Building Early Literacy:
The Opportunity and the Challenge

Nonie Lesaux, PhD

Early Literacy Summit

Phoenix, AZ
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Meet Nathan & Shelby
Today’s Agenda: Three Guiding Questions

1. How did we come to a comprehensive plan for improving children’s learning outcomes?

2. What do we know about language and literacy development among diverse populations?

3. What are the key strategies for increasing the quality of children’s language and learning environments?
ARIZONA LANDSCAPE
AZ’s Children, 0–5

533,333 children ages 0-5

1 of 3 grow up in poverty
Preschool Enrollment

1 out of 4 enrolled in preschool
K-12 Population

1,840 public schools
K-12 Population: Free or Reduced Price Lunch

57.4% of students eligible for FRPL
K-12 Population: Immigrant Status

29% of students from immigrant homes
4TH GRADERS WHO SCORED BELOW PROFICIENT READING LEVEL BY FAMILY INCOME: ALL (PERCENT) - 2011

National KIDS COUNT
KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org
A project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation
4TH GRADERS WHO SCORED BELOW PROFICIENT READING BY ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER STATUS: ALL (PERCENT) - 2011

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The Demographics of Reading Difficulties

Linguistic Diversity
- enters educational settings w/ limited primary language
- cognitive advantages
- heightened meta-linguistic awareness

Growing up in Poverty
- acute & chronic stressors
- emotional & social challenges
- non-academic language environments
- health & safety issues

Under-resourced, segregated schools

Limited opportunities to develop advanced literacy skills

High rates of special education placement
Hehir, 2002; National Research Council, 2002; Samson & Lesaux, 2009

High dropout rates
Fry, 2010; Bloom & Haskins, 2010; Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011
Guiding Goals

Capitalize on our attributes & resources

Elevate the bar for children at every reading level

Increase individual & societal prosperity

Improving Reading in AZ
EARLY LITERACY
High-Speed Trains

A type of high-speed train was first introduced in Japan about forty years ago. The train is low to the ground, and its nose looks somewhat like the nose of a jet. These trains provided the first passenger service that moved at a speed of one hundred miles per hour. Today, they are even faster, traveling at speeds of almost two hundred miles per hour. There are many reasons that high-speed trains are popular.
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Skills-Based vs. Knowledge-Based Literacy Competencies: A Pervasive Gap

Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011

National Rate of Growth_Word Reading: 135 W-score Points
Sample Rate of Growth: 145 W-score Points

National Rate of Growth_Vocabulary: 45 W-score Points
Sample Rate of Growth: 60 W-score Points

Word Reading

National Average

Word Knowledge
Skills-Based vs. Knowledge-Based Literacy Competencies: A Pervasive Gap

(Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010)
Two Different Problem Spaces

SKILLS
- Concepts about print
- The ability to hear & work with spoken sounds
- Alphabet knowledge
- Word reading & spelling
- Fluency

KNOWLEDGE
- Concepts about the world
- The ability to understand & express complex ideas
  - Vocabulary
  - Oral language skills

Literacy: Reading Writing, Listening & Speaking
What does this mean for our learners?
Lesson #1: The Key Link Between Reading & Language Development

**Infant**
- Imitates Speech
- Vocalizes feelings (cry, giggle)

**Toddler**
- Looks through a book and retells the story

**Preschooler**
- Reads simple books
- Asks questions when listening to stories

**Early Elementary**
- Now learning 3,000 words/year

**2nd Grade**
- Reads independently and talks about what he reads

Has 250-350 words

Has 3000-5000 words

Now learning 3,000 words/year
Lesson #2: Thinking Past “Proficiency”

Oral & Written Language

Complex Ideas
Lesson #3: It Takes Strong, Supportive Interactions Across Contexts

Supporting Children’s Reading Development
- Rich conversations
- Varied experiences
- Personal stories
- Songs and rhymes
- Word play
- Reading & writing together
- Excitement around books & learning
KEY STRATEGIES
**Promoting young children’s language and reading**

| Program Design & Implementation for Impact | Ongoing Assessment of Children & Settings | Re-Defined Adult Capacity-Building Models | Language-Rich, Rigorous, and Engaging Curricula | Partnerships with families focused on language & learning |

**Turning the Page: Refocusing Massachusetts for Reading Success**
Ensure programs are delivered with sufficient intensity, duration, and scope (before scaling up)

- **Dosage**: Are we doing enough to change behaviors?
- **Implementation**: Are we really delivering the program or support?
- **Timing**: Are we preventing difficulties and raising literacy rates?
- **Key Ingredients**: What's working?

Key Ingredients: What’s working?

Dosage: Are we doing enough to change behaviors?

Implementation: Are we really delivering the program or support?

Timing: Are we preventing difficulties and raising literacy rates?
Conduct early, ongoing assessments of children’s language and reading, \textit{and} the quality of settings and services.
Increase adults’ capacity to assess and support children’s language and literacy development

- **Foster instructional leadership**
- **Ensure site-level, data-driven, continuous improvement**
- **Expand professional education**

Supporting Children's Literacy Development
A Comprehensive Curriculum Supports Quality Instruction

- Language-rich
- Rigorous
- Engaging
Principles of An Integrated Instructional Approach

Provides direct instruction

Instruction to Support Language, Literacy, and Social-Emotional Development

- Uses rich texts as a platform
- Cultivates Consciousness
- Makes Learning Social
- Uses consistent routines and language

Increase the quality of children’s language and reading environments across the many settings in which they are growing up, from birth to age 9

Program Design & Implementation for Impact
Ongoing Assessment of Children & Settings
Re-Defined Adult Capacity-Building Models
Language-Rich, Rigorous, and Engaging Curricula
Partnerships with families focused on language & learning
Expand and strengthen work with families across learning settings and within communities

- Link family engagement to children’s language and reading
- Strengthen family literacy ↔ community library connection
- Tap community leaders
Partnerships with Families

Put Children's Language & Literacy Learning at the Core!

1. Build relationships with *all* families
2. Share literacy progress
3. Encourage families to read, talk, and play
MAKING IT HAPPEN
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Making It Happen

I n t e n s i t y
- Time
- Money
- Human Capital

Raising Awareness

Changing Behaviors
Focusing Efforts: 3 Broad Types of Initiatives

1. Raising Awareness
   - Example: Book drive
   - Short-term Impact: Warm feelings, more books in the home
   - Long-term Impact: No evidence of effects on its own

2. Structural Changes
   - Example: Retention
   - Short-term Impact: Bump in achievement
   - Long-term Impact: Fade-out of academic gains; social problems, increased drop-out,

3. Capacity Building
   - Example: High-Quality PreK experience
   - Short-term Impact: Bump in achievement, higher vocabulary
   - Long-term Impact: Reduced rates of SpEd, higher achievement
Structural v. Capacity-Building Levers: A Cautionary Tale

Child experiencing academic or behavior difficulties

**School Response**
- Grade retention

** Likely Outcome**
- Limited effects
- Long-term costs

**School Response**
- Provide targeted, timely intervention

**Likely Outcome**
- Strong effects
- Long-term benefits
### Promoting young children’s language and reading

| Program Design & Implementation for Impact | Ongoing Assessment of Children & Settings | Re-Defined Adult Capacity-Building Models | Language-Rich, Rigorous, and Engaging Curricula | Partnerships with families focused on language & learning |

**Summing Up:** A Complex Enterprise Demands a Comprehensive Process

**Turning the Page:** Refocusing Massachusetts for Reading Success
Acknowledgements

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Thank you!