



ReadBoston Early Words Campaign in partnership with Staples

OVERVIEW

One of the most important predictors of reading success is the strength of adult communication with children. Frequent verbal communication bolsters vocabulary and improves reading comprehension. Talking to young children helps them develop strong language and communication skills, which enables them to express themselves, listen, learn, read and socialize better.

The window to stimulate brain development closes quickly. In the first three years of life, the brain grows from 25% to 90% of its adult weight. Brain development is largely a function of stimulus. The more stimulus babies and young children get in terms of being read and talked to, the greater their capacity for language and literacy.

Some recent research has indicated that low-income parents, on average, speak to and dialogue with their children much less than higher-income parents, and they speak to them about a narrower range of topics using smaller vocabulary. The result: the average low-income parents' child has heard 30 million fewer words than his/her higher income peers by the time he/she is three years old.

ReadBoston has recognized the need to start young, in fact to start at birth, with literacy efforts. We are very grateful to our partner, Staples, for their commitment to this project. Some local leaders feel that ReadBoston was enormously helpful in bringing attention to the third grade reading metric and its importance for student success. The Early Words Campaign is an opportunity to do the same thing for the importance of strong verbal interaction with very young children.

THE PLAN

ReadBoston plans to initiate the Early Words Campaign to increase adult interaction with children through talking. The proposed goals of the campaign are

- to increase awareness of the importance of talking with young children;
- to identify and model practices that will encourage the much-needed verbal exchange;
- to provide high-dosage supports to specific at-risk populations.

GOAL ONE:

MULTI-PRONGED PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

A multi-pronged public awareness campaign is planned. ReadBoston efforts include partnering with a media outlet to air public awareness spots featuring local celebrities and neighborhood leaders. Our goal is to go both wide and deep with the Early Words Campaign. Through the public awareness campaign, we plan to reach the general public without regard to income, race and age. This will allow us to bring the message to everyone, including policymakers, educators and funders. The targeted effort with specific populations will directly benefit children and families that makeup the achievement gap in Boston.

GOAL TWO:

IDENTIFY AND MODEL PRACTICES

The second goal, to identify and model practices, will target both practitioners and parents. Trainings and seminars, in both large and small groups, will be held for practitioners to support their efforts with parents. ReadBoston staff will also access parent groups and gatherings to work directly with them. Collateral materials that will promote adult/child communication will aid our efforts with parents. Examples include bibs, sippy cups, towels, etc. that suggest, through imprinted messages and designs, appropriate questions that adults can use to begin conversations with their small children.

GOAL THREE:

HIGH DOSAGE SUPPORTS TO SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

ReadBoston plans to target specific populations, most likely to include a housing development(s) and others, with an intensive intervention. This effort, planned for a minimum of 20 weeks, would include multiple opportunities for diverse connections with the specific population. ReadBoston's research has indicated that the dosage needs to be high and the points of contact varied. An evaluation of this initiative will help ReadBoston to enhance and expand the model over the three years and include strategies for sustainability and touchback.