



Portland Early Literacy Collaborative: An Early Reading First Project



“My daughter has progressed in her learning regarding letter/sound recognition, rhyming, interest in books, and her ability to summarize a story. Her abilities exceed what I expected a 3 1/2 yr. old to be able to do.”

What is Early Reading First?

Early Reading First is a U.S. Department of Education program that supports the development of early childhood centers of excellence that focus on all areas of development, especially on oral language, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print awareness all skills that prepare children for continued school success. The project serves English language learners and children from low-income families. Teachers in early childhood centers are provided with intensive training and coaching to help them teach the children in their classrooms.

Where is the Portland Early Literacy Collaborative project taking place?

There are **130 children in 9 classrooms in 5 child care centers** around Portland that are receiving high quality instruction from teachers implementing the *Opening the World of Learning (OWL)* curriculum and receiving intensive coaching and mentoring. There is a comparison group of 63 children in 4 classrooms in 4 child care centers that are not using the OWL curriculum and not receiving training but are subjected to the same outcomes measures described below.

Why and how is the Portland Early Literacy Collaborative being evaluated?

Each Early Reading First grantee is required to have an evaluator. Glenwood Research is a local evaluation and research company. All staff including the Principal Investigator, Evaluation Manager, and data collectors has experience working in the early childhood field and are able to can give a unique and realistic perspective on the data received. The evaluation provides continuous feedback provides quality assurance, ensures that the intervention is being implemented and measures and tracks child, parent, teacher, and coach outcomes. In the evaluation, we measure children’s level of vocabulary, child’s ability to express themselves, and child’s knowledge of letters, beginning sounds, print and rhyme awareness. We also look at the quality of the classroom and the literacy environments.

What children are involved in the Portland Early Literacy Collaborative?

- ❖ 46% of the children are female; 54% are male
- ❖ 63% of the children speak English only
- ❖ 20 % of the children speak English plus another language
- ❖ 17 % of the children are English Language Learners (there are 22 different languages spoken)

Did children improve over time?

- ❖ Yes! The score reflecting the amount of vocabulary a child understands increased by 9 points in the Early Reading First centers after a year of intervention compared to an increase of only 4 points among children in the comparison group. **This translated into knowing more words and understanding more when entering kindergarten.**
- ❖ Yes! The score reflecting the ability of the child to express themselves increased by 7 points in the Early Reading First centers after a year of intervention compared to an increase of only 1 point among children in the comparison group.
- ❖ Yes! At the very beginning of the year, children in the Early Reading First centers knew 6 letters. **At the end of the year the children knew 16 letters, an increase of 10 letters.** The comparison group only increased 5 letters over the same time period.

Did the quality of the classrooms improve over time?

- ❖ Yes! Areas of the classroom that relate to **language and reasoning**, including the number and quality of books, communicating with children, and helping children develop reasoning skills **increased substantially from 4.1 to 6.1 points (out of a maximum of 7)**. This puts the Early Reading First centers well above the average child care center in Maine (which scores at 4.5 out of 7).

Did the way teacher interact with children around literacy change?

- ❖ Yes! Teachers in the Early Reading First classrooms were more likely to speak to children in ways that introduce new words, concepts and linguistic structures.