundation](#), [Book ‘Em](#), and the [Nashville Book Connection](#). Most book access programs are focused on school-age children and pre-k programs, providing supplemental support for MNPS elementary school students, teachers, and families.

With the notable exception of the [Governor’s Early Literacy Foundation’s Birth–5 Book Delivery](#) through [Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library](#), and a handful of small, community-based initiatives, less focus is placed on scalable book access programs to serve children from infancy through pre-k.

A challenge is how to find and reach Davidson County’s (approximately) 44,000 children under age 5 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

Looking at programs that serve children from infancy through kindergarten reveals that **40% of children under age 5 spend most days in a licensed child care program** (TN-DHS, 2023). Fifty percent of children under 5 are in some kind of informal care at home, with neighbors and relatives, or in an unlicensed childcare program. **Only 10% of children under 5 in are enrolled in a MNPS pre-k or Head Start program** (MNPS, 2023; MAC, 2023).



To reach the greatest number of children under age five requires partnerships with child care providers and families. The library has both. **A good first step is to provide onsite mini libraries for Bringing Books to Life's existing partners, with a goal to scale up from there.** The library has an opportunity to leverage its programming assets and access to high-quality books to ensure every child has the resources they need for a strong start in early literacy.

## Mini Libraries Implementation Recommendations

Mini libraries should be stocked with an array of high-quality, developmentally appropriate books. A wide range of book types is necessary for effective early literacy teaching and learning including books with rhymes, poetry, pictures, and informational text. Ideally, mini libraries would contain physical books and digital bundles for preschool-age children. Research supports early literacy learning with physical books though there is growing evidence that technological literacy is essential for the future and the starting point is early childhood (NAEYC, 2012).

The quality of books matters more than quantity, though there should be targets established referenced to school-age best practice (15 books per student) and community need.

The best book collections are not static. **Library staff can provide an invaluable service by training child care educators and directors on how to find, select, and curate high-quality materials over time.** Library consultations can ensure books meet quality expectations and that they reflect the race, language, and culture of the children served in the programs.

Consultations could be further enhanced by library staff teaching child care educators and directors how to create print rich classroom environments, include books in learning centers, and partner with neighborhood libraries for ongoing coaching support. Neighborhood libraries could facilitate networks of child care providers to provide means for book swaps and other strategies to keep collections high quality and effectively curated.

**To reach families with children in informal care, a mobile book bus or other mechanism for community delivery of high-quality books should be explored.** This is especially important in Nashville's neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of child poverty. Partnerships with the [Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency](#) and non-profits who provide a range of services for families in poverty, such as the [Martha O'Bryan Center](#), could be explored.

It will be important for the library to continue close partnerships with community groups who are problem-solving book access, including [Raising Readers](#) collective action teams, to coordinate efficient and effective book access initiatives. Along with partners like [United Way's Read to Succeed program](#), which currently provides comprehensive resources and supports for 11 child care centers countywide, the library can play a leadership role in the city with respect to third grade reading. Nashville's children need books and who better to provide books than the library.

## Teacher Training

Bringing Books to Life offers training for early childhood educators through program partnerships, monthly workshops, and onsite visits to child care centers and schools.

### Early Literacy Program Partnerships

Bringing Books to Life (“BBTL”) currently has 177 partnerships with child care centers, Head Start centers, pre-k programs, elementary schools, and after school programs. Child care centers include community-based non-profit programs, church-based programs, and private schools. Partnerships typically begin with a six-week onsite program that includes two teacher workshops covering a wide range of early literacy practices. BBTL staff visit classrooms, lead story times, and provide children with art activities that reinforce literature themes and reading skills. Programs end with a visit from the library’s puppet truck and marionette performance. Family literacy celebrations are held at a neighborhood library branch with storytelling, singing, and refreshments. Once an initial partnership has been established centers are eligible to host other training opportunities BBTL provide.

### Professional Development Workshops

Bringing Books to Life offers free educator workshops focused on a variety of early literacy teaching practices organized around themes. Each session offers training, lesson plans, books, and book suggestions. Once a month, BBTL offers two-hour trainings on Saturdays open to any educator working in a pre-k, Head Start, or child care program. Trainings are alternated between in-person and virtual formats. Each year, BBTL hosts a well-known children’s book author or illustrator to teach workshops about their writing/drawing process and how to use their books in the classroom. Each attendee receives a free book.

Trainings and workshops cover a wide range of topics including how to find and select high-quality literature; conduct effective interactive read alouds; extend book learning; design reading centers; create games and activities to increase vocabulary, phonics, and word awareness; use questioning and play to develop language skills; teach text extension strategies; and access and use library resources. The programs are rooted in an understanding of children’s multiple intelligences which helps teachers understand diverse learners and tailor their instruction to meet every child where they are.

### Professional development landscape

The Tennessee Departments of Human Services (TN-DHS) and Education (TN-DOE) license and certify child care programs and mandate state rules and regulations related to child care operations, training, and program quality. Child care educators in Davidson County are required by the state to earn professional development hours each year, including early literacy training. TN-DHS reviews proposals for teacher training to ensure the content meets guidelines and priorities for children’s early learning.



Head Start and MNPS pre-k programs provide training for their educators specific to their program priorities and budgets. They do not operate under TN-DHS licensing requirements.

A comprehensive review of 1,396 Tennessee state-approved trainings available to child care programs in 2023 revealed that **only 10% of statewide trainings were focused on early literacy**. Sixty five percent of the early literacy trainings available were offered as online modules. The remaining 52 early literacy trainings were some combination of in-person and online. **Bringing Books to Life comprised 25% of the total in-person and online early literacy trainings available statewide**. BBTL only serves Davidson County so the percentage of BBTL trainings per total in Nashville is closer to 40-50%. BBTL staff reported that teachers living in adjacent counties attend library trainings as much as possible and frequently request onsite trainings from library staff at their programs. The requests can't be accommodated due to staff and budget constraints.

## Focus group findings

Across all focus groups with early childhood teachers and directors the **#1 request was for more Bringing Books to Life early literacy training and coaching**. Several teachers reported that BBTL trainings are the best offered. Their complaint was that there is not enough.

### Bringing Books to Life teacher trainings

In a focus group with child care directors, they uniformly said BBTL is the only literacy training that incorporates several best practices that promote kindergarten readiness. They reported that most other trainings offered are online which results in a “sit and get” model that does not translate into better teaching. Every director said they wish they could spend more time with their teachers, supporting their professional development, but they do not have time. Competing demands take their focus away from supporting teachers.

**Teachers reported that BBTL training is unique because it offers substantive content that helps them understand the importance of reading and how to teach early literacy.** Child care teachers are not trained through preparation programs so often teachers feel ill-equipped and even embarrassed at their lack of knowledge. New teachers come in knowing very little and must be brought up to speed quickly. Teachers from child care and pre-k programs shared that BBTL trainings are “excellent” because they are interactive, and the instructors are experts. Teachers appreciate the books and resources provided in the trainings that they can then take back to their classrooms and programs. When asked what specific BBTL trainings benefitted teachers most they responded with:

- How to do effective and engaging interactive read alouds
- Connecting books to lessons, activities, field trips, curriculum topics, and home connections
- Designing learning centers with books and literacy learning embedded
- Learning experiences that are fun and engaging for children and teach important skills, like bookmaking, letter games and math

### Multiple training providers

Teachers and directors reported difficulty knowing what child care trainings (outside BBTL) are available to them and how to access them. There is no central catalog or resource to aid in finding and selecting quality trainings. Directors shared the names of a variety of providers but said it is hard to know what is high-quality and there is no one person to talk to about the training unless they happen to know someone at the providing agency. This is one reason why teachers and directors said they value the library when they can have one staff person available for their questions and concerns. **Teachers and directors said they need more in-person support.** Several directors said they develop their own training from online sources or by engaging individuals in their school and community, including parents with expertise. They reported that in addition to BBTL some of the highest quality training available was from individual consultants who are often retired teachers or teachers who leave the profession to make more money. Teachers said that they would love to be able to attend early childhood conferences held in Nashville, Chattanooga, Memphis, and other cities in Tennessee, but they can't afford to go.

### Teacher training formats

Teachers in every focus group shared challenges accessing and attending trainings. No one format worked for all programs. Trainings offered during the day present a challenge because teachers can't leave the children in their care and there is often not enough staff to cover time out of the classroom. Saturday trainings worked well for some but not for others due to jobs, family obligations, and burnout. Zooms and webinars are easier to access though many teachers said they are not as engaging or helpful to improve teaching. Zoom trainings can be more accessible since teachers can attend and participate in them while children are resting or at home in the evenings.

### Curriculum

Teachers and directors at child care sites reported that **they do not have access to an early childhood curriculum and often must make up their own.** One director reported that teachers make up weekly themes the director approves. Other directors said they research online (e.g. google) or through word-of-mouth ideas inspired by blogs and online curricula (they reported this tends to be low-quality). Some teach Biblical stories connected to their church. Teachers at pre-k programs in elementary schools reported that they use a district-mandated curriculum. Head Start teachers use a curriculum provided by program administration. Teachers at United Way Read to Succeed sites reported they use a curriculum offered through the partnership connected to their literacy coaching. One director summed it up by saying, "We will use anything anyone gives us, especially if it is free."

### Teacher requests

When asked what kind of early literacy training teachers need most, **teachers and directors across all focus groups and interviews said they need coaching that extends beyond one training.** Many shared that it would be helpful to customize training for what teachers and staff need. They requested BBTL trainings along with onsite visits so that staff can model, co-teach, and discuss what is working and what still needs improvement.

Several teachers shared how helpful it would be to have training on how to support language learning and early literacy with infants and toddlers. One teacher said that she did not even know what that would look like. Many teachers shared a desire for more than one training on certain topics such as how to incorporate books and literacy learning across the school day in different activities. This teaching skill requires time and practice to become confident and adept. They suggested an idea to have a training series versus just one training on certain topics.

**Teachers also requested help managing children’s behavior and getting them to focus on learning.** They shared that many children come in with emotional challenges and it is difficult to teach when they can’t support children’s mental health issues. They also shared that often the children in their care don’t have proper health care so maybe the library could partner with programs to read books about teeth brushing and eating vegetables while dental and health care providers come to school for screenings.

When asked how BBTL and NPL staff can better support literacy training for teachers, teachers and directors offered the following:

- More trainings more often and with a menu of options to choose from
- Small group and one-on-one coaching for extra help; higher dosage of support
- Nashville Public Library mini conferences for teachers to access at one event with a breakfast social hour, session, lunch, and another session
- NPL presence at larger early childhood conferences – a booth and training sessions
- Teacher resource center at every library with curriculum kits, books, e-books
- BBTL staff to train teachers on how to select books and maintain and update book collections; pay teachers to help with this
- Bring books to teachers and send collections of books with teachers after trainings
- Assign BBTL staff for each site that they have one “go to” person for ongoing support
- NPL online site with video snippets of best practices and on demand tutorials
- More workshops with children’s book authors and illustrators
- Child care and food for Saturday trainings
- Text outs with literacy tips for teachers and directors

### **Note on child care**

In a special focus group session with child care directors, they unanimously reported they have never seen the level of burnout they see now in their teachers. It is hard to staff teachers because of the low pay and demands of the job. Many have lost teachers unless they can provide them with extra support. **One director said, “The child care sector is in the middle of a mental health crisis.”** Directors are working hard to combat stress by devoting time in meetings to self-care, securing money from their board for more vacation and sick time, and raising fees and doing their own fundraising to pay for teacher pay and benefits. One director shared that she and her husband sold one of their cars to pay for their best teacher’s health insurance so she would not leave.

The child care staffing crisis is an ongoing issue being tackled by states and cities across the country. The library is a partner in Nashville's collective efforts, in addition to playing an important leadership role by providing high-quality support and training for child care teachers and directors. Across multiple studies of child care staffing challenges, teachers reported low pay as only one reason they leave their job. **Teachers cited burnout, exhaustion, and lack of professional growth opportunities as additional reasons they exit the profession.** By offering child care teachers and directors high-quality, engaging, and joyful training the library boosts morale in an exhausted workforce, improves the quality of early literacy teaching, and professionalizes the profession. Training and support are critical to continue, especially amidst a child care staffing crisis.

## Recommendation 2

### Teacher Training

Expand Bringing Books to Life's early literacy teacher training options with a focus on program needs and library staff capacity

Expanding the number and quality of educator trainings requires manpower and resources. A significant ramp up in trainings may not result in sustainable improvements in early literacy teaching capacity without a strategic, targeted focus on partner program needs, library staff capacity, and Bringing Books to Life expertise.

### Restructure program partnerships

Currently, BBTL offers its programming free of charge and on demand. This results in a significant number of partnerships but at varying levels of involvement. The potential positive impact of teacher training is minimized when touchpoints are few and far between. BBTL staff reported that capacity is an issue; there is not enough staff to meet the requests from programs. Scheduling is challenging when work flow is unpredictable.

**BBTL would benefit from restructuring program partnerships to deliver tiered supports.**

Top tier support should be provided strategically to only a handful of programs who meet high-needs criteria as determined by the library-program partnership.

Second tier support could include in-person and online teacher trainings and workshops that are free and available to any educators or directors who need them.

Third tier support could include on-demand story times and puppet truck visits to program sites.

In this model, the library meets its mission of being a community resource, free and open to all while also providing an increased supply of teacher training to meet program demand.

## Provide early literacy coaching

### Tier 1: Early literacy coaching

Early literacy coaching was the #1 request from teachers at child care centers and pre-k programs. Providing coaching at scale and on demand is not possible. **The library should create a process for identifying and prioritizing programs to receive a higher dosage of coaching support.** The highest need, under resourced programs serving children from low-income communities could be prioritized, or programs with larger staff minimally trained in early literacy teaching practices.

It will be important for the library to start small and replicate later. The number of priority programs receiving BBTL early literacy coaching should be based on staffing capacity and program breadth.

Coaching models that have the highest outcome impact follow a common sequenced script:

- 1) Identify coaching model goals and purpose
- 2) Identify the early literacy practices that will be included in the coaching model
- 3) Develop the core competencies and qualifications required for effective coaching
- 4) Recruit, train, and develop literacy coaches, leveraging existing staff
- 5) Start with one to two programs to fine tune the effort and adjust planning as needed
- 6) Build the program out slowly and intentionally with a continuous improvement model

The library can leverage its neighborhood branches to provide literacy coaching and support, building on already strong library staff-child care partner relationships. A train the trainer model where BBTL staff train and develop library staff, child care directors, and teachers could result in sustainable improvements in early literacy teaching while keeping investment costs reasonable.

## Increase participation in face-to-face trainings

### Tier 2: Monthly trainings and workshops

To maximize the reach and impact of BBTL's early literacy teacher trainings the library should expand options and increase participation rates based on teacher and director feedback.

#### Monthly in-person workshops

Teachers and directors in our focus groups shared that BBTL offered the highest quality in-person early literacy training available. Trainings are widely valued by teachers who attend but teachers shared they can't always attend the trainings due to transportation and family constraints. **To increase participation in face-to-face trainings the library should rotate locations, days, and times for monthly trainings.**

Based on teacher and director feedback it would be helpful to **continue Saturday trainings and add evening training options as well**. The library can work with community partners, teachers, and volunteers to **provide free onsite child care for participants**, as well as food and takeaway curriculum kits with lesson plans and books. One director shared that when BBTL held an evening workshop at a neighborhood branch, with dinner and child care, attendance was triple what they expected.

**Rotating the locations of trainings will benefit teachers who can't attend trainings due to transportation.** The library should continue to use neighborhood branches as host sites for teacher and parent workshops.

**Preparing a schedule of training options and locations months in advance would allow library staff to plan, organize, and use capacity efficiently.** As well, child care directors and teachers could plan and manage their staff's professional development and prioritize BBTL trainings, providing them more access to the training they value most. Participation is likely to increase with a pre-prepared menu of options circulated widely and accessible online.

**Depending on response the library could consider increasing in-person workshops to once per month vs alternating months to significantly expand reach.** To aid staff capacity BBTL can partner with individual training consultants to host and co-host workshops. This is likely to increase teacher participation rates by keeping quality high and varied, and at the same time develop strong teacher training partnerships.

## Include child care directors in training options

The library should consider including training for child care directors in its menu of options. **Although 20% of state-approved child care trainings are targeted to directors and administrators, only 2% are focused on child development and early learning. Of those, only a few focus specifically on early literacy.** A high-impact strategy to improve teaching is to provide early learning program directors training aligned to teachers' early literacy training.

Directors can support teachers through coaching on early literacy best practices, which could add capacity to BBTL's coaching effort. Many existing director trainings are focused on reflective practice, adult learning, program assessment, and child development. **BBTL could supplement directors' existing leadership training with a specific focus on early literacy.** BBTL could provide directors an early literacy walk-through tool so that even if directors do not have the time for extensive coaching, they could have a tool in hand to collect data for staff meetings and conversations with teachers.

Child care teacher turnover is a challenge for teacher training efforts but by supporting directors in early literacy best practices overall teacher capacity is maximized. **BBTL should provide training for child care teams to include teachers and directors together.**

Directors' training can focus on extending early literacy learning outside individual classrooms and into the life of the program. **Directors are directly engaged with families which provides rich opportunities to support and engage families in early literacy learning.** Few existing trainings focus specifically on early literacy and family engagement – with the exceptions of BBTL trainings.

## Create a Bringing Books to Life online teaching portal

In addition to expanding in-person training options, the library should consider increasing online trainings as well, to increase participation and reach a broader audience. Online trainings should include live zoom sessions and pre-taped webinars to ensure content is available 24/7.

**The production of online trainings could form the anchor content for a Nashville Public Library teaching portal that includes online training sessions, early literacy webinars, snippets of best practice in action, and live streaming for special events.** As well, staff could add interactive options such as space for Q&A of common educator questions and user-friendly step-by-step guides for how to find and select high-quality literature.

A menu of options for trainings and coaching can be included in the portal, aiding library staff capacity planning and scheduling, as well as child care provider planning for how to find and select high-quality early literacy trainings to meet their educators' unique needs and interests.

## Host special early literacy workshops

Teachers and directors across all focus groups shared their excitement and enthusiasm for BBTL's children's author workshops. Several teachers requested more workshops like these as well as author visits to child care center sites. **Author and illustrator workshops are a highlight of BBTL trainings and an offering that is unique to the library.** The ripple effects of author workshops extend to classroom teaching. Teachers reported a boost in their motivation and confidence during and after the workshops which extended to their teaching. Teachers shared that they incorporated the author study into lessons and activities with children, increasing children's excitement and enthusiasm for books, in addition to teaching important foundational reading skills.

**The library could extend its special workshop series to highlight bright spots in the early childhood community.** Coordinating with community partners and providers BBTL could showcase the talent and accomplishments of teachers, program teams, or families who are increasing children's love of books and early literacy learning. Any content created through special early literacy workshops could be included in the BBTL online portal.

## Collaborate with early literacy training partners

Bringing Books to Life is an established leader in early literacy training. **By partnering with other early literacy training providers BBTL can play an even bigger role in improving kindergarten readiness for all children.**

The second largest request from early childhood educators and directors in our focus groups was for help knowing how to support young children's social-emotional development, especially as it relates to behavioral and emotional challenges. The [Hemmeter Lab](#) at Peabody College, Vanderbilt University is an established leader in the study of social-emotional development in young children. They work with child care centers through research partnerships and offer training for teachers of infants and toddlers through a project called [Toddler Talk](#). [Mary Louise Hemmeter](#) and her colleagues at the Hemmeter Lab have been providing coaching, support, and instructional resources for early childhood educators and programs across the globe for years. They have established wide credibility with early childhood educators in child care, pre-k and Head Start programs. **The library could form a partnership with the Hemmeter Lab to develop and co-host trainings or a training series that combines early literacy learning and social-emotional development.** Based on the input and feedback from teachers in our focus groups, as well as through individual interviews, teachers and directors would greatly value and likely flock to this type of training.

The [United Way of Greater Nashville's Read to Succeed program](#) has been serving and supporting child care centers in Nashville for 22 years. Read to Succeed currently partners with eleven child care centers. They provide comprehensive support including research-based curricula, literacy coaching, training and professional development, lending libraries, and parent engagement. They recently designed and developed a tiered model of support similar to the library though with more extensive support for a smaller number of sites. BBTL already partners with Read to Succeed in the larger [Raising Readers](#) collective with multiple other early literacy organizations. **Rolling out early literacy coaching and support for every child care program in Davidson County is a mission too big for any one entity.** The library benefits from collaborating with Read to Succeed to coordinate training resources and maximize the impact of both organizations.

The largest provider (in terms of number of offerings) of early literacy training in Tennessee is the Child Care Resource & Referral Agency ("CCR&R). CCR&R contracts with the Tennessee Department of Human Services, who provide funding and regulatory support for child care agencies statewide. CCR&R provides administrative and early learning training and support for child care providers across the state, including Davidson County. A portion of their training offerings overlap with the library in content, but **there are many opportunities for complementary trainings with BBTL offering its unique expertise in high-quality teaching practices.** Coordination could extend the reach and impact of both organizations, providing child care programs a wider selection of high-quality offerings.



There are several other individual consultants and organizations who provide early literacy training for child care and early learning programs including [ChildCareTennessee](#), The [Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance](#) (TECTA), the [Ayers Institute](#) at [Lipscomb University](#), [ProSolutions Inc.](#), [HiMama Academy](#), [Transforming Child Care Education LLC](#), [Child Care Education Institute](#), [The Early Childhood Academy](#), [Successful Solutions Training in Child Development](#), [Child Care Lounge](#), [Bright Minds Training](#), [Care Courses](#), [Goddard Systems](#) and more.

Based on the input and feedback from teachers, training quality varies significantly especially with respect to the larger, national organizations who produce a high volume of “check the box” online content. **BBTL’s training is valued because of the staff’s expertise and the interactive, engaging format of the trainings which deepen and extend teachers’ learning.**

**BBTL’s training is unique because of the in-person format, the interactive online sessions, the books and resources provided aligned to the training content, the specialty expertise of library staff with respect to high-quality literature and text, and the depth of the content.** For example, some trainings tell teachers it is important to include books in learning centers, but BBTL teaches teachers how to embed literacy learning and books across activities, topics, and curriculum content, in addition to ensuring the books are high-quality and matched to children’s developmental stage, background, culture, and language.

[Raising Readers](#), a citywide initiative aimed to increase the percentage of third grade students reading on grade level, has created a new collaborative, [Core Network Nashville](#), focused on connecting training resources to early childhood educators. Liz Atack, BBTL’s manager, has played a leadership role in these efforts. The library will continue to benefit from collaboration across multiple partner agencies to align and coordinate simultaneous and complementary training initiatives.

## Collaborate to create a new early literacy micro-credential

**The library should explore creating an early literacy micro-credential with a higher education institution partner.** Unlike Head Start and pre-k teachers, child care educators are not required to have a college degree and often come to the profession lacking in skills and knowledge. There are existing credentials for early childhood educators including the [Child Development Associate](#) (CDA) credential offered through [TECTA](#). A challenge is cost. Most educators can’t afford the credential even with scholarships. The CDA is focused broadly on child development. An early literacy micro-credential offered free to child care teachers and directors could provide a high-quality option to improve teaching, offer teachers professional certification for advancement and pay, and establish the library as a gold standard leader in early literacy teaching and learning. With the establishment of a micro-credential NPL could inspire libraries across the state and country to take an active leadership role in supporting the child care workforce and tackling the third-grade literacy crisis.

## Parent and Family Supports

Bringing Books to Life (“BBTL”) offers workshops for parents and families to share accessible ways they can positively affect their child's early literacy development. BBTL offers workshops for parents at elementary schools, child care centers, preschool programs, the main library, and neighborhood library branches.

\*Note: For the purposes of this section the terms parent and family are used together and interchangeably. Parent generally refers to the primary caregivers of a child, mostly assumed to be mothers and fathers, but family systems are diverse, and children can be raised by multiple members of a family, including grandmothers and close relatives. The term parent/family is all-encompassing and includes primary or secondary caregivers of a child. Workshops are open to anyone caring for a child, including parents, guardians, relatives, nannies, and home care providers.

### Bringing Books to Life Family Workshops

Bringing Books to Life offered its first family workshop in 2007 focused on reading aloud and has since expanded to focus on multiple teaching and learning practices including how to:

- ❖ Have positive serve and return interactions with infants and toddlers;
- ❖ Have meaningful conversations with children, 3-5 that stretch their language skills;
- ❖ Ask open-ended and dialogic questions;
- ❖ Do engaging interactive read alouds;
- ❖ Find and select high-quality age-appropriate books;
- ❖ Model reading and writing at home;
- ❖ Create print-rich environments at home;
- ❖ Explore text with children to support print concept learning;
- ❖ Help children make connections between books and life;
- ❖ Play phonics, letter, and word games at home and in daily activities;
- ❖ Do shared and guided reading;
- ❖ Do picture walks and dictation;
- ❖ Support children’s emerging writing abilities; and
- ❖ Support language learning in children’s play.

**All workshops are anchored in an approach that is asset-based, accessible, and focused on parent education and empowerment.** The assumption is that parents instinctively know what to do, and BBTL staff focus on acknowledging their good instincts and offering simple practices, using books and library resources, to increase their child’s language and literacy learning. BBTL staff also emphasize the bond between parent/caregiver and child and the importance of joyful literacy experiences that include reading, writing, talking, playing and singing.

Workshops are offered in English or Spanish and staff work with Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (“MNPS”) interpreters to reach families who speak other languages. BBTL is focused on early literacy, but because the library is one of the few local organizations that consistently offers literacy workshops for parents and families, staff increasingly see parents of older children attending. As a result, staff created new workshops to address concerns common in (K-3) emerging readers: comprehension, motivation, and extending book learning to other content areas and activities.

Workshops typically last around 45 minutes and are heavy on demonstration and practice. Every family who attends a workshop receives a book to take home (related thematically to the workshop) and a kit of materials to use at home that includes art supplies and an item specific to the workshop. The intention is for families to use the materials to put what they learned in the workshop into practice at home. Parents and families attend workshops with and/or without their children. Workshops are offered in multiple formats via zoom and in person.

## Survey and Interview Findings

Across three years of surveys and interviews, **parents and families reported that the library’s parent workshops are the best and often only training they receive to support their child’s language and early literacy learning.** Workshops have a significant impact on changing parent behavior with 96% of attendees reporting that because of attending a BBTL workshop they read more with their children, have more conversations about books, and encourage their children’s practice with writing.

Parents reported that the format for the workshops was helpful because staff model practices and then give parents opportunities to practice and ask questions, all in a joyful manner and approach. Common words used by parents to describe family workshop staff include passionate, personable, engaging, knowledgeable, excellent, and kind.

**Several parents shared that they were intimidated at the idea of attending a workshop before they arrived but once they were there, staff made them feel smart and capable.** They appreciated not being “talked down to” and instead lifted up by the engaging interactions and discussions. Parents enjoyed meeting other parents in class and learning from each other.

Virtual workshops have been helpful for parents and families when they can’t attend in person though participation rates are unpredictable. Parents shared that attending in person is beneficial because it helps them engage with staff and other parents. They also appreciate the books and bags of resources they get to take home after the workshop.

When asked what parents learned at workshops that has proven valuable for them at home, the most common responses included:

- How to use books to ask my child questions
- The importance of setting aside time to read out loud with my children
- How to read in different places and times of the day
- Making time to read and write as part of the daily family schedule
- Being mindful that letters and words are everywhere, not only in books
- How reading with my child and talking about letters is fun and engaging
- How to find good books and ask the library for help
- The importance of fine motor development and the stages of writing
- Understanding that parents can't "mess up" when they are talking and reading with children
- How easy it is to use simple items around the home to play with children
- How important it is to listen to my child without being distracted

One of the major takeaways from parents is their surprise at how easy it is to teach and learn in everyday activities. When they understood the connections between play, talk, and literacy they felt more adept at being their child's teacher at home.

**After attending BBTL workshops several parents said they not only read to their children more often but also play with and talk to their children more frequently.** One parent reported that she now encourages her child to play with other children so they can improve their language skills. She had no idea child talk was so important to reading. Another bilingual parent said (translated from Spanish to English), "I did not know I could tell my child stories and it will help them read. I don't know how to read in English, so this made me feel smart and capable."

Workshop impact as measured by changes in self-reported behavior from participants is significant. **After attending a BBTL workshop 97% of parents read more with their child; 93% increased opportunities for their child to practice writing at home; and 72% increased library and/or school visits to get books for their child to read at home.**

The impact on library use is notable. **Ninety-two percent of parents surveyed said they were more likely to use the library's resources and were more aware of the resources the library has to offer families after attending a workshop.** Several parents reported that they did not know how to get books before the workshop and were surprised at how easy it is to access the library online. Parents also shared appreciation for BBTL workshops noting that they were "proud of our library system" and how it supports families.

When parents were asked how the library could better support them, they shared the following:

- More workshops in our area of town
- Specific resources on kindergarten readiness skills and how to support them at home
- Workshops on different topics related to literacy
- Workshops for K-2 children and parents
- Shorter workshop options or “snippets” of ideas to access when they don’t have much time
- An app on their phone with literacy resources
- Send outs of literacy tips as reminders or refreshers
- Books at bus stops, hospitals, and other places parents and children often wait together
- Books written in different languages and reflecting different cultures

## Staff Focus Group Findings

In a focus group and subsequent interviews with BBTL staff, they openly shared strengths, needs, and challenges related to the family workshops and library engagement with parents and families.

Language and culture came up frequently in conversations with staff. **They are seeing an increased demand for workshops in Spanish and Spanish language books.** There is an additional need for other languages including Kurdish (the fastest growing population), Burmese, and Arabic. Staff suggested that it would be helpful to have strong partnerships with MNPS and other community partners who could offer translation services not only for live workshops but also to translate materials and recommend books. Parents continuously request help finding quality literature, especially in different languages. This can be challenging for staff who often rely on big box publishers for book supply which is not always the highest quality and is often unavailable in multiple languages with stories and characters reflecting different cultures. **BBTL staff would like to explore adding interpreters and branching out from single source publishers to secure the highest quality diverse books for children and families.**

One of the biggest challenges (and opportunities) for family engagement is outreach. **Staff would like to increase participation and workshops to reach more families.** Virtual live stream has worked to reach families not able to attend in person, but participation is not predictable which makes it difficult to use staff capacity efficiently and effectively. **When access to families is mediated by another organization, such as Metro schools, family participation increases dramatically.** Staff leverage partnerships when possible but looking for additional partners to increase parent outreach could go a long way to extend the program to families who may need it most. **Staff reported that child care partnerships help but refugee and immigrant families are not always represented in the child care world so new ways to connect with neighborhoods and enclaves would be beneficial.** Currently, parent workshops are advertised on the library website, branch postings, social media, and through center/pre-k program partners.

**When library staff were asked how to increase family outreach, they suggested the following:**

- Host workshops at different venues across the county; go to communities where they are
- Develop workshop content in partnership with program partners
- Add additional staff and workshops (topics, types, etc.)
- Host family workshops and celebrations with food
- Continue virtual options
- Add workshops semi-monthly in evenings (coincide with read alouds at home?)
- Collect survey data post workshops to improve program to increase participation
- Send a monthly newsletter to programs with literacy tips and invitations to workshops
- Tap parent ambassadors for outreach; parent networks word-of-mouth
- Train and pay parents to teach workshops in their own language and with their community
- Create or be part of a curriculum for families; library could provide certification for parents to have in-home child care
- Mail parents books and learning materials with an invitation to attend
- Advertise more consistently on social media and website (FB page for each branch, social media announcements on multiple platforms, etc.)

**When library staff were asked to vision goals and ideas re the BBTL parent workshops and family engagement strategies they suggested the following:**

- Strengthen the bridge between parents/families and the library to help them access and use the library's services and offerings
- Host "Get to know your library workshops" at different branch libraries offering a safe space to ask questions, meet library staff, and build relationships with families in their community
- Help parents learn how to use technology to access books and literacy materials
- Host monthly workshops for families to learn how to use the library (e.g. this is how you get the website; how to research and find books; how to download books, etc.)
- Host monthly workshops to help families access benefits (WIC, SNAP, child care, etc.)
- Make library and website more inviting and user-friendly for families (different languages)
- Host playgroups in addition to standard workshops and story time
- Offer literacy kits to families to take home, library cards, and Imagination Library sign-ups
- Distribute books and activity kits (with materials) to families and whole communities
- Follow-up w families, get feedback, and collect data to assess families' library use
- Set targets for attendance to inform outreach (aim for 10-15 per workshop)
- Demonstrate growth over time (tracking for improvement)

## Recommendations

**Bringing Books to Life's approach to early literacy family engagement is a key asset for the Nashville Public Library.**

Family engagement is a priority for schools and preschool programs but effectively implementing parent supports that result in short and long-term positive impact is a challenge.

Schools and preschool/child care programs have multiple priorities and tight budgets, and as a result, don't typically have the capacity or skills needed to host/facilitate engaging and effective parent workshops and similar parent supports. **Only 7% of the total trainings available to child care programs in Davidson County in early 2023 focused on family engagement and a small percentage of those touch on early literacy.**

Bringing Books to Life is one of the few providers of high-quality early literacy content and training for parents and families. **The BBTL team's approach to family engagement is impactful because it is rooted in effective practices for adult learning.**

**BBTL staff demystify literacy instruction by sharing interactions and activities that are accessible and easy for parents to understand and do.** The more parents interact, talk, and read with their children, the stronger their child's brain and early literacy development. When activities are easy and accessible, parents are much more likely to repeat them at home. Over time these small actions become habits, which results in the meaningful acquisition of early literacy skills in children.

**BBTL staff focus on building confidence and self-efficacy in parents by focusing on what they are doing right and building from there.** Parents receive conflicting messages about their role in their child's literacy development, and often feel unequipped and unable to help. BBTL staff begin with an acknowledgment of parents' good instincts, knowledge, and competency by pointing out what they already do that is helping their child develop successfully. Parents are affirmed for what they are doing right, which builds trust and creates a productive space for continued learning. The team's approach to parent support focuses on, and emphasizes, parents as their child's first teacher and the one who knows their child best.

**Confidence and self-efficacy are especially important for families whose primary language is not English and/or who have diverse backgrounds and cultures.** Meeting parents and families where they are, with priority given to cultural competency, honors and respects parents in their role as their child's teacher, fostering greater likelihood of positive changes in early literacy teaching at home. A strengths-based approach acknowledges the benefit of learning more than one language and the value of culture in language and literacy learning.

As well, BBTL staff encourage parents to take advantage of the library’s resources to support them as they navigate multiple obligations and responsibilities. Parenting young children can be exhausting for parents in the best of circumstances. For parents who are struggling to make ends meet or who are experiencing trauma, raising children is exceptionally exhausting and overwhelming. Being able to access help and support from the library – and other community partners – releases a pressure valve for parents, providing a means of support and encouragement so they can focus on themselves and their children with attention and care making it more likely that they will implement what they learn in family workshops.

## Recommendation 3

### Parent & Family Supports

Expand Bringing Books to Life’s family workshop options, formats, and locations to reach more families, more often

Bringing Books to Life (“BBTL”) family workshops provide essential support for parents and families to develop children’s early literacy skills at home. Parent feedback is consistently positive and behavior change is significant. The challenge is reaching more parents, more often.

**As with teacher training and literacy coaching it will be important for the library to redesign its family engagement approach to best utilize staff capacity and target programming to the highest needs’ populations.** Currently, BBTL staff respond to requests from schools and programs for family workshops, story times, and celebrations. This meets the mission of the library to be accessible to everyone, but it limits staff’s ability to ensure children and families who need the most support are served. This can be remedied by designing a suite of family engagement options and a process for identifying priority partners. As well, the BBTL team should set goals for engagement and track metrics to continuously assess participation trends and parent response.

**To reach targeted family populations the library should offer multiple workshop options, format, and content tied to evidenced-based practices.** This can include in-person workshops at various locations through the city and virtual programming via live stream workshops, webinars, and archived videos. Onsite locations can include the main library, neighborhood branches, pre-k and child care program sites, and community spaces in housing developments.

**To increase participation, the library should increase public awareness of family workshop offerings through the library’s website, social media, community partners, newsletters, and locations through the community where families frequently visit.** Program reach can be significantly extended by training parents to host workshops for other parents, which would also provide parent ambassadors to spread the word about the library’s family workshops and programming and build early literacy capacity through communities.



**To meet the growing need and demand of immigrant and refugee families it will be important for the library to offer parent workshops in multiple languages with the help of community partners to provide interpreters.** The library can leverage community partners to bring workshops to families living in immigrant enclaves and neighborhoods.

## Create a Bringing Books to Life online parent portal

In addition to expanding in-person and virtual parent workshop options, the library should consider creating an online parent portal in conjunction with an online teaching portal. This would enable significantly broader outreach to parents and families across the county and beyond, as well as creating a resource for all families to use 24/7 on an ongoing basis.

**As with the production of online teacher trainings, parent workshops could form the anchor content for a Nashville Public Library teaching portal.** The portal could include live stream workshops, pre-taped content, snippets of best practice in action (i.e. how to do an interactive read aloud), online story times hosted by BBTL staff, archived puppet show tapings, early literacy webinars, and live streaming for special events. As well, a parent portal could include helpful resources such as children's books recommendations, kindergarten readiness resources, and user-friendly step-by-step guides for how to access library resources and find out about special events.

As the library builds out a portal, links can be added to help parents and families navigate to other websites for relevant information such as how to find and pay for child care, how to register for pre-k and kindergarten, and how to sign-ups for free books such as through the Imagination Library.

The library can also leverage technology to create a digital media tool offering parents & caregivers literacy tips via an app or text messaging service. A one-stop-shop online portal can provide parents sign-ups for text messaging as well as for upcoming parent workshops.

## Partner with Metro Nashville Public Schools to host parent workshops and playgroups for families with children ages 0-5

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools ("MNPS") recently created an initiative aimed to support parents and families with infants and toddlers, ages 0-3, called Grow Together. **This provides an ideal opportunity for the Nashville Public Library to partner with MNPS to co-host parent playgroups, workshops, and sessions that help parents know how to support the healthy growth and development of their children, embedding early language and literacy learning.** The gatherings can include resources for families such as welcome baby packages for new parents, Imagination Library registrations, library cards, apps that provide early literacy tips and messages from the library, and online community forums for parents to connect with each other.

## Grow and deepen families' engagement with the library

Bringing Books to Life staff identified family engagement with the library as a key strategy to expand reach and increase participation in early literacy workshops, as well as to provide families with supports that enable them to better support their children.

**The library should continue engaging families by hosting “get to know your library” workshops at the main library, neighborhood branches, and community sites.** This provides opportunities for families to meet library staff and other parents as they learn how to take advantage of the many resources the library has to offer. Staff can offer hands-on tutorials to help parents learn how to download books, access online resources, and use the library’s website. As well, staff can assist parents in signing up for partner resources such as the Imagination Library and early literacy text messaging services. Children can meet puppet show staff and engage in early literacy games and activities. The library can use these workshops as opportunities to offer resources for families including book bags, devices pre-loaded with reading apps, digital giveaways, and activity kits to do at home, in addition to food, diapers, formula, and other necessities contributed by partner agencies.

**The library should consider co-hosting family support workshops with community partners to help parents access needed resources.** One of the biggest challenges for families with young children is knowing how to access needed services and supports including child care, food assistance, economic benefits, and job training and credentialing. The library offers a comfortable and welcoming meeting space where families can sign up for benefits on site and learn about how to better support their children while also learning how to access the library for literacy teaching and learning. Partners who provide services and supports (i.e. SNAP administrative assistance, health insurance navigators, taxes and financial advising, child care certificates, etc.) can assist with outreach and onsite offerings including food, diapers, bus passes and child care.

**The library should continue to host family celebrations to commemorate milestones and foster family-library-community engagement.** These can include pre-k and kindergarten enrollment and graduation, seasonal holidays, and community events. With each celebration, Bringing Books to Life and other library staff can incorporate literacy activities, puppet shows, and story times.

## Program assessment and evaluation

Program expansion should be guided by research, evaluation and assessment data. It will be important for the library to be strategic in selecting strategies and recommendations based on community need, Bringing Books to Life's unique expertise, and an evidence base aligned to program expansion goals.

### Recommendation 4

#### Early Literacy Research Pilot

Pilot an early literacy initiative to assess impact and inform replication

The first recommendation is to pilot a specific project to be studied for potential scale. This could be structured in several ways depending on the research goals and assessment approach, which should be done in coordination with a research partner for design and implementation.

**One option for consideration is to identify a location, such as a neighborhood with high child poverty or an early learning program serving a high percentage of low-income families, and immerse a subset population in specific, targeted BBTL programming.** The outcomes could be focused on early literacy kindergarten readiness skills pre-identified for the study. The goal would be to see if immersion in literacy supports for families, children, and programs has a positive impact on the development of essential early literacy skills necessary for third grade reading proficiency. Pilot data and results can be used to inform replication and scaling of BBTL's partnership model, possibly in collaboration with other agencies offering early literacy supports to children and families, to achieve maximum impact for high needs populations.

**Another option for consideration is to examine the impact of a specific teaching practice taught by BBTL staff, such as dialogic reading, on parent behavior and/or child literacy outcomes.** The goal would be to identify the impact of a particular teaching technique to focus the library's program expansion efforts, which could include the design of targeted teaching training and coaching efforts and/or parent and family workshop content. Pilot data and results could be used in coordination with similar research to inform not only the library's programming but also the school district and child care center's early literacy programming.

**The library could also consider designing a pilot project with an established research partner to track specific literacy child outcomes across time, from pre-kindergarten through grades 1-3.** This would be best accomplished through an extended research-practice partnership supported by institutional funding. The study could be structured in myriad ways depending on the purpose and goals and could provide valuable insights for long-term programming and community-school district partnership.

## Recommendation 5

### Program Assessment

#### Develop data analytics to track and monitor program performance

**To ensure the library's early literacy efforts are meeting the needs of children, families, and the community comprehensive program assessment methods should be employed.** Data to be tracked and monitored can include workshop and training attendance, participant feedback, behavior change post-training, and child outcomes tied to specific early literacy skills. This can ensure continuous improvement of programming content, delivery, and approach and identify areas for future study with a research and/or community partner. Focus groups, interviews, and survey data with key stakeholder groups can be employed to get a deep dive analysis of specific programs to better target efforts and use library capacity efficiently and effectively.

Bringing Books to Life staff have been tracking program data via spreadsheets but this can be laborious, time-consuming, and ineffective without a structured system in place. **It would be beneficial for the library to invest in software that could analyze key data and display results in a customized dashboard.** This would provide data not only for internal staff but also for the board, foundation, funders, and community partners.

**The library could also use its expertise to develop an early literacy checklist or walk-through assessment for child care and pre-k partners to track implementation of strategies supported by the Bringing Books to Life program trainings.** Observation tools and resources go hand-in-hand with early literacy coaching and partner program support. This would meet the requested needs of teachers and directors and ensure sustainability of program impact.

## Why Nashville Public Library?

The Nashville Public Library is uniquely positioned to play an essential role in meeting the need for early literacy in Nashville. The library is a treasured community asset that serves as one of the few remaining civic spaces open and accessible to every person, family, and group in Davidson County. The main library and its neighborhood branches serve as equalizers across the county offering vital literacy resources and services to community members irrespective of background, socioeconomic status, culture, language, and ability. **NPL's programming for children and families is beloved in the community, providing an ideal opportunity to leverage these assets to expand its early literacy programming for young children and their families.**

Only 31% of Nashville's third grade students are reading on grade level, which means 70% of Nashville's children are set up to struggle in reading and writing and are highly likely to stay behind through high school and beyond. The literacy crisis is an immediate and pressing priority for the city, county, and state. Improving literacy at scale requires a call to action, a comprehensive coordinated campaign, and high-quality programs that build children's skills, knowledge, and competencies. Before children reach formal school age, they acquire early literacy skills, knowledge, and competencies at home and in child care settings. **Bringing Books to Life's programming serves the two major stakeholder groups who have the most influence on young children's early language and literacy learning before they reach kindergarten: parents/caregivers and early childhood educators.** The library has established credibility and significant reach through its existing partnerships, providing an ideal opportunity to expand the library's early literacy programs for parents and teachers.

The Nashville Public Library has a critical and unmatched leadership role to play in ensuring Nashville's children attain literacy proficiency, setting them up for success in school and life.

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