



October 22, 2020

INFORMATION ITEM

SUBJECT: Book Distribution and Early Literacy Update

Strategic Plan Priority Area: Child Development and Family Functioning

Goal: All children birth through age 5 have high-quality, nurturing environments that ensure their learning readiness.

SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE

At the request of the Chair, First 5 California (F5CA) staff will update the Commission on the status of the book distribution program.

If we hope to prepare children for California's future and reduce achievement disparities, California must prioritize the early learning of its youngest residents. A wide body of research has demonstrated that exposure to books and positive parenting practices, such as being read to in the first three years of life, are critical to robust brain development. Many programs and organizations are hard at work in California to provide books and early literacy supports to young families in order to reduce the opportunity gap.

These programs align with the Governor's Parent Agenda by providing needed resources to families. They also support the California Surgeon General's goals to reduce the achievement gap. Early literacy programs encourage parent/child bonding which promotes resiliency and therefore provides positive mitigation against adverse childhood experiences, which is especially important in the middle of a stress-inducing pandemic and public health emergency.

Program Description and Administration

In February 2020, an on-line survey identified approximately 80 programs across 56 counties that support the recognized need to increase access to literacy engagement and book distribution programs. To leverage and grow capacity and distribute books to more children and families across the state, F5CA is providing a one-time infusion of books to counties for distribution to California's high promise children.

Approximately \$1.5 million from an existing contract with Fraser Communications is being redirected to book distribution for vulnerable children and families in California.

F5CA can administer this in a cost-effective and efficient way, resulting in a high-impact, low-investment program.

Program Goals and Scaling

A frequent challenge for distribution programs is scalability. The California Family Book Distribution Partnership will leverage currently active book distribution programs and existing Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL) affiliates. It is estimated that an additional 600,000 books will be distributed to 195,000 high promise families. Counties with no direct book distribution programs will now also receive books through this program.

There are 46 counties participating in the California Family Book Distribution Partnership. Of those, 36 are receiving direct shipments of books and 10 are expanding their Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL) program.

Counties receiving direct shipments of books: Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Contra Costa, El Dorado, Fresno, Glenn, Humboldt, Imperial, Kern, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Modoc, Mono, Monterey, Nevada, Orange, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Solano, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Tehama, Tulare, Ventura, and Yolo

Counties expanding DPIL: Del Norte, Inyo, Lake, Merced, Plumas, San Joaquin, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tuolumne, and Yuba

BACKGROUND OF KEY ISSUES

Impact of Reading on Child Development

Reading to children ages 0 to 5, as well as exposure to books, has been shown in a myriad of studies to have profound positive impacts on cognitive development that lasts well beyond a child's fifth birthday. Children who are read five books per day, for example, hear an estimated 1.2 million more words than children who are read only one book per day. This is commonly referred to as the "million-word gap," and significantly impacts a child's vocabulary development and school performance. Exposure to books in the home also has been shown to be strongly correlated to a child's educational performance and reading test scores. The more books a home has, the better a child does in school. Importantly, the effect of each additional book is highest in homes with the fewest books (the law of diminishing returns), and households in low socioeconomic categories. Additionally, positive early experiences exploring books fosters motivation to continue reading, builds a love of books, and promotes creativity and imagination.

Recognizing the importance of getting books into households with small children, many programs, both private and public, have developed distribution strategies designed to increase the number of books children have in the home. At the state level, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond has committed to partnering with F5CA on this effort. As part of the partnership, F5CA and the California Department of Education will jointly create a tip sheet for families to be packaged with the books for

distribution. The tip sheet will be bilingual and highlight the importance of early literacy and build on the Talk. Read. Sing.® campaign.

A local example of innovation around early literacy is the Little by Little (LBL) School Readiness Program, which is an evidence-based early literacy program for children at risk for literacy failure in Los Angeles County. The program actively engages parents and works to foster a family culture of consistent literacy practices. The effectiveness of the LBL program in significantly improving the school readiness was established via evaluation work. Across the ten currently funded LBL locations in Los Angeles County, the program serves approximately 60,000 participants annually for a cost of about \$52 per participant, per year. To minimize duplicative efforts, LBL leverages existing service provider networks (WIC) to distribute books and reading education information to families during the course of pre-existing service visits.

Equity and representation

Variety is as important as volume when it comes to books effects on cognitive development. Future book acquisition within this project will focus on bilingual titles and content that reflects and affirms the diversity of California's families and communities.

The Dollywood Foundation is partnering with F5CA on this effort through the coordination of a book infusion and by identifying books that meet California's unique needs. Books acquired through the DPIL will be bilingual and have been vetted and selected by a panel of early childhood educators with a focus on core human values: respect, acceptance, consideration, appreciation, listening, openness, affection, empathy, and love towards other human beings.

Wordless picture books have also been added to the selection. There will be a special wordless printing of "Three Brainy Birds Spreading the Word" book from the Talk. Read. Sing.® campaign. There are a number of benefits of wordless books, particularly when children or adults are learning a second language or in multi-language homes. Wordless picture books increase a child's vocabulary by encouraging the use of words they might not otherwise use. They also promote creativity and imagination by allowing a child to add to the story.

In addition, F5CA is purchasing a large number of Potter the Otter books from First 5 Santa Clara, all of which are bilingual.

Reading as a Protective Factor Amid COVID-19

While ensuring children have access to books is critical at any time, in the midst of a pandemic when many schools and child care programs are closed and stress among parents and children is heightened, it is more crucial than ever that children have access to books in their home, both from an early literacy and a caregiving perspective. To support healthy child development during COVID-19, children and youth need to maintain regular age-appropriate connections to important adults in their lives. Activities such as reading, where parents and caregivers spend one-on-one, quality time with children, will help protect children from the harmful effects of this, and any future, crisis.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND ACTION

In January 2020, the Commission was presented with examples of programs and organizations providing books and early literacy supports to young families. Presentations were given on four models used in several counties in California: Little by Little, Dolly Parton Imagination Library, Raising a Reader, and Reach Out and Read. In April 2020, the Commission engaged in a discussion around potential F5CA investment in a statewide book distribution program consistent with F5CA's mission. In May 2020, the Commission approved redirection of \$1.48 million from an existing contract with Fraser Communications to book distribution. An additional update to the Commission was provided on September 4, 2020.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

Approximately \$1.5 million in book and distribution costs will be funded through F5CA's current media contract with Fraser Communications.

ATTACHMENTS

None.