



UNIVERSITY of
LOUISIANA
L A F A Y E T T E

**Picard
Center**

Dolly Parton Imagination Library

CUMULATIVE EVALUATION REPORT

APRIL, 2018

Prepared for:



United Way of Acadiana

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

United Way of Acadiana

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School Systems

The Picard Center would like to extend a special thank you to the supportive and cooperative staff in Acadia, Lafayette, St. Martin, and Vermilion parishes for assisting with the academic and demographic data needed to complete this report.

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Recommended Citation

Dick, S. J., Burstein, K., Flint, T.K. & Forsyth, Y.A. (2017). "Dolly Parton Imagination Library Cumulative Evaluation Report: December 2017." Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development and Lifelong Learning, University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

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Executive Summary

Many factors impact reading-readiness in young children. A convergent body of 50 years of research provides insight into these factors and informs families and educators of the skills and needs of young children as they approach formal schooling. The *National Early Literacy Panel* (Westberg, 2006) identified critical predictors of early reading, which include alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, the ability to rapidly name a sequence of random letters, digits or colors, name writing, and capacity to remember spoken information for short periods of time (auditory memory). Additionally important are combinations of the elements of alphabet knowledge and concepts about print, as well as the ability to produce or comprehend spoken language, which includes vocabulary and grammar. All of these skills are engaged when parents and children read together. Furthermore, reading to and with children provides opportunities for increased parent-child relationships, self-regulation of behaviors, and a love of learning. “Children that read the most read the best and learn the most” (Trelease, 2006).

Whether rich or poor, residents of the United States or China, illiterate or college graduates, parents who have books in the home increase the level of education their children will attain.

Evans, Kelley, Sikora, & Treiman, 2010

Since its inception in 2009, the United Way of Acadiana’s *Dolly Parton Imagination Library* (DPIL) program has provided high-quality children’s literature to nearly 21,000 children across the four-parish Acadiana region. As of December 2015, the program had over 9,000 active participants enrolled. This study presents evidence that students in the DPIL program are more likely to achieve literacy benchmarks on the spring Kindergarten DIBELS assessment than their non-DPIL peers. More importantly, key subgroups that historically struggled to meet literacy benchmarks appear to derive greater benefit from participation in the DPIL program. Specifically, on the DIBELS spring assessment, boys (+5%), children in poverty (+10%), and African Americans (+12%) respectively increased benchmark scores as compared to their non-DPIL peers. Additionally, DPIL students not achieving DIBELS benchmark in the fall are 16% more likely to be on benchmark in the spring (as compared to a matched comparison group of students).

This program has proven extremely popular with 99% parents who when surveyed were mostly or extremely satisfied with the program. Parents report that children receiving the DPIL books are excited to read and tend to treat the books as their prized property. The majority of parents reported reading to their children at least a few times a week for 10-20 minutes each.

This report provides background information on the program and a description of the research design and evaluation methods and concludes with suggestions for promotion of the DPIL and remediation of minor issues with book distribution reported by some parents.

Background Information

In 1995, Dolly Parton launched the Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library program to benefit the children of her home county in East Tennessee, USA. Dolly’s vision was to foster a love of

reading among her county's preschool children and their families by providing them with the gift of a specially selected book each month. By mailing high-quality, age-appropriate books directly to their homes, she wanted children to be excited about books and to feel the magic that books can create. Moreover, she wanted to ensure that every child would have books, regardless of their family's income.

In recognition that a growing love and appreciation for books are critical to successful reading, the *Dollywood Foundation* continues to encourage community-based agencies across the United States to participate in this program. In 2009, the United Way of Acadiana began providing the program to a four-parish region: Acadia, Lafayette, St. Martin, and Vermilion parishes. Its principal ongoing activities are to register children in the program, maintain the database of participating families, purchase and mail books to enrolled children each month, and annually evaluate the impact of the program on literacy skills and family satisfaction.

The Importance of Home Reading

Children develop literacy skills and an awareness of language long before they can read. Since language development is fundamental to all areas of learning, skills developed early in life can help set the stage for later school success. By reading aloud to their young children, parents help them acquire the skills they will need to be ready for school.

Children who lack the fundamentals of language awareness and literacy skills early in life are more likely to fall behind in school (Scarborough, 2002) and are more likely to drop out later on. Numerous studies point to parent-child book reading during the preschool years leads as a contributor to higher reading achievement in elementary school (Missal et al. 2007), which also leads to greater enthusiasm for reading and learning. In an international study involving 15-year-olds from 14 developed countries, students whose parents read books with them regularly during the first year of primary school scored an average of 14 points higher on a comprehensive reading assessment at high school (OECD, 2011).

<http://www.childtrends.org/indicators/reading-to-young-children>

Extensively examined (Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994; Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995), the consensus is that children benefit from being regularly read to at home. Early work established that parent-child book reading contributes to or inspires children who begin reading at an early age (Clark 1975; Durkin, 1966; Durkin, 1974-75). Parent-child book reading activities also facilitate oral language development, which is key to future reading comprehension (Lonigan, Dyer, & Anthony, 1996; Raz & Bryant, 1990; Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998).

The longitudinal *Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development* (HSLLD) examined the development of language and literacy skills of children from low-income homes and provided further evidence of the long-term impact of book reading practices (DeTemple, 2001; Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001). Parental reports on children's book-related experiences (e.g., the frequency of book reading, library use, and book ownership) predicted their end-of-kindergarten status. Growth models from kindergarten through fourth grade indicated that the impact of these early experiences continued to be significant four years later.

Reading aloud to children is considered the single most important activity for building children's eventual success in reading (Anderson, 1985). Frequent storybook reading at home enables children to learn the uses and functions of written language and the reading/writing processes (Strickland & Morrow, 1990) while engaging in meaningful and enjoyable family interactions. Books become conversation starters while family reading creates contexts to develop oral language and vocabulary. A rich learning environment allows children to experience understanding on personally meaningful levels (Neuman & Roskos, 1993; Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001) as they make various connections to the stories. Jim Trelease, the author of the *Read Aloud Handbook* (2006), notes:

"People would stand in line for days and pay hundreds of dollars if there were a pill that could do everything for a child that reading aloud does. It expands their interest in books, vocabulary, comprehension, grammar, and attention span. Simply put, it's a free 'oral vaccine' for literacy."

Reading Readiness = Kindergarten Readiness

The emphasis on home reading and literacy cannot be underestimated. By extension, today, virtually all early childhood programs place a significant emphasis on learning language and words through similar social interactions with adults and peers. Joint activities, such as looking at picture books and storybook reading, appear to be particularly conducive to early vocabulary learning (Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Elley, 1989; Ninio & Bruner, 1978; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Snow and colleagues (2002) report that the significance of teachers' use of extended discourse and rare words at preschool is a strong predictor of 4th-grade reading comprehension (see also the *Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development*; Snow, Dickinson, & Tabors, n.d.).

Research Design

This report is a multipart study divided into two main parts. Part one is an analysis of possible effects of DPIL participation on the academic performance a subset of children, whose parents provided written permission for access to current and future academic records. For Part 1 we use the results of the school-administered *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (including DIBELS version 6 and DIBELS Next) and a primary measure of effects in the fall and spring of kindergarten. Part 2 reflects a mixed methods analysis of a parent survey of attitudes and family literacy behaviors. The parent survey was designed to determine the community's use of the books and overall satisfaction with the DPIL. The impact of DPIL participation is examined at the aggregated larger group level and the sub-group levels of age, gender, SES, and ethnicity. The effect on DPIL participation is tested for both the whole group and demographic subgroups (unprepared for kindergarten, gender, race, and students in poverty).

Academic Effects

The goal of any academic intervention program is to improve school outcomes. Part 1 of the report represents the effects of the DPIL on students in early elementary school. This section performs a quantitative analysis of the differences between known DPIL students and a comparison group from the general population of students. The following research questions guide it:

Research Question 1: Does DPIL participation impact academic performance of children as compared to children not participating in the program?

Research Question 2: Is the performance of students in the DPIL program mediated by demographic characteristics (race, gender, and SES) of participating children?

Research Question 3: Who participated in the United Way of Acadiana DPIL program?

Research Question 4: How did the DPIL program impact participating families?

Current Participation

In January 2010, United Way of Acadiana initially contracted with UL Lafayette's Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development & Lifelong Learning to evaluate the DPIL program by measuring its impact on young children as well as its progress toward the goals and outcomes. Annually, the Center has provided United Way and its participating school partners with a detailed report of the year's progress. The current assessment of DPIL reflects the original four parishes. Understandably, Lafayette Parish represents over half of the DPIL participants, as the parish has the largest population. The remaining parishes represent similar portions of the overall population of young children.

Table 1: Number of Children Served by Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL)

PARISH	Total	% Served*
ACADIA	3,854	18%
LAFAYETTE	11,082	53%
ST. MARTIN	2,863	14%
VERMILION	3,184	15%
TOTAL	20,983	

* Estimated percentage by United Way of Acadiana Dec 2017

Enrollment and Sample Evaluated

At the time of this report, 20,983 children are enrolled in the United Way of Acadiana’s DPIL program. The sample of children enrolled in the DPIL evaluation consists of all children whose parents elect to enroll their children birth to age five. Generally, the number of children enrolled at each year is approximately the same, (approximately 20 percent per year of age or 4,200 children/yr.). However, due to lack of funds, new enrollments were halted last year.

Of continuing concern is the low number of children included in the statistical analyses, which is determined by the number of parents that provide written consent to United Way for sharing individual academic data with the Picard Center. Since DPIL supplies books to children from birth to five, only those children who have exited the program and are enrolled in formal school are included in the study.

The current report reflects permissions from 1,262 participating school-age children, approximately 30 percent of the five-year-old group. Additionally, a moderate number of families have left the school’s catchment areas and are not reflected in current school records. Thus, the presumptive study group of 860 is considerably smaller than original 1,262.

The Picard Center’s evaluation faculty employed two techniques for increasing the number of students available for the study. First, as multiple years of children were studied, those entering kindergarten in the 2014-15 school year (92) being combined with children entering in the 2013-14 school year (136) yielding a total of 228 DPIL students from two previous years. Second, additional parental permission was sought from parents completing the online survey in addition to United Way outreach, yielding a usable DPIL group of 409 school-age students. Using a stratification strategy of school, grade, gender, race, and SES, an additional group of 612 comparison students were randomly selected. We elected to oversample 1.5 comparison students for every DPIL student. Oversampling of comparison students keeps the comparison group within a reasonable size but reduces the effect if a true but unknown DPIL student were part of the comparison group. Therefore, it is expected that the results of the study give insight into the impact of the DPIL program on current academic achievement.

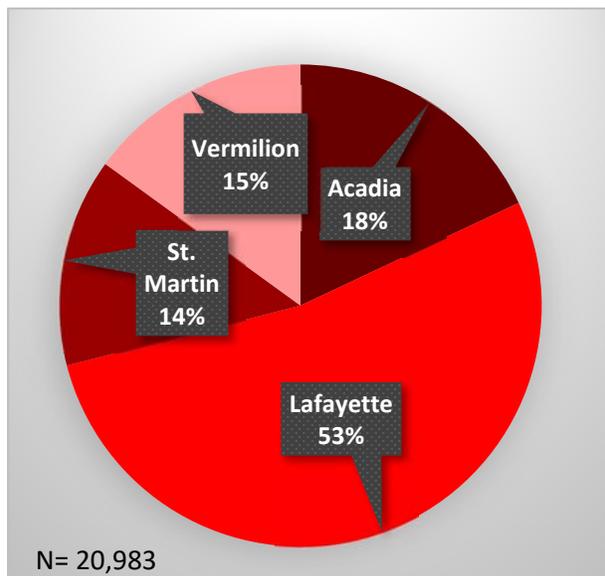


Figure 1. Sample Population by Region

Table 2: Kindergarten DIBELS Study Group (Counts)

	DPIL	COMPARISON	TOTAL
CURRENT	181	270	451
PRIOR	228	342	570
TOTAL	409	612	1021

DIBELS Assessment Results

The state of Louisiana adopted the DIBELS assessment of children’s readiness to read. DIBELS for kindergarten focuses on the pre-literacy skills of the ability to recognize letters and capacity to associate and manipulate sounds and letters. These skills become important indicators of reading so are formally assessed in twice in kindergarten (fall and spring).

In this study, the key variable is the percent of children achieving benchmark scores as defined by DIBELS (Dynamic Measurement Group, 2016). The composite score is a combined age-adjusted measure, which brings together multiple DIBELS scales into one. The pre-literacy measures represent a child’s ability to identify letters and letter sounds and to understand that groups of letters make words (nonsense word analysis). The composite score can be best understood as a percent achieving benchmark (Core) as it is a combination of scores, avoiding the pitfalls of misinterpretation of raw scores. Due to the relatively small number of DPIL students, DIBELS scores were reduced to two categories, Core (achieving Benchmark) and Below Benchmark (Intensive and Strategic Intervention).

Arguably, the *true* test for the DPIL program occurs in the first DIBELS assessment, fall of the kindergarten year. However, it is reasonable to believe that families continue to read DPIL books throughout kindergarten, which may compound the effect of DLIP and in-school instruction. Thus, differences were tested to determine the effects of both the fall and spring DIBELS assessment points. The results of the analyses lead researchers to report that DPIL students outperformed the comparison group on the spring DIBELS assessment – supporting the compound effect argument.

The research method anticipates that the two overall student groups (DPIL and Comparison) are substantially the same in the fall and spring assessments. In the fall, DPIL participants were slightly less likely, but not significantly, to be on benchmark at the fall DIBELS assessment (see Table 3) – leading to the conclusion that there was no difference in DIBELS performance. In the spring assessment, more DPIL students achieved benchmark than the comparison group, but again, the difference was not significant. These tests lead the conclusion that there was no effect of the DPIL program on the groups as a whole.

Table 3: Percent of Students on DIBELS Benchmark (Composite Score)

	DPIL	COMPARISON	
FALL	45.7%	48.5%	
SPRING	71.6%	70.1%	
N	409	612	1021

Chi-Square indicated No significant differences

Alternative Assessments

In past studies, academic effects attributable to DPIL have been measured solely based on DIBELS. The current report includes two additional early literacy measures that are considered preliminary as the sample sizes are very small.

Fountas & Pinnell

Since the last DPIL program evaluation, the Lafayette Parish School System discontinued the use of DIBELS assessment instrument and began promoting the use of the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System, an authentic set of tools to identify instructional and reading

levels.¹ Similar to DIBELS, the primary assessment measure is phonological awareness (first sounds). The initial average fall score indicates a significant difference between DPIL and comparison groups. However, these results are reflective of a single school district, and only ten DPIL students were verified in the dataset.

Table 4: Average Scores Fountas & Pinnell by Participation

	DPIL	COMPARISON	TOTAL
AVERAGE OF FALL SCORE	8.6	6.8	7.1
COUNT	10	46	56
T-test indicates no significant difference			

Third Grade LEAP

Extending the argument that there is a compound effect of DPIL and in-school teaching, the Picard Center received access to an additional data from the 3rd grade Louisiana Evaluation of Academic Performance (LEAP) test scores from two districts, a standardized assessment that has been implemented since 2009. This statewide, standardized LEAP test includes English language arts (ELA), math, science, and social studies. For this purpose, only ELA scores are examined for group comparisons. Again, only a limited number of DPIL participants were identified. Despite the small study group, the average scaled score of DPIL participants is significantly higher than the comparison group and suggests a long-term effect of the DPIL program on ELA performance.

Table 5: Third Grade LEAP ELA Scaled Scores by Participation

	DPIL	COMPARISON	TOTAL
AVERAGE OF ELA SCALED SCORE	757.5	733.4	745.6
COUNT	31	43	74
T-test indicates a significant difference $p < 0.05$			

Demographic Subgroup Effects

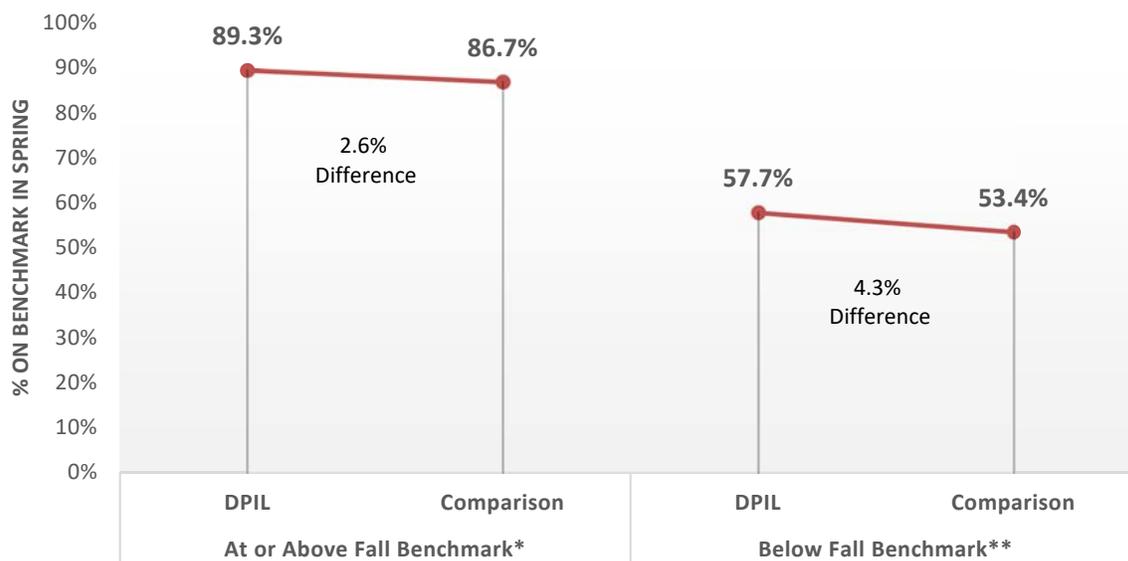
The point of demographic analysis is to identify differential effects by subgroups, indicating that some children may derive greater or less benefit than other groups. In this study, we examine the existence of DPIL effects attributable to school preparation, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (SES).

Spring DIBELS Assessment Based on Fall Assessment Level

The impact of DPIL on those students entering kindergarten below benchmark (fall DIBELS) is an important subgroup. The central question is, “Does DPIL enhance early literacy instruction in kindergarten?” This is determined by post hoc testing for interactions. The assessment category on the fall DIBELS is the best predictor of the spring assessment category. The existence of an interaction suggests that students who start outperforming lower, end up higher in the presence of DPIL. In effect, did DPIL students who failed to make benchmark in the fall do better on the spring assessment? That is to say, an inverse “Matthew Effect.” Figure 2 summarizes the percent of spring benchmark by group (DPIL and Comparison) and the benchmark level in the fall. Of those students on benchmark in the fall, 2.6% were more likely to be on benchmark again in the spring, a

¹ <http://www.fountasandpinnell.com/assessment>

significant difference. Of those students who were below benchmark in the fall, DPIL students were 4.3% more like to be on benchmark in the spring, again a significant difference. These results suggest that prior DPIL participation potentiates learning and promotes increased in benchmark attainment in both those who entered kindergarten with essential literacy skills and those with lower level skills.



N=1021, Chi-Square p= *<0.05, **<0.01, Cramer V = *0.03, **0.05

Figure 2: Performance on Spring DIBELS Assessment based on Fall Assessment Category

The next stage of academic analysis of DIBELS scores includes traditional demographic divisions. These fall DIBELS scores serve as the essential contextual starting point by which growth is measured at the spring DIBELS assessment point. For each subgroup, we identify significant differences between DPIL and comparison students. On fall assessment scores, subpopulations (gender, ethnicity, and SES) were examined and identified as statistical significance across DPIL and Comparison groups. Females, white students, and those students not in poverty achieved benchmark more readily than males, African Americans, or children in poverty.

Gender

In past and current DPIL evaluations using DIBELS, girls perform better than boys. On the fall assessment, female students in the **comparison** group were significantly more likely (six percent) to be on benchmark; by spring assessment, significantly more (five percent) female **DPIL** participants were on benchmark than **comparison** students. On fall DIBELS assessment, male **DPIL** and **comparison** students were equally likely to be on benchmark. By spring, male **DPIL** students were 5% more likely to be on benchmark than comparison students. For both male and female students, DPIL students grew more than their counterparts and thus were significantly more likely to be on benchmark in the spring of kindergarten.

Table 6: DIBELS Percent on Benchmark and Counts by Subgroups

	GENDER	DPIL	COMPARISON	CRAMER V
FALL	Female	46.0%	52.3%	0.06*
	Male	55.0%	45.0%	nsd
SPRING	Female	81.1%	76.2%	0.06*
	Male	68.5%	64.0%	0.05*
COUNT	Female	161	308	
	Male	178	300	
	RACE	DPIL	COMPARISON	CRAMER V
FALL	African American	44.3%	42.4%	nsd
	Euro American	47.0%	52.9%	0.06*
SPRING	African American	75.5%	62.9%	0.14**
	Euro American	73.5%	74.1%	nsd
COUNT	African American	106	210	
	Euro American	225	363	
	POVERTY‡	DPIL	COMPARISON	CRAMER V
FALL	In Poverty	44.2%	46.0%	nsd
	Not in Poverty	42.3%	51.2%	0.03*
SPRING	In Poverty	76.1%	66.2%	0.11**
	Not in Poverty**	75.3%	82.1%	0.09**
COUNT	In Poverty	174	276	
	Not in Poverty	111	201	

Chi-Square p= *<0.05, **<0.01, Cramer V = *0.03, **0.05, † Poverty determined by Federal Poverty Level

As previously described, DIBELS is the primary analytic measure of the current evaluation. Attainment of ‘Benchmark’ is used rather than the actual score to equate performance across school years and to overcome non-normal data distribution (skew). As a result of using the derived ‘Benchmark,’ the preferred statistical test is Chi-square, a non-parametric test, that when found to be significant, means the differences in the data are likely to be found across the population as a whole. However, chi-square is sensitive to sample sizes over 500. Since this study has some samples over 1,000, significant findings were tested for effect size with a Cramer’s V (Cramer, 1946). Cramer’s V is the measure of the strength of association among nominal level variables. While there are differing opinions on the interpretation of Cramer’s V, Zaiontz (2015, 2017) suggests that 0.15 indicates a weak association and 0.20 a medium strength association with two degrees of freedom. The Cramer’s Vs found in this study are often far below these levels. In this particular case, evaluators are dealing with multiple intervening variables as children enter school from different home environments and the possibility that some in the comparison sample were unknown DPIL participants. As such, it is reasonable to use the effect size as a guideline for more or less important factors. While it is a viable criticism of the finding that effect sizes are low, the results are worth considering despite the limitation.

The fall DIBELS assessment is the essentially the baseline by which growth is measured at the spring assessment period. First, learners in the comparison group were more likely to be on benchmark than those participating in DPIL. However, statistically significant interactions were observed in DPIL participants that traditionally outperform diverse groups of learners on measures of English language learning (females, Euro-Americans, and mid- to high-income learners); whereas, DPIL males, African Americans, and learners identified as low income are indistinguishable from their non-DPIL counterparts.

Gender

In past evaluations using DIBELS, girls have tended to perform better on the DIBELS assessment than boys, which reflects numerous findings, especially on tasks related to language (Jacobs et al., 2002; NCES, 2003). At the fall assessment, female students in the comparison group were 6% more likely to be on benchmark (a significant difference). By spring assessment, female DPIL students were 5% more likely to be on benchmark than comparison students. At the fall DIBELS assessment, males in both DPIL and comparison groups were equivalent on benchmark achievement. However, by spring, male DPIL students were 5% more likely to be on benchmark than their comparison counterparts. Both male and female DPIL students grew more than their counterparts, resulting in significantly more DPIL children on benchmark spring of kindergarten.

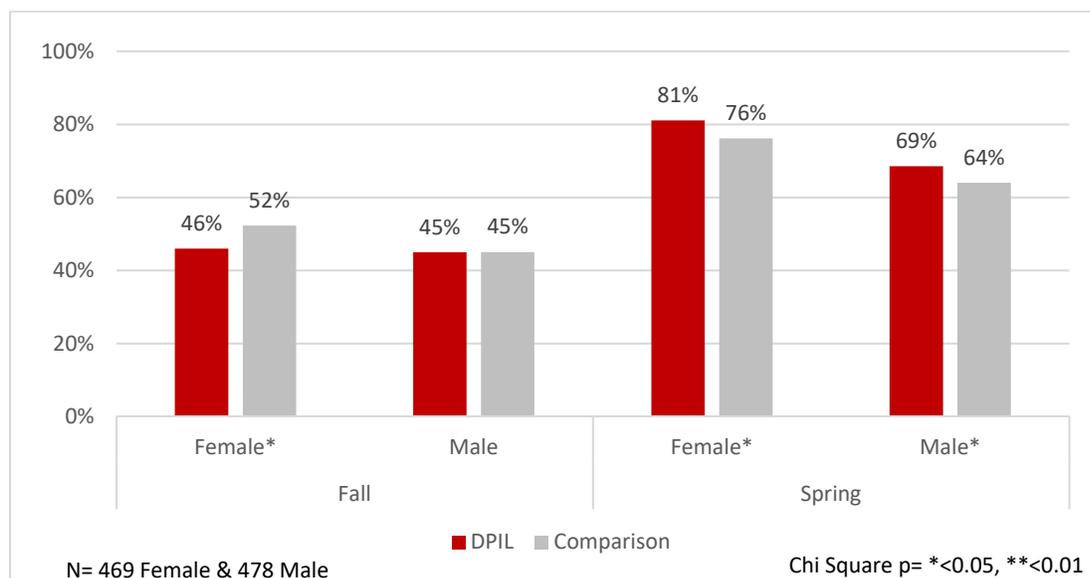


Figure 3: DIBELS Percent on Benchmark by Gender*

Ethnicity

In the sample, only two ethnic groups (African American (AA), Euro American (EA)) had sufficient representation to report results. At the fall assessment period, there was no significant difference between AA DPIL participants and AA children in the comparison group. However, by spring, DIBELS, there was a significant difference between AA students in the DPIL (75% on benchmark) and all comparison students (63% on benchmark), a difference of 12%. Among white students, comparison students were 6% more likely to be on benchmark than DPIL students, a significant difference. By the spring DIBELS assessment, white DPIL and comparison students were equally likely to be on benchmark. It is also interesting to note that black DPIL students match the percent on benchmark of the white students. This result indicates a step toward gap closure with white students with benchmark levels of 76% for DPIL and 69% for comparison students.

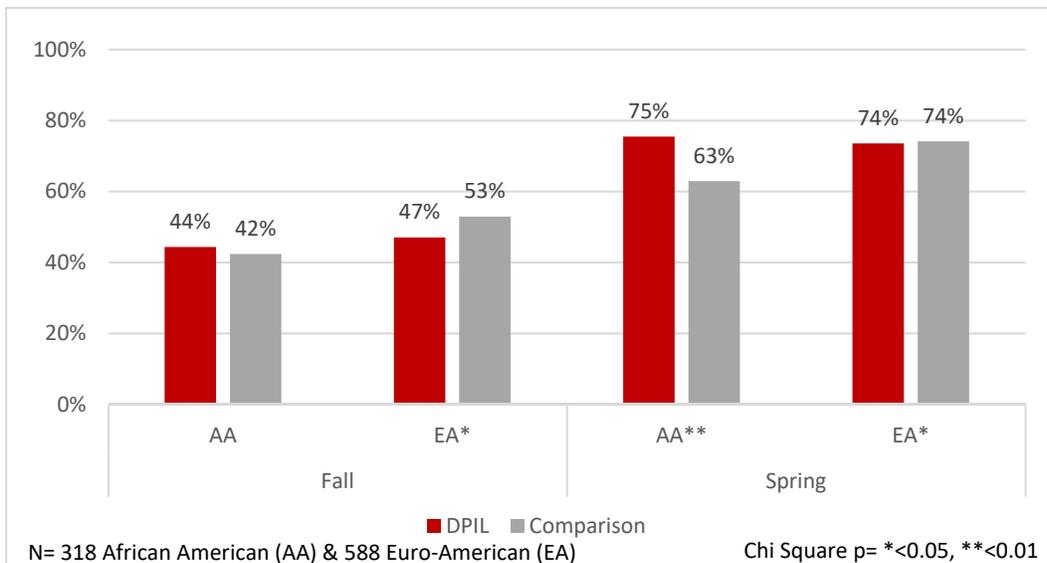


Figure 4: DIBELS Percent on Benchmark by Ethnicity*

Poverty

Students in poverty are defined as those that participate in the free or reduced-price lunch program (determined by the Federal Poverty Level). In the fall DIBELS assessment, there was no statistically significant difference between DPIL and comparison students. By the spring DIBELS assessment, DPIL students were 10% more likely to be on benchmark than comparison students. For students not in poverty, comparison students were statistically more likely to be on benchmark than the DPIL students in both the fall and spring DIBELS.

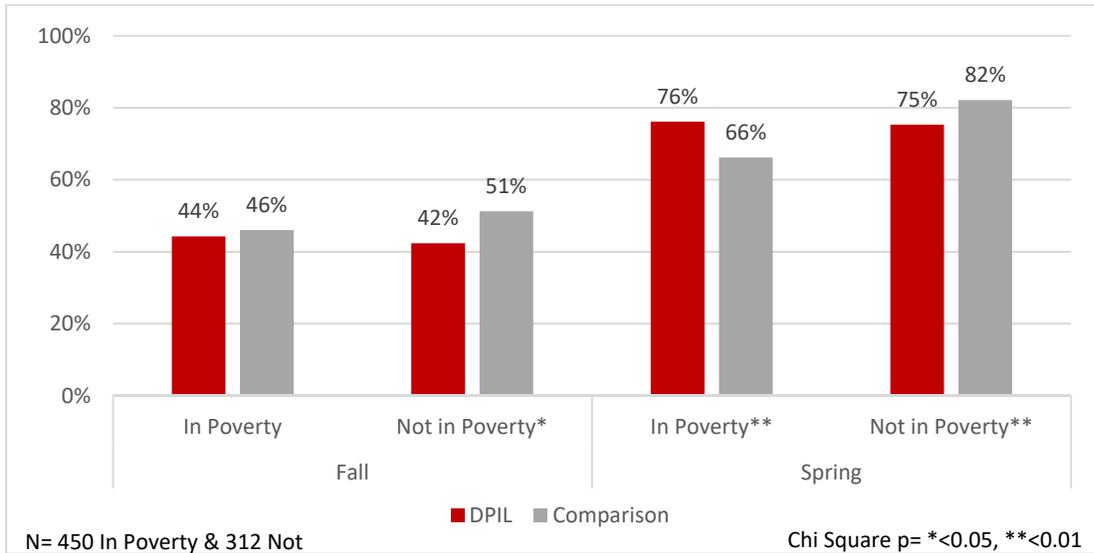


Figure 5: DIBELS Percent on Benchmark by Poverty*

Summary of Academic Analysis

While there were no significant differences found when comparing all DPIL student and the comparison group, a closer look at subgroups in the population led to some important results. The academic outcomes of the DPIL are consistent with past reports of the DPIL from the Picard Center (Dick, S.J., Burstein, K., 2016). DPIL students generally perform equal to or below on the fall DIBELS assessment. By the spring DIBELS assessment, there is significant evidence that DPIL students have equal to or are more likely to be on benchmark than the comparison group. The effect is most pronounced for subgroups traditionally at greater risk of literacy difficulties, i.e., males, African Americans, students in poverty, and students that failed to make benchmark in the fall. Overall, there is clear evidence supporting gap closure as a result of the DPIL.

Parental Survey

A survey of DPIL parents and guardians was designed to help evaluators understand parent use of and satisfaction with the program. Email invitations were sent for an online survey to approximately 9,000 parents and yielded 1,182 respondents. Due to parents with multiple children, the survey represents approximately 1,294 children currently receiving books. This section will look at the results of this survey. Most of the survey responses came from the population center in Lafayette Parish (71%). Approximately 12% of respondents were non-white, compared to 29% of the population. Of the parents surveyed, 89% completed at least some college with 59% receiving a degree. The median household income of respondents is \$50,000-\$74,999, whereas the median income of the population of the area is \$48,800.²

Table 7: Demographic Distribution of Survey Respondents

PARISH	PERCENT	COUNT
ACADIA	14%	172
LAFAYETTE	71%	706
ST. MARTIN	10%	127
VERMILLION	18%	218
OTHER	1%	17
		1240
ETHNICITY		
WHITE	88%	1080
BLACK	8%	92
OTHER	4%	53
		1225
EDUCATION		
HIGH SCHOOL	11%	139
SOME COLLEGE	29%	360
COLLEGE	38%	472
GRADUATE SCHOOL	21%	260
		1231
INCOME		
\$0-\$24,999	13%	154
\$25,000-\$49,000	22%	262
\$50,000-\$74,999	23%	276
\$75,000-\$99,999	22%	257
\$100,000 OR MORE	20%	233
		1182

²<https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/united-states/quick-facts/louisiana/population#map>

Survey participants offered zip code information to help us produce a more refined look at the locations for the survey respondents (see Figure 6). For the most part, survey respondents reflect the population distribution of the region. Most respondents are from the west side and south side of Lafayette and down into the Youngsville area. There is a heavy cluster of respondents in Breaux Bridge with some smaller groups in Carencro and Rayne. Smaller pockets of respondents from around Lafayette (central and north side) may seem less significant due to smaller population zip code geographic regions. Other pockets of respondents came from Broussard, St. Martinville, Scott, and Crowley. Unlike the previous reports, there are very few respondents from out of the Acadiana region.

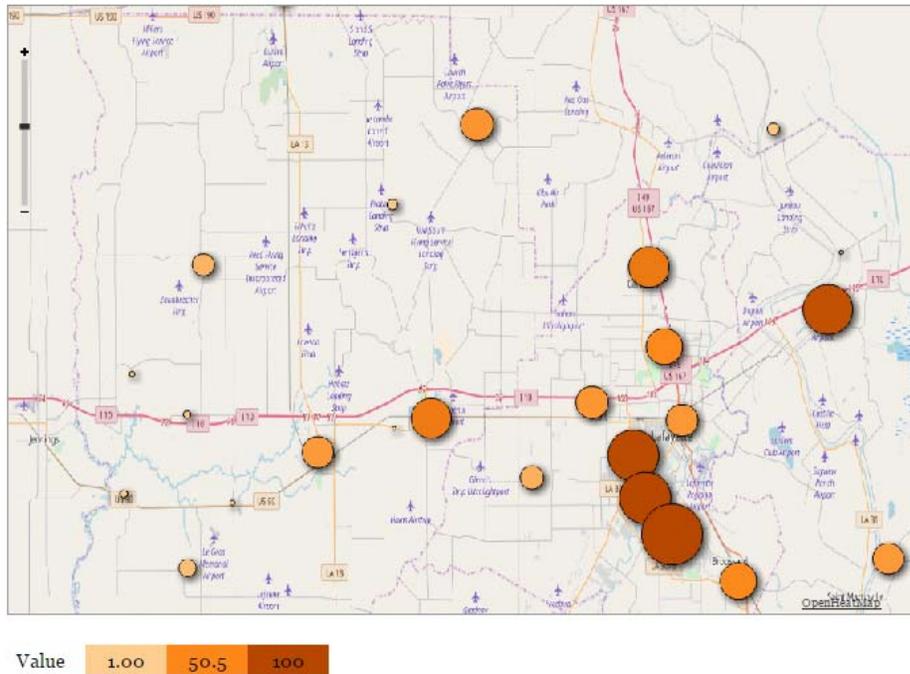


Figure 6: Zip Code Distribution of Survey Responses

An unknown program cannot be successful. Table 8 below breaks down how parents learn about DPIL opportunities generally and by race. The most common referral source for all recipients is through interpersonal channels, specifically friends or relatives (56%). United Way direct promotion efforts are the second most effective referral source (13%), especially to the African American community. Also, non-white respondents disproportionately learned about DPIL from a health professional. White parents receive information via mediated channels including traditional, social media, and visits to Dollywood more than other subgroups. Professionals including the health and education professionals informing parents account for slightly over 18% of referrals and are stronger for families in the non-white communities. As the region becomes more diverse, engaging professional communities may increase referrals in communities most in need of DPIL.

Table 8: How Did Parents Learn about the DPIL?

SOURCE	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER	ALL
FRIEND OR RELATIVE	57%	45%	49%	56%
INTERNET	8%	5%	4%	7%
NEWS OR ADVERTISEMENT	2%	1%	0%	2%
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS	10%	20%	22%	12%
EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS	6%	11%	8%	6%
SOCIAL GROUP OR AGENCY	5%	2%	6%	5%
UNITED WAY	13%	16%	12%	13%
N=	1055	89	51	1195

CHI-SQUARE (12) = 23.8, P = 0.022, CRAMER'S V = 0.10

Supporting a Love of Reading

Past researchers operated from the belief that children learned to speak and listen during their early years and *later* learned to read and write at school age. We now know that young children develop literacy-related abilities from infancy. Research has shown that parents can foster their children's emergent and early literacy development, along with a love of reading, from birth by creating supportive home literacy environments, expressing positive attitudes about literacy, modeling literate behaviors, and sharing literacy activities such as read alouds (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst & Epstein, 1994; DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994; Payne, Whitehurst, & Angell, 1994). Family literacy in this capacity, as promoted by the DPIL program, can positively impact children's academic achievement and future reading and writing success. Correspondingly, the analysis establishes that the DPIL program supports social learning and family literacy, enhances children's love of reading, and encourages and promotes children's literacy learning.

Time Spent

Results of the parent survey indicate that nearly 95% of the responding families read together either daily or a few days per week (See Table 9) since joining the DPIL program. It is encouraging that each of the families in the survey reported reading at least five to ten minutes a few times each week. It is likely that with modest United Way efforts, more families could move from "a Few Times" to "Daily." More encouraging, the families spend time talking about the books to their children, reinforcing the lessons of the reading.

Table 9: Parent-Reported Reading to Child by Days and Minutes

DAYS READING	5-10	10-20	20-30	>30	ALL
DAILY	56%	65%	65%	82%	63%
FEW DAYS A WEEK	36%	31%	33%	13%	32%
ONCE A WEEK	7%	4%	2%	2%	4%
LESS OFTEN	2%	0%	0%	2%	1%
N=	341	688	216	45	1290

Chi-Square(9) = 36.837, P = 0.000, Cramer's V = 0.0976

Parent responses also suggest that the DPIL program gives families opportunities to construct meaningful communications through storybook reading. Responses to the question, "In what way do you feel the books have encouraged reading with your child/children?" indicate that many parents believe that the social nature of the program has inspired them to read with their child/children more often than they had before joining the DPIL program and that they enjoy doing

so. Parents note that “...children love sitting with both Mom and Dad and listening to stories,” that DPIL provides many opportunities for “quality time” together and that receiving the books from the program “promotes family time” and “encourages reading” (see Figure 7).

Families further suggest that DPIL allows them to “bond with” their child/children in a social context, through these family literacy practices. Parents note that they have begun new “...bedtime story” routines with their children since beginning the DPIL program, allowing them more “time together” for bonding over books. Children “enjoy the one on one time” that the DPIL book readings provide and families “love” this aspect of the program. The social context of the DPIL read alouds provides a space in the homes of these families, which allows for rich conversation and meaning-making with books. These responses demonstrate that social interaction and engagement(s) with others, about literacy, is enjoyable as well as essential (Vygotsky, 1978).

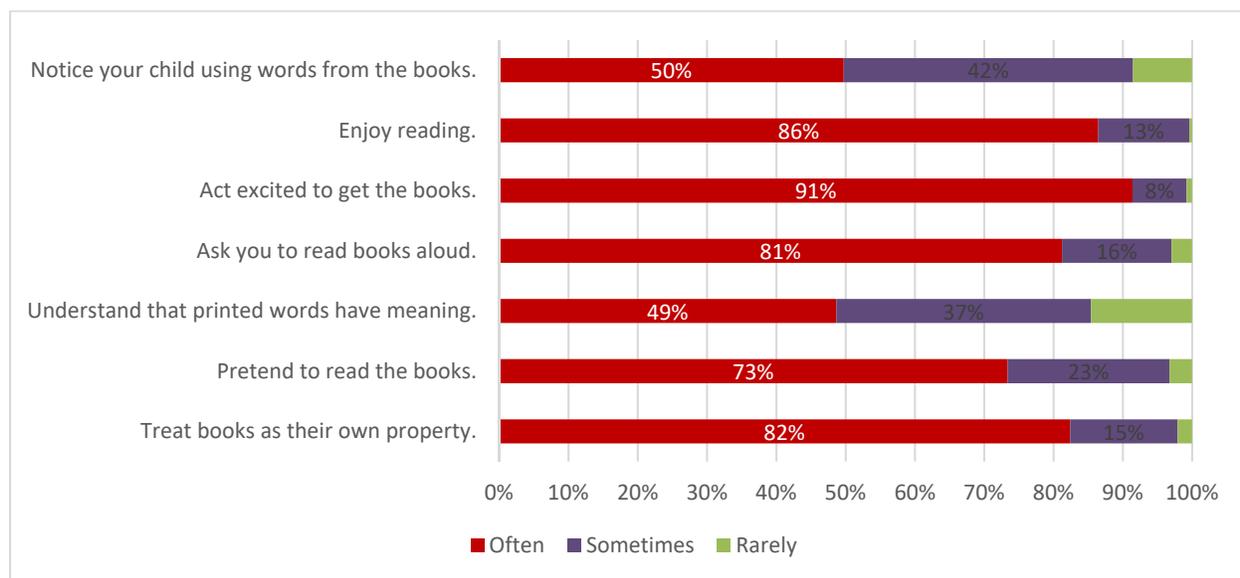


Figure 7: Does your child do the following?

The DPIL encourages a love for “reading time” by fostering an event activity around the books. Parents note that “the books are fun,” that children are extremely “excited to get the books in the mail,” and that they “really enjoy the books.” Other parents note that their children are “highly motivated to read the new books that come in the mail just for them” and that the program actively “promotes a love of reading.” The book becomes an event as children receive more—the gift of a book but also the gift of reading.

What Gets in the Way?

Children’s learning dramatically improves in the presence of family supports for literacy. In homes with a variety of books and families who read books together, children demonstrate higher literacy and higher general academic knowledge than those in homes that are less literacy-rich (Livingston & Wirt, 2003). If young children are to develop the motivation necessary to sustain them through the often difficult early stages of literacy development, they need to experience read alouds from a variety of books and be given multiple opportunities to engage in creative responses. (Reutzel & Cooter, 2015). Professional organizations such as the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

suggest that young children engage with books at least 15 minutes each day (1998), through which they learn book handling skills, language processes, academic vocabulary, phonemic awareness, phonics, and print concepts.

Numerous families have limited access to high quality, age-appropriate books for their children and often have inadequate time for literacy interactions. Moreover, while parents, families, and communities are interested in helping children develop as readers, they are often unaware of *how* to help. Because of these limitations and constraints, it is imperative that families have access to quality children's books, as well as to introductions to read-aloud strategies and opportunities for sharing in positive reading engagements with their children.

Information drawn from the open-ended parent survey questions reveal positive results, noting that most families surveyed (74%) indicate that they read between 10-30 minutes or more, each time they read together. However, approximately 70% of these parents indicated that "lack of time" is the main reason that family reading does not occur on a regular basis.

Conversely, approximately 22% of the parents suggested that "nothing" gets in the way of family reading time. Since beginning the DPIL program, these families note that they have prioritized family literacy and do not let outside distractions take away from this "very important" time and carve out at least 15 minutes every day for children's literacy development.

Modeling Literate Behaviors and Making Connections

Reading aloud allows parents and children to activate their prior knowledge (things they already know or have learned about), discuss topics from stories based on their experiences, ask questions actively, and discuss the text and illustrations, all of which enhances reading engagement as well as literacy learning.

Our survey data indicate that nearly 10% of responding parents noted that lack of reading time contributed to their child's/children's inability to engage with the books for sustained periods of time. Parents further noted that children often got "distracted" by other things, including "TV," "other children," "playing," and "family routines," and that they were sometimes disengaged with the books because they were not always at the appropriate reading level for the child.

Although overwhelming response, it is important to recognize the need for the books to be at developmentally appropriate for children. It also points to the need for parental information on engaging children with books and stories in meaningful and relevant ways.

It is the talk and responses surrounding reading activities that give them their power, allowing children to connect what is in the story with their own lives (Dickinson & Smith 1994; Snow, Tabors, Nicholson, & Kurland, 1995). Research describes these types of reading responses and conversations as "decontextualized language" (Snow, 1991). Parents and teachers can promote higher-level thinking by moving experiences in stories from what the children see in front of them to what they can see in their imaginations (International Reading Association & NAEYC, 1998).

Parents report a variety of literacy-encouraging behaviors (see 7) including asking the child to read or tell the story aloud (64%), asking questions about the story (93%), and discussing basic elements of reading (letters, sounds, punctuation, and sentences, 80%). At the same time, parents are going beyond the words to bring the books to life including hand and facial gestures (94%), involving the illustrations (98%), and fun art and play activities (67%).

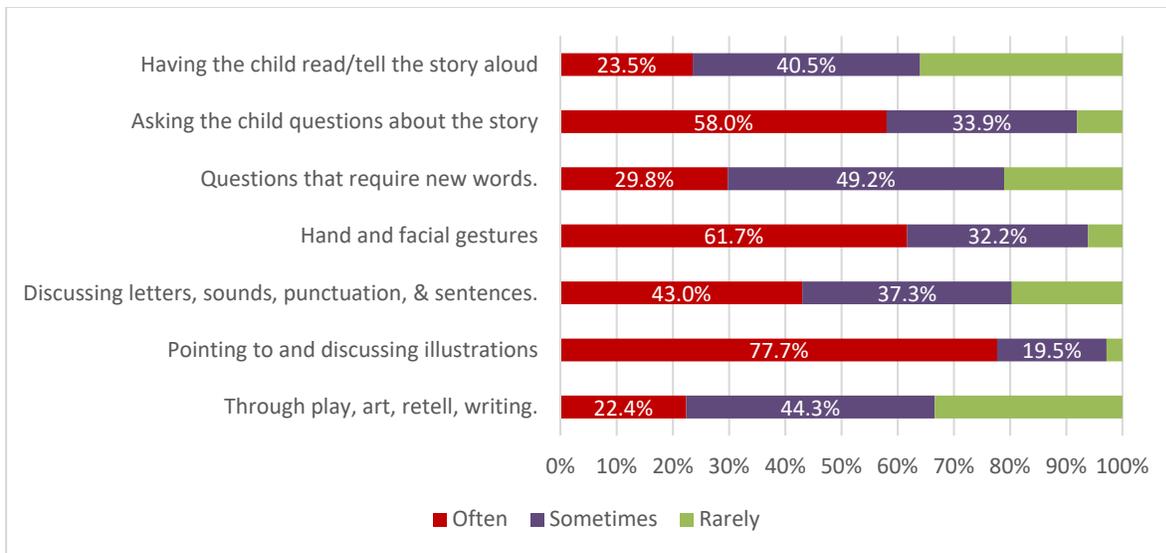


Figure 8: Which of these strategies do you use when reading with your child/children?

Parent responses to the survey reveal that nearly 59% of parents often give their children the opportunity to respond to the books through discussion, during or after reading engagements. The majority of these discussions often revolve around talking about the illustrations, asking the child questions about the story, and using hand/facial gestures as they read. Interestingly, nearly 97% of parents report that they feel their children’s responses to the books through playing, singing, and writing helps their reading development and approximately 63% suggest that these responses positively affect their child’s writing development.

It is encouraging that parents and children are spending quality time reading together and talking about the illustrations and the stories. Survey data suggest that parents benefit from simple strategies that promote a variety of reader responses, including play, art, story retell, writing, and music (singing and dancing). Although nearly 94% of parents indicate that they do *not* feel they need more support on ways to effectively read with their child, the data suggest otherwise.

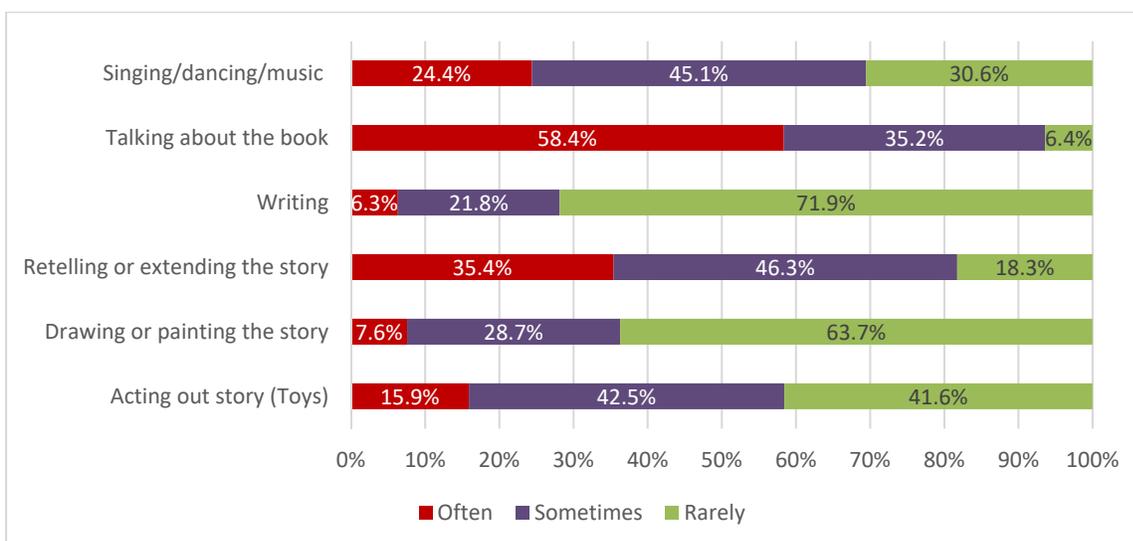


Figure 9: During or after reading a book with your child, do you provide the chance

Books in Relationship to the Child

Beyond providing a space for family literacy and engagement that encourages reading and prepares children for school learning contexts, the DPIL promotes parent modeling of adult literacy. These behaviors include how to hold a book, reading from left to right, drawing from the text and illustrations to make meaning, and making connections to stories in personal ways to enhance comprehension.

There are ways that a book can become more important to a child through a clear and personal relationship developed by repeated readings during which children related the characters, events or contexts to themselves. While 85% of the parents report that their children can relate the books to themselves or their family (see Figure 10), it becomes more challenging to the child to relate the books to other media such as book (66%), movies/television (62%) and their communities (55%). This kind of relationships make the books “real” to the child and reinforces learning.

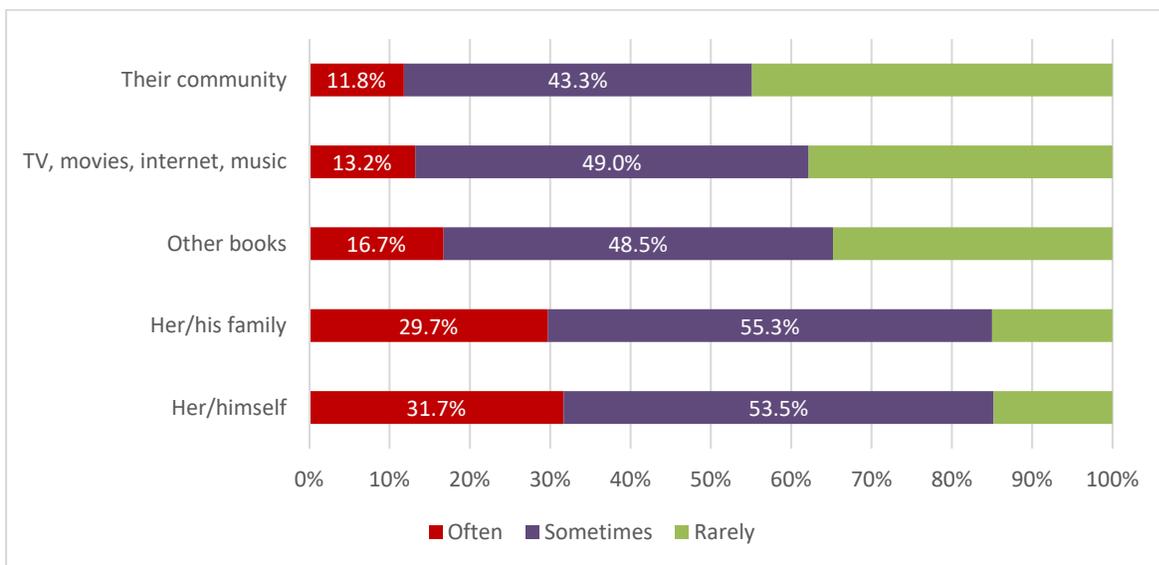


Figure 10: Does your child compare or relate the books

The book content may modify the relationship to the child. In open-ended comments, some parent reported concerns with the cultural content of the books. Direct questions (see Figure 11) indicate that mismatch of race to the reader is problematic (44% reported), as are cultural activities (54%), and community (60%). At the same time, other related issues such as interests (87%), and family (86%) were reflected in the books.

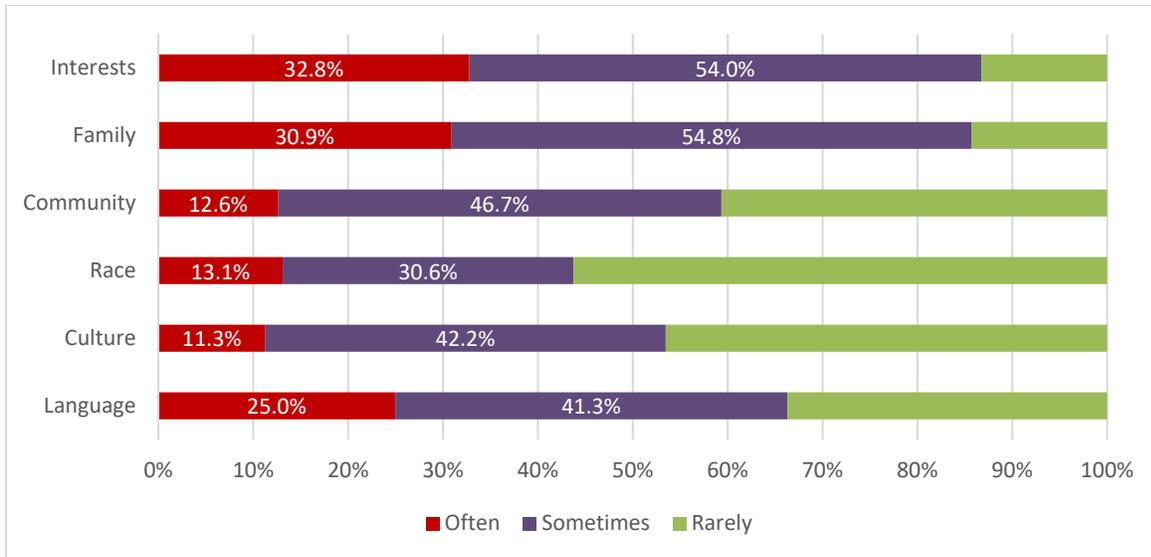


Figure 11: Does your child see reflected in the books provided

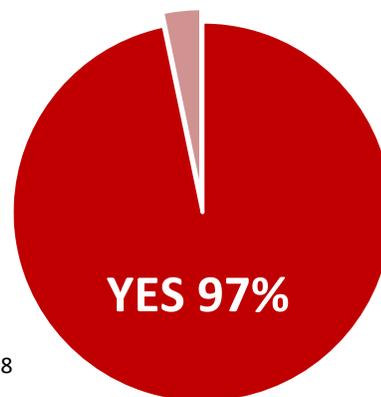
Parent’s Evaluation of DPIL

Parents believe, beyond providing a context for family bonding and fostering children’s love of reading, that the DPIL program encourages and supports early literacy learning in their young children. Parents also report that the program effectively prepares their children for learning in formal school.

Parents note that along with the social nature of reading engagements the books sent by the DPIL program “provide a variety of topics” that support children’s early reading development and future learning. Parent responses reflect educational terms as they report how the program promotes reading and facilitates children’s “language and cognitive development.” Parents attest that the DPIL program helps build children’s “fluency,” “comprehension,” “vocabulary,” “speech,” “listening,” and overall “reading development” and suggest that children “learn sight words,” “colors,” and “animals.” Furthermore, they report that the books help children to use their “imaginations” and prompt creative responses to stories as they read together. Nearly 97% of the responding parents note that because of the DPIL program, their children are better prepared for the literacy demands of kindergarten.

Rarely is an education program as universally supported by parents as the DPIL. The pie charts above and below summarize two key questions of parental satisfaction. Most of the remaining parents reported that their children were too young or just starting the program, with only approximately 3% reporting that their children were not well-prepared for kindergarten.

Parents report that their children are “thrilled” to receive their books each month, and eagerly anticipate the arrival of new books. Seventy-two percent of parents are extremely satisfied with only 1% of parents reporting problems or concerns. The



N=1008

Figure 12: My Child Was Better Prepared for Kindergarten with the

most common requests were to expand the program to other children, regions, or older ages. Some parents requested a greater variety of books, board books, or gender and cultural based selections. In addition to language-specific reading material.

Nearly 99% of the responding parents noted that they were either extremely satisfied or mostly satisfied with the books they received from the DPIL. Many also reported that they enjoyed the variety of books that allowed for a quality reading time. However, some parents did not feel their children were always adequately represented within the DPIL books regarding reading level, language, culture, race, community, family, and interests. Families similarly suggested more books for toddlers and board books for their emergent and early readers.

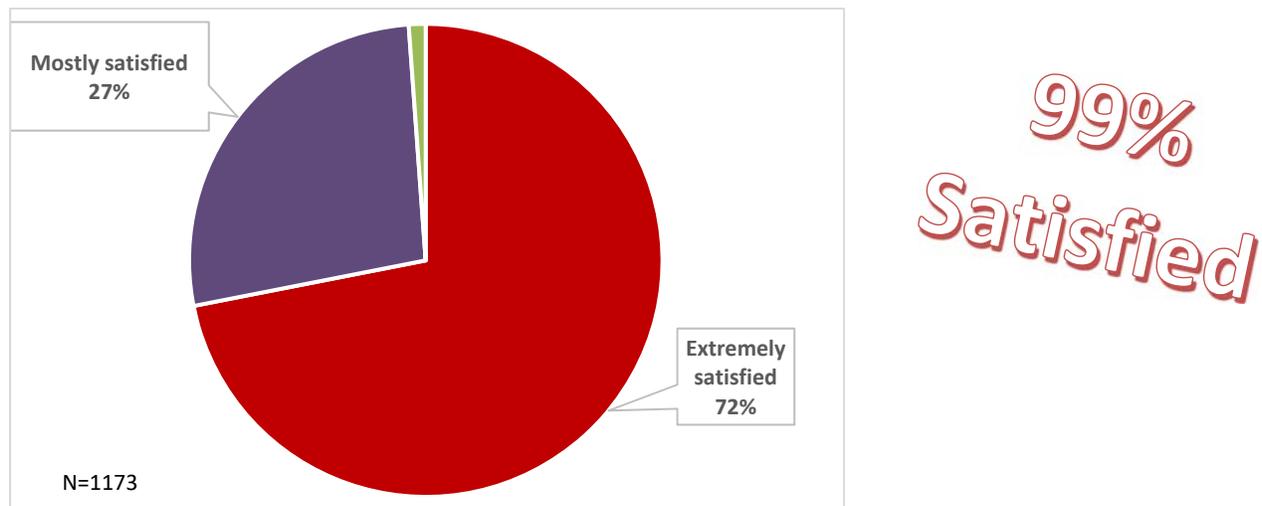


Figure 13: Parent Satisfaction

Final Thoughts

There is an implicit logic in the design and operation of the DPIL as follows. The number of words in a child’s vocabulary is a critical indicator of later academic success (Hart & Risley, 1985). Children’s vocabulary use at age three is a strong predictor of language skill and reading comprehension at age 9-10 (Biemiller, 2001). Further, vocabulary use in first grade can predict more than 30 percent of 11th-grade reading comprehension (Biemiller, 2006). Young children who are regularly read to have a larger vocabulary, higher levels of phonological, letter name, and sound awareness, and increased success when decoding words (Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002). The Dolly Parton Imagination Library provides high quality, developmentally appropriate directly to the homes of children birth to five each month. These books constitute the inspiration and means by which DPIL families engage in shared reading, now recognized to be the foundation of reading success (Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995).

Overall, the DPIL is an extremely effective program that both parents and children enjoy. Children, particularly under-resourced families benefit from the experience. Since the United Way of Acadiana’s adoption, young children have received thousands of high-quality books. While recommended improvements based on the qualitative analyses, suggestions are minor but may help United Way or other providers of the DPLI to serve their communities better. These suggestions include providing parents with information on developmentally appropriate strategies that promote reading engagement and literacy learning, continued promotion of the importance of

reading at least 15 minutes each day, and sending books that are age-appropriate and more reflective of the community.

The qualitative analysis of the data presented within this section of the report indicates that United Way of Acadiana is doing an extremely effective job of administering the DPIL program, ensuring that quality children’s literature delivered across Acadiana. Parents overwhelmingly agree that DPIL is an “amazing” and “wonderful” program that enriches the literate lives of their children and their families. Parents also note that this program strengthens parent-child attachment and motivates children to read. Accordingly, the program is *fun* and fosters a lifelong love of reading. Overwhelmingly, parents report that the DPIL not only effectively promotes family literacy and reading at home but simultaneously supports young children’s literacy and learning, thus prepares them for kindergarten. Parents also commend United Way for successfully supporting and administering such a valuable program.

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