

Combination of early reading programs helps with kindergarten readiness

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Tiana Rollinson Henry, a community engagement specialist at Cincinnati Children's, shares a book with a child. Credit: Cincinnati Children's

A study published in the journal *Pediatrics* shows the combination of two early reading programs had positive effects on preschool students

entering kindergarten in Cincinnati Public Schools over a three-year period.

The two early reading programs are: Reach Out and Read, through which children receive a new book and guidance about reading at home during well-visits from newborn through age 5; and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which mails new [books](#) to the child's home once a month from birth through age 5. Each of these is well-established at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and across the nation.

"With this early study, we suggest that when combined and sustained, these two programs have the potential for effectively supporting the development of preliteracy skills of large populations of at-risk children, improving kindergarten readiness, and, ultimately, success in [school](#) and life," said Greg Szumlas, MD, of the Division of General and Community Pediatrics at Cincinnati Children's.

"I can't stress enough to parents the importance of reading with your child, starting at birth," Szumlas added. "Just a few minutes a day, reading aloud, and interacting with your child over books can make a huge difference in helping them prepare and be ready for kindergarten."

Cincinnati Children's initiated the unique combination of the two programs in July 2015 with the participation of 23 [health clinics](#) throughout the city and funding from Every Child Capital. Researchers analyzed the results of the kindergarten readiness assessment (KRA), a standardized state test for all children entering kindergarten at a [public school](#), of program participants over the course of three [school years](#) - 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019.

Over 3200 children participated in the combined program during the three-year period. For a sample of participants, scores on the kindergarten readiness assessment were analyzed and compared to the

school district average. Results showed an increase of 15.4 percentage points between the 2016-2017 school year and the 2018-2019 school year for students participating in the program, while the school district average increased by only 3.8 percent during this same time period.

"Even though the percentages for the entire district were higher than our program participants, the increase in percentage points over that three-year period represents significant progress and improvement," Szumlas said. "This early study suggests that pediatric health care providers are positioned to influence the literacy developmental trajectory of [children](#) long before they start school and that literacy promotion should be considered a routine part of primary care."

Lisha Lungelow, a Cincinnati Children's social worker in the Pediatric Primary Care Clinic, enrolled her son, Jordan, in the Reach Out and Read/Imagination Library program when he was 13 months old back in 2016.

"When he came to me, he didn't really have any exposure to books," Lungelow said. "Reading was a way for us to connect and bond. He loved getting the books in the mail and seeing his name on them."

When Jordan entered kindergarten last year, Lungelow believed he was ready and credits his exposure to books through the combination [program](#).

"When he was in [kindergarten](#), I went to grab a book for us to read," Lungelow said. "Jordan took it from me, and he read the book to me. I can't even explain the joy that brought me. It was really great."

More information: Gregory A. Szumlas et al, A Combined Reach Out and Read and Imagination Library Program on Kindergarten Readiness, *Pediatrics* (2021). [DOI: 10.1542/peds.2020-027581](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-027581)

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