



January 9, 2012

Achievement Gap Task Force Public Hearing

Good morning,

My name is Christine Garber and I am the Connecticut Program Director for Reach Out and Read.

Reach Out and Read is an evidence-based, national, nonprofit organization that promotes early literacy and school readiness in pediatric exam rooms by giving new books to children and educating parents about the importance of reading aloud. We serve nearly 3.9 million children nationally which includes over 47,000 children in our state.

Reach Out and Read CT is a proud member of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance. We, like the Alliance, believe that in order to close the achievement gap, we must begin at birth with high-quality early care and education.

Why must we start early with children? We have no choice, the brain starts developing on day one!

- The architecture of the brain is shaped by very early experiences
- Unused nerve cells are “pruned” in these early years
- Cognitive skills of book sharing ensure that brain connections persist

Why must we start early educating parents? Because by age three, 80% of their child’s brain growth is complete. If we wait, parents will miss this important “window of opportunity.”

In order for our children to develop the foundational literacy skills they need to start Kindergarten, parents must be educated, from the time their child is born, about the enormously important role they have in shaping the lives of their children. Simply reading aloud to their children 10-15 minutes a day will set those children on a trajectory of knowledge and success in life.

However, currently fewer than half of parents (48%) in the United States read to their young children daily. This, in turn, translates into 35% of our nation’s children entering Kindergarten without the basic language skills they need to learn to read. And those children who fall behind in first grade have a one in eight chance of ever catching up to grade level without extraordinary efforts. (*Juel 1994; Clay 1979*)

And the news is worse for low-income children. A typical middle-class 5 year old is able to identify 22 letters and sounds of the alphabet compared to just 9 for a low-income child who hears 30 million fewer words while living in an environment of adversity and toxic stress which, in childhood, is linked to damaging the developing brain architecture.

Why Reach Out and Read? Reaching and educating these high risk children and families is the barrier we face, however, the Reach Out and Read model breaks this barrier by its unparalleled access to children and their parents from birth.



reachoutandread.org

By partnering with pediatricians, Reach Out and Read leverages the trusted relationship between doctors and parents to develop critical early reading skills in children. Reach Out and Read takes place in the exam room during the ten standard well-child visits from six months through age five reaching children and educating parents during those critical years of brain development.

Moreover, through our presence in hospitals, clinics, and health centers, we reach children who do not have access to early education programs and therefore most need our services. Nearly 90% of all young children see a child health provider at least annually for a check-up, while less than one third are in any childcare setting, the next most common contact with a formal service system.

14 independent studies, all published in medical journals, say Reach Out and Read works. Not only does Reach Out and Read gain access to the high risk children (and their parents), those participating children enter kindergarten better prepared to succeed, with larger vocabularies, stronger language skills, and a six-month developmental edge over their peers. There is more extensive published research available supporting the Reach Out and Read model than for any other psychosocial intervention in general pediatrics.

Additionally, our model is fiscally responsible as our team of pediatricians volunteer their services to deliver our program. Accordingly, allocating funds upfront to Reach Out and Read is far less costly than providing extra services to school aged children trying to catch up to grade level. It is "preventative care" if you will.

Endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, Reach Out and Read incorporates literacy and early reading skills into the definition of child health aligning us perfectly with Public Act 11-181 and the integration we are aiming for here in CT.

"Some people there are who, being grown, forget the horrible task of learning to read. It is perhaps the greatest single efforts that the human mind undertakes, and he must do it as a child." (John Steinbeck) Let's not be those types of grown-ups. Let's remember that, "The desire to read is not born in a child. It is planted – by parents and teachers..." (Jim Trelease – The new Read Aloud Handbook) Let's start early and give our children and families the tools they need to be successful.

Thank you.

Christine Garber
Connecticut Program Director
Christine.garber@reachoutandread.org
(203)980-6430