



**House Education Committee Informational Meeting
Imagination Libraries & Student Journalism Protections
April 29, 2024, 523 Irvis**

10:00am **Call to Order/ Opening Remarks**

Committee Member Introductions

10:05am **Panel 1: Imagination Library (House Bill 2025- Rep. Hanbidge)**

Honorable Liz Hanbidge
61st Legislative District

Dr. Susan Banks, Deputy Secretary for Libraries and State Librarian
Office of Commonwealth Libraries, PA Department of Education

Ms. Norrine “Nora” Briggs, Executive Director (North America) *
The Dollywood Foundation

Ms. Nancy De Los Rios, Board Member *
Imagination Library of Lackawanna County

10:40am **Panel 2: PA Student Journalism Protection (House Bill 1309- Rep. Shusterman)**

Mr. Ben Shapiro, Editor-in-Chief
Conestoga High School Paper, and Member of New Voices PA

Ms. Cyndi Hyatt, State Director,
Journalism Education Association, and Member of New Voices PA

Mr. Aaron Fitzpatrick, M.Ed., MJE, President
PA School Press Association, and Member of New Voices PA *

11:20am **Closing Remarks/Adjournment**

Testimony Submitted:

Jane M. Blystone, MJE, PhD

Helen Fallon, Former director, Honors Program Professor Emeritus
School of Communications, Point Park University

Hannah Shumsky, Teacher, Adviser, and Former Student Journalist
PA New Voices

Cole Skuse, Student Journalist, Freedom Area HS
Carnegie Mellon University

Ms. Kelli Thompson, Government Relations
PSEA

The Pennsylvania School Press Association Board of Directors

The Press Club of Western PA

All times are approximate and include time for questions.

**Indicates participating via TEAMS*



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**House Education Committee
Public Hearing on
Home-Based Early Literacy
April 29, 2024**

Good morning, Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Topper, and distinguished members of the House Education Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Pennsylvania Department of Education's (PDE) role in administering a statewide implementation of a home-based early literacy program for Pennsylvania. My name is Susan Banks, and I serve as the Deputy Secretary for the Office of Commonwealth Libraries (OCL) and State Librarian for the Commonwealth.

Background

Early literacy is a complex and thriving ecosystem in the Commonwealth. This ecosystem includes early learning centers, early literacy service providers, and every public library – most of which are already supported by state funds but which, currently, are also dependent on local charitable contributions in order to survive. These are precious and professional resources that can lead this effort and support any future changes.

The Office of Commonwealth Libraries has engaged in conversations with early literacy providers and advocates to understand the potential challenges and opportunities to implement this program statewide. Although there are successful implementation models to learn from, there are a number of considerations that must be examined before Pennsylvania resources are invested in any solution to produce outcomes in improved early literacy.

We believe it is prudent to explore all options designed to achieve the same ends. Investing heavily in a single program without recognizing the considerable investment and expertise in early literacy already in Pennsylvania is missing an opportunity to collect and leverage the strength of our Commonwealth's resources. Creating connections with the existing early literacy support structures in every community will provide more robust and long-lasting impacts in improving literacy outcomes for all Pennsylvanians from birth to age 5.

Context for a Program for Early Readers

PDE and OLC is supportive of programming that supports access to reading-level appropriate literature for Pennsylvanians ages 0-5, with an emphasis on getting books directly to children and their families to keep and collect. In the past, OCL had partnered with private and corporate funders like Verizon to offer PA One Book Every Young Child, a program that built supportive programming and services and leveraged Pennsylvania writers and publishers to connect existing early literacy providers. That program was designed to create a community-level fabric of support and enrichment for home-based literacy.

Studies have shown that literacy outcomes for children improve when they read at home and that parents are more likely to reinforce good reading behaviors with children when there are books in the house. Recent studies, as well, have indicated that book-delivery services, such as the Imagination Library, need to be long-term to truly impact literacy in at-home environments.

Early Literacy Landscape in Pennsylvania

The early learning landscape in Pennsylvania is a dynamic and multi-faceted network designed to support the development and early education of young children across the state. This ecosystem encompasses a variety of providers and organizations, each playing a role in fostering early literacy and preparing children for future academic success. Including:

Early Learning Centers and Childcare Providers: Pennsylvania is home to 5,777 childcare providers serving children ages 0-5, which include 4,025 childcare centers, 1,140 family childcare homes, and 612 group homes¹. These providers serve as foundational elements in the early learning landscape, offering structured environments where children under five can develop essential skills.

A key aspect of ensuring quality in these settings is the Keystone STARS program, which stands for Standards, Training/Professional Development, Assistance, Resources, and Supports. Keystone STARS is an initiative of the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL). It aims to improve the quality of early learning environments and promote positive outcomes for young children. The program encourages continuous quality improvement through standards that promote the best practices in early education. This system not only aids parents in identifying quality care but also provides incentives for providers to improve their services.

Public Libraries: With approximately 670 outlets, public libraries in Pennsylvania are pivotal in promoting early literacy. Public Libraries provide free programming that includes storytimes and other events designed to introduce young children to reading, as well as engage them in early learning activities that develop their concentration, social skills, communication skills, and encourage imagination and creativity. Library programs such as 1000 Book Before Kindergarten help develop a love of books and reading. Statewide initiatives such as Family Place Libraries and Play & Grow provide training and resources, ensuring library staff have a foundation of early childhood development and social emotional learning as they develop programs for children ages 0-5. Libraries also serve as community hubs, offering access to parenting materials, educational resources, and serving as a vital link between children and lifelong learning.

Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRCs): Early Learning Resource Centers serve as centralized hubs for families and early education professionals to find information and access services supporting high-quality childcare and learning programs. ELRCs help families identify optimal childcare options, connect them with subsidies, and guide childcare professionals in enhancing program quality. This network of centers ensures families have access to the resources needed to

foster children's development and support parents in maintaining employment.

Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and Pennsylvania Head Start: These programs are specifically designed to support children from low-income families, ensuring they receive high-quality early education that emphasizes school readiness. Programs like Head Start not only focus on the child's education but also engage parents and communities to support the child's learning environment at home and in educational settings.

Home Visiting Programs: Programs such as Early Head Start offer home-based services that support family involvement in early childhood education. These programs deliver personalized guidance to parents, helping them to understand and stimulate their children's development from an early age.

Parents as Teachers: This program specifically focuses on empowering parents to be their children's first and most influential teachers. Parents as Teachers provides parents with the tools and knowledge to support their child's early development and learning, reinforcing the home as a primary learning environment.

Family Literacy Programs: Family literacy programs funded by the Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Education Grant Program established in Act 143 of 1986 include four instructional components: adult education, parent education, interactive literacy activities, and age-appropriate early childhood education. Programs provide instruction to participating adults and children that is research based and standards aligned, using best practices to support adults to improve their literacy skills, children to enter school prepared to learn to read, and parents/caregivers to help their children succeed in school. There are currently 15 family literacy programs funded by the grant program.

Foundations, Grant Makers, and Large Agencies: In Pennsylvania, the landscape of educational support is enriched by a variety of foundations, grant makers, and large agencies that play significant roles in advancing early literacy and educational opportunities by funding programs, supporting policy developments, and ensuring that educational initiatives have the resources needed to succeed. They contribute significantly to the ecosystem of support that nurtures early literacy and development across the state. Some notable organizations include:

United Way of Pennsylvania: This organization plays a pivotal role by advocating for educational policies and supporting programs that directly affect early childhood education. United Way of Pennsylvania works to ensure that all children have access to quality early learning experiences, which are essential for later success in school and life. They support initiatives that improve access to high-quality childcare and educational programs, aiming to enhance the overall effectiveness of early learning services throughout the state.

The William Penn Foundation: This foundation is committed to improving educational outcomes by supporting high-quality early childhood education among other civic initiatives. They have a long history of investing in educational programs that enhance public spaces and the cultural ecosystem, all of which contribute to a well-rounded educational environment for children in Pennsylvania.

The Pittsburgh Foundation: One of the oldest and largest community foundations in the United States, The Pittsburgh Foundation provides grants that focus on improving the quality of education in the public sector, including significant support for early childhood education initiatives that benefit underprivileged communities.

The Erie Community Foundation: Serving the Erie region, this foundation aims to improve quality of life through strategic grantmaking. Their focus includes supporting educational programs that address immediate community needs and foster long-term growth.

Coalitions and Advocacy Groups: Early childhood education is an important foundation for a child's future success. It not only helps children develop cognitive and social skills but also prepares them for a lifetime of learning. That's why it's heartening to see coalitions all over the Commonwealth coming together to support and advance early childhood education and policies. These organizations are key partners and advocates for effective policies, increased public awareness, and greater direct support that families need to ensure the well-being and education of children. Through their efforts, they are helping to ensure that every child has access to high-quality education and care, setting them up for a bright future ahead. However, this ecosystem faces challenges such as funding and resource allocation, particularly the need for sustained financial and human resources at the local level.² Additionally, the early literacy ecosystem in Pennsylvania, while comprehensive, is facing challenges that impact families, especially when it comes to accessing quality early learning centers. One of the significant hurdles is the geographical and economic barriers that leave a substantial number of children without access to early childhood education.

Resources Necessary to Establish a Program for Early Readers

There are a number of common elements across successful programs for early readers, from the administrative to the logistical. Some of these resources are provided by or available through Commonwealth agencies, while others emerge from community-based organizations and relationships.

- Establish administrative oversight and responsibilities for executing the program (PDE, Statewide, County levels)
- Create program parameters for participating individuals and organizations and develop

- marketing/promotion for program (OCL and Coordinators)
- Connect with existing early literacy and learning programs and providers (OCL and OCDEL)
 - Establish distribution methodology for books – Imagination Library and/or other solution (OCL and Statewide Coordinators)
 - Build support services and programs (OCL and Partners)
 - Evaluate the impact of the program over the course of 5 years, tracking participants' experiences as they age out of the program (PDE Research, Higher Education partners)

Current Numbers:

- Number of children under the age of 5 in PA (2024): 688,571
- Projected top number of children likely to participate: (65%) 447,571 (Based on the Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL) program projections:
<https://imaginationlibrary.com/usa/cost-estimator/>)
- Total currently enrolled through existing DPIL affiliates: 56,041

We appreciate the House Education Committee for providing the Department with the opportunity to provide context and foresight into an impactful and sustainable effort to increase Early Literacy through a home-based reading program using all of Pennsylvania's resources effectively.

Sources:

1. Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. (2023). *State of Early Care and Education in Pennsylvania: August 2023*. <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/890097018/>
2. Children First. (2023). *Pennsylvania 2023 Start Strong PA Fact Sheet*. Children First. <https://www.childrenfirstpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Pennsylvania-2023-Start-Strong-PA-fact-sheet.pdf>

Hello, I am Nora Briggs, Executive director of The Dollywood Foundation, Dolly Parton's nonprofit.

The research & science is very clear. We cannot wait to kindergarten for children to have access & exposure to books and reading. We need to reach children early - reading at this age, happens primarily at home. Reading at home requires books. Not all families have access, nor can provide books. We can help here!

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a home book gifting program for children birth to 5. Parents can register - as early as birth and children graduate out on their 5th birthday. Can receive up to 60 books. Registered children receive an age appropriate, high-quality book with their name on it, monthly, at home, at no cost to the family. We have Braille Books, Audio and Bilingual / Spanish books. Reading Tips help parents increase engagement and connection!

Books in the home lead to increased kindergarten readiness, changes in the home literacy environment with families connected around books and all family members reading, Significantly stronger reading, math and science, academic achievements in 3rd grade and beyond. Children who participate in DPIL do better academically throughout school year over non participants.

This program is special. Dolly calls this her heart program. It's about connecting hearts in the families. Connecting them to each other, snuggling and cuddling together, connecting hearts to books and reading. Children will continue to do what they love to do - so let's help them love reading!

Statewide programs have more impact and benefits than a collection of local programs scattered throughout the state.

- County - level program partners ensure statewide coverage for all zip codes
- Access for all families to early learning resources
- Children start kindergarten with shared experience and helps level the playing field
- Creates a shared bond among children from across neighborhoods, race, and economic differences, helps break division
- Partner with state agencies to find the most vulnerable children: Foster Care, Babies born in parents in correctional facilities, WIC Families
- Partner with state birthing hospitals
- Partner with the State Department of Education to flag participants and track program effectiveness
- Ties to Adult Literacy and Dual Language Programs places a multi-generational focus on literacy.

A shared funding model creates a robust partnership between private and public dollars. Engagement and ownership at multiple levels.

We know that simply getting books into the home changes the trajectory of kids, families and communities. Education is a equalizer and sets the stage for life success.

Thank you for your consideration. Dolly wants to help create a love for books and reading and make sure that every Pennsylvania child has access to books and learning, provide the start they need in education and in life. Thank you!

Nancy Sarno de los Rios

DPIL through the United Way of Lackawanna Wayne and Pike Counties

Good Morning Chair Schweyer and the House Education Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today regarding the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

I represent Lackawanna County's program, one of the 55 local partners across the commonwealth. We are relatively new, with our launch in 2021. Our program currently serves 2000 children and we've delivered over 20000 books since our start.

Our experience is one of explosive growth. Without advertising we maintain a waiting list of about 400 children. We're now working to secure long term funding to insure our county's children have immediate access. With the support of PA state funds, we'd be able to expand our enrollment, and develop synergies with other area literacy programs and our wonderful library system.

Why Dolly Parton's Imagination Library? So many reasons...

A track record of success, measured by the level of kindergarten preparedness of participants. There are many studies done around the world showing this success, including the study by Center for Community Solutions studying Cuyahoga County in Ohio. They can be found on the research tab of the DPIL website.

Receiving books directly to a child's home, addressed to them, develops pride and a love of reading. Many families lacking transportation, may not be able to take advantage of our Library systems, or afford to shop for new books.

The program fosters snuggle and quiet time with family members away from screens. Those adults who are learning English, can benefit from the time with entry level books too.

Studies show that language skills are developed within the first year of life. Having books arrive at home, gives parents the opportunity to teach verbal sounds, inflections, color words, shapes and so much more.

By having children ready for Kindergarten, area school districts lessen the need for remedial reading programs. Through the Imagination Library, a 10 to 15% reduction in need is not unachievable. This could relieve a financial burden on schools, and help to re-assign resources to promoting reading instead of helping children catch up.

Extrapolating the benefits of reading into the years of higher education, students who are prepared readers are more likely to graduate high school, go onto college and are able to financially provide stability to our communities.

The Dolly Parton Imagination Library is not the only literacy program available to our children, but its track record is well established, allowing for synergies with our libraries, school districts and area agencies.

One of our goals to work with area literacy programs to develop a clearing house of options to develop the love of reading in our children.

We sincerely hope you'll consider joining the other 22 states that support the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. We are certain the benefits for children, especially those with the greatest needs, will far exceed the financial investment you'll make today.

Examining the Impact of the Imagination Library Program on Kindergarten Readiness

Presentation at Le Moyne College by the
Literacy Coalition of Onondaga County
August 12, 2015

 **LiteracyCoalition**
OF ONONDAGA COUNTY



Our Beginning... May 15, 2010 at White Branch Library



What is Imagination Library?

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library has been a key component of our school readiness strategy, which mails age-appropriate books monthly to all enrolled children from birth to age 5 in the City of Syracuse, and is in alignment with the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.



3rd Grade Reading Success Matters

The Campaign for
**GRADE-LEVEL
READING**

Books Arrive
Monthly /
Activities
Conducted

Family
Reading
Behavior
Changes

Kindergarten
Screening
Scores
Increase

English
Language
Arts Scores
Increase

Imagination Library Logic Model

Snapshot as of August 2015

- 85,000+ Books Distributed
- 6,000+ Children Served
- 70+ Referral Partners
- 2,700+ in Family Literacy Programming



2015

Local Research Finds Children Consistently Enrolled More Kindergarten Ready

2014

City and County have committed to funding first 3 years of expansion to entire City of Syracuse

2013

Syracuse named a Pacesetter Community by the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading

More local Research confirms positive findings in interviews with refugees

2012

Expansion to half of the City of Syracuse

2011

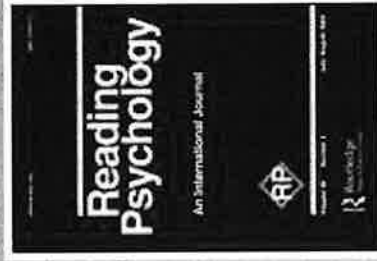
Preliminary local Research-Families Reading More

2010

Launched in May in 13203 & 13208

Previous Research

- Longer enrollment in Imagination Library was associated with more child-directed reading and story discussion.
- Even when controlling for child age, gender, income, parental education, race, parental nation of birth, and primary language spoken at home.



Ridzi, F., Sylvia, M.R., & Singh, S. (2014). The Imagination Library Program: Increasing parental reading through book distribution. *Reading Psychology, 35*, 548-576. doi: 10.1080/02702711.2013.790324

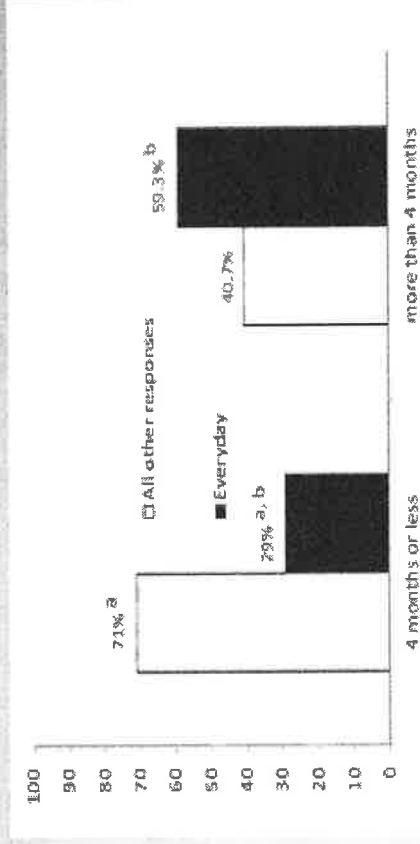


FIGURE 2 Percentage of participants who reported reading to their children daily based on length of time enrolled in the Imagination Library Program. Significant differences (^{a,b}) with Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = 0.0083$) occurred at $p < 0.001$ level.

Refugee Families



- Additionally, parents reported an interaction with books that were reaching their homes and consciously modeling the shared reading practices demonstrated by the program providers.

- Participant observations and interviews with parents and program providers indicated that, while the family literacy practices were mostly centered on oral traditions, participation in Imagination Library and related programming led to familiarity and use of print-based forms of literacy.



Singh, S., Sylvia, M.R., & Ridzi, F. (2015). Exploring the literacy practices of refugee families enrolled in a book distribution program and an intergenerational family literacy program. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 43, 37-45. doi: 10.1007/s10643-013-0627-0

Research Question

- Is participation in the Imagination Library program associated with higher levels of kindergarten readiness?



Measurement Action Team Members

- *Dr. Brandon Keaveny, Chief Accountability Officer, Office of Shared Accountability, SCSD
- *Dr. Frank Ridzi (Co-Chair) CNYCF and LMC
- *Dr. Jeff Craig (Co-Chair) Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES, Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Support Services
- *Dr. Monica Sylvia, Associate Professor of Psychology, Le Moyne College, LMC
- *Dr. Xiaofen Qiao, Data Analyst, Office Of Shared Accountability, Syracuse City Multiple Consultant Staff
- *Virginia Carmody, LCOC Executive Director
- Dr. Jonnell Allen, SU Community Geographer
- Laurie Black, Administrator, SYRACUSE 20/20
- Katherine Byrnes, LCOC Program Director
- Mark Clary, Associate Director, Catholic Charities
- Kelly Cooney, SCSD Adult Education Data Manager
- Cynthia Doss, Asst. Director, Syracuse Educational Opportunity Center
- Pat Driscoll, Ex. Director, Say Yes to Education Syracuse
- Carol Dwyer, SU Community Benchmarks Director
- Melissa Hidek, P.EACE, Inc./Head Start
- Dr. Kathleen Hinchman, SU Associate Dean and Professor
- Peter Knoblock, ACTS (Alliance of Communities Transforming Syracuse)
- Cynthia O'Connor, Consultant, Apter and O'Connor
- Stephanie Pasquale, City of Syr. Dep. Comm. Neighborhood & Business Dev.
- Susan Reckhow, Onondaga County Public Library, Adm. For Branch Services
- Ann Rooney, Onondaga County, Deputy County Executive for Human Services
- Joan Royle, Executive Director, Westcott Community Center
- Nora Rudewicz, Childcare Solutions, Data Manager
- Debbie Stack, WCNY, Director of Interactive Education
- Mari Ukleya, Director of Adult Education, OCM BOCES
- Dave Wall, OCC, Director of Corporate and Public Partnerships
- Carol Williams, Consultant, CW Associates



Research Method

- We tested whether consistent exposure to the program (i.e. 3 or 4 years) has a significant effect on level of ability identified in a screening test.



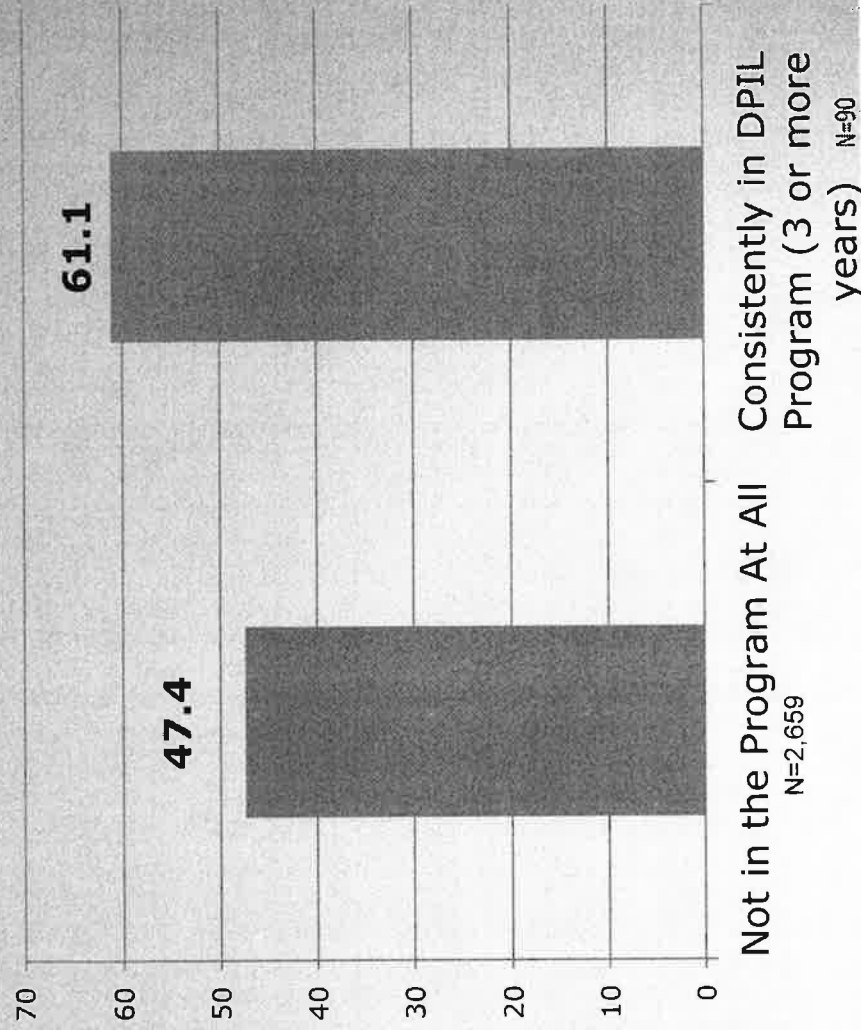
Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)

- Early exposure to print is associated with the development of oral language, emergent literacy skills and motivation to read (Raikes et al. 2006).
- The National Reading Panel (2000) has identified some critical pre-reading skills that should be assessed in Kindergarten and early Grade 1, including phonemic awareness, and elements of phonics, including letter names and sounds and the ability to read non-real (nonsense) words.
- Letter Naming Fluency – identified frequently as the best single indicator of risk for reading failure (Elliot, Lee & Tollefson 2001, Hintze, Ryan & Stoner 2003).

Using the AIMSweb LNF score of 13 as the standard cutoff we find that:

- For those consistently enrolled in the program (i.e. 3-4 years), there was a 28.9% increase in children ready for kindergarten, according to this measure.
- This percentage increase is calculated as follows: $61.1 - 47.4 = 13.7 / 47.4 = 28.9\%$
- This difference was statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Percent Ready for Kindergarten (scoring 13 or higher on LNF)



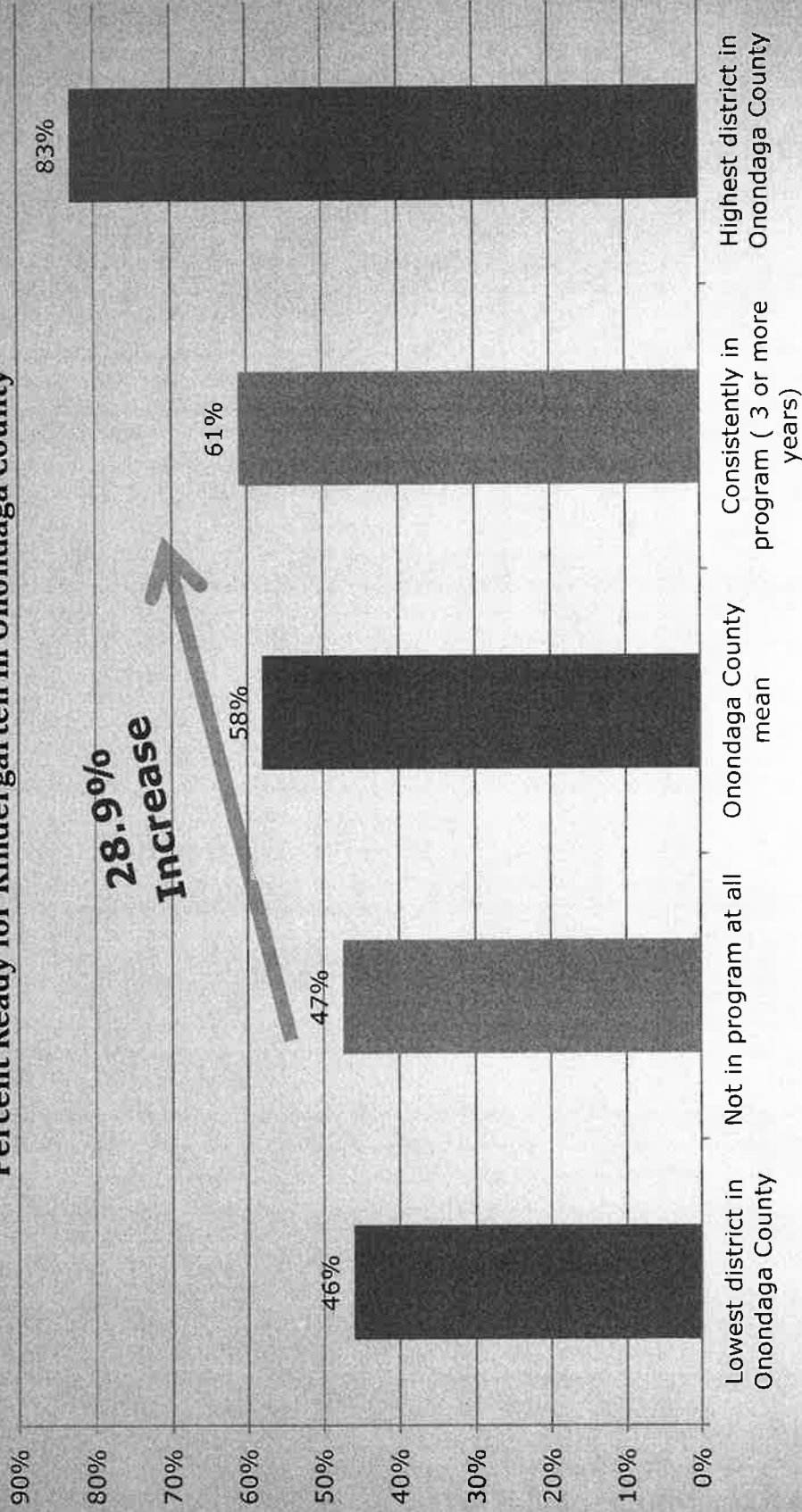
Significance

We find that being consistently enrolled in the Imagination Library program (i.e. 3 or 4 years) is associated with increased likelihood of being ready for kindergarten (i.e. 13 or higher score on LNF), even after controlling for:

- race,
- gender,
- age (i.e. only testing kindergarteners),
- ESL status,
- Special Education Status, and
- Free and Reduced Lunch Status.

Across the County...

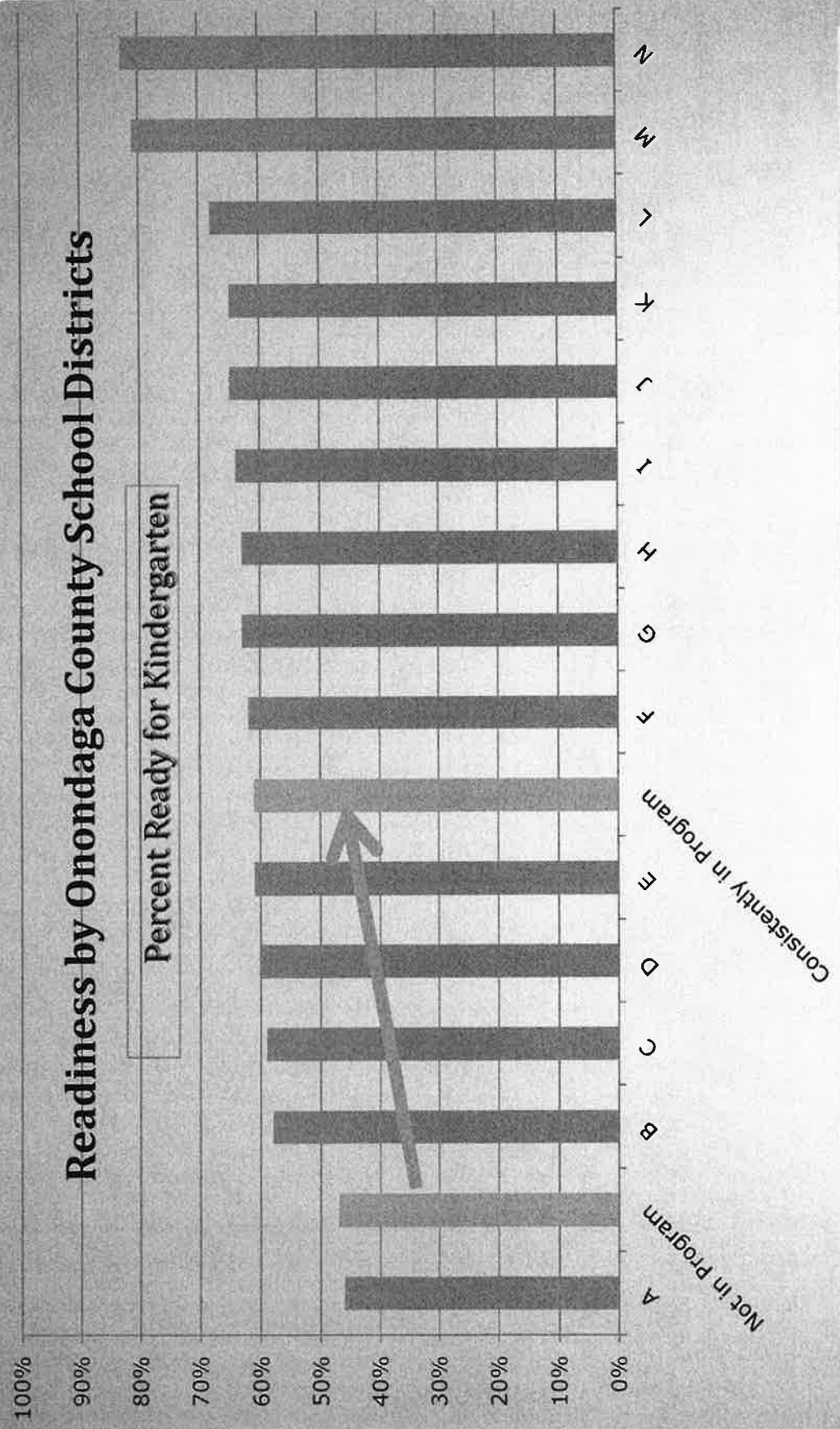
Percent Ready for Kindergarten in Onondaga County



Consistent enrollment in the DPIL program (i.e. 3-4 years) was associated with children performing above the county average, while non-enrollment was below county average.

Readiness by Onondaga County School Districts

Percent Ready for Kindergarten



Children not enrolled in DPIL had kindergarten readiness on a level similar to the lowest school district in the county. Those with consistent enrollment in the DPIL program (i.e. 3-4 years) had kindergarten readiness scores on a level similar to the middle performing schools in the county.

In Summary...

There is evidence that children who are consistently enrolled in the Imagination Library program in Syracuse are **28.9% more likely to be ready for kindergarten** than those who do not participate.





Innovative Approaches to Literacy

Funded by U.S. Department of Education

What We Did

An enhancement of PAT services with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to provide free books every month to families with children ages birth to four. PAT parent educators connected families to libraries and other literacy resources, and focused on positive literacy practices during their personal home visits.

REACHED

1,327 families

1,557 children

58 affiliates

9 states



24,856
PAT home visits
delivered over
~15 months



35,000
books
distributed



WHAT HAPPENED

GOAL 1: Increase parent-child literacy activities among parents with children ages birth through 4

GOAL 2: Improve oral language skills of children at 4 years of age

29%

children **pretending** to read books once or more a day

22%

families **reading** books together once or more a day

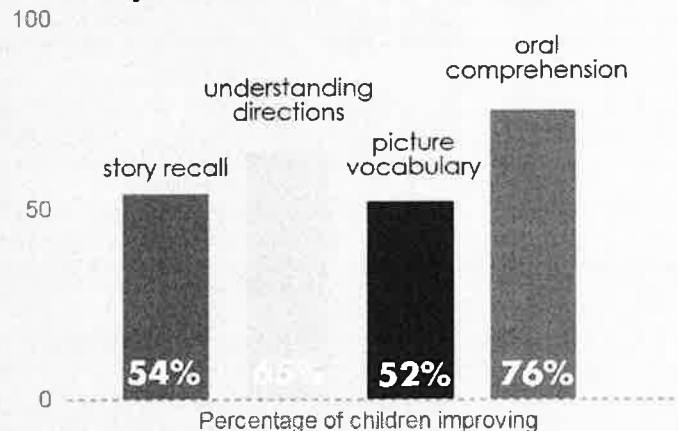
35%

families with 26 or **more books** in the home

19%

families who **own library cards**

Improvements in Low Scoring Children



Percentage of children scoring well below normal range at pretest that improved to the normal range at posttest



WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT DOLLY'S IMAGINATION LIBRARY

The Dolly Parton Imagination Library is a unique early years book gifting programme that mails a brand new, age-appropriate book to enrolled children every month from birth until five years of age, creating a home library of up to 60 books and instilling a love of books and reading from an early age. Any community in the USA, Canada or UK may replicate the Imagination Library and sponsor the regular gifting of books to every child under five in their community.

At present, over 1300 communities sponsor Dolly's Imagination Library for over 650,000 children. We would like to share with you some of the comments and endorsements we have received over the years from parents, teachers and communities.

TEACHERS AND EARLY YEAR EXPERTS SAY

"The Imagination Library encourages and supports parental involvement in their child's learning from birth to five. Not only does the initiative support the love of books and the development of communication, language and literacy for children and families but it also supports the development of personal, social and emotional aspects of a child and parents well-being which underpin all learning"

Kathy Higson, Early Years Adviser, School Effectiveness Service, Rotherham UK

"I work for the Horry Country Memorial Library in South Carolina. I do storytelling at 30 daycares and preschools in rural and urban areas and there is not place where Imagination Library is unrecognized. This program reaches out to kids while their minds are fresh and open to the world of books."

Manuel Vega, Outreach Assistant, South Carolina

"Working in partnership with the Imagination Library to encourage families to read together helps meet the Children's Centres objectives of raising attainment in all young children and closing the gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and the rest."

Barbara Mellist, Children's Centre Adviser, Rotherham, UK

"I just recently returned from a home visit and was so impressed that the dad was reading to his two year old daughter, a book which they received from your program. May you know that you are making a difference in one family I know who is receiving books from you."

Lisa Wright, Registered Nurse, Early Intervention Program USA

"I am a Parent Educator for Parents as Teachers through Greenbush in Southeast Kansas. I serve 15 families in Chase County, KS. I just would like to tell you how much my families enjoy being able to receive their Dolly Parton books each month. When I visit my families, one of the first things they always mention is how much they enjoy the books sent to their children. It is always an exciting day when a book arrives."

Sherry Wells, Elmdale, Kansas

"I tell my parents, I can always tell when a kindergarten student enters my room for the first time, whether or not that child has been read to daily. Reading builds vocabulary, comprehension skills, fluency, sentence structure, knowledge, sequencing – and I could go on and on! As a kindergarten teacher, I feel reading is the foundation of our program. The Imagination Library is to be praised for helping the children of East Tennessee prepare for kindergarten." **Teacher, Tennessee**

"Through this project children are offered the opportunity of an early start of a lifetime of enjoying books. Imagination Library helps to form the foundations for healthy early development by promoting language skills and inquisitiveness. From a healthy emotional development point of view it enhances positive interactions between children and adults, encouraging learning, play and mutual enjoyment."

Adela Bingham, Senior Educational Psychologist, UK

"This is a wonderful project. We know what a difference high quality books can make to children when they become part of their everyday lives."

Michael Pettavei, Randolph Beresford Children's Centre, London UK

"I cannot thank you enough for this program! By the time the children start school, they are ready to learn about the early elements of literature and print. You don't have to teach them how to hold the book, that print has meaning, or how to 'read the pictures' to tell a story. You also see it in their writing skills – they can plan and create their own stories. I hear, 'But, I don't know what to write!' a lot less often." **Teacher, Tennessee**

"Lap time and story reading prior to entering kindergarten is directly related to how well a child will read in the future." **Teacher, TN**

COMMUNITY SPONSORS SAY

"We became involved with The Imagination Library when we were setting our district objectives for community services. As we related the program to what Rotary's goals are nationally and worldwide, we felt that the Imagination Library did a wonderful job of promoting those values."

Claire Derome, Rendezvous Rotary Club of Whitehorse, Canada

"As a rural Alabama school, we are constantly looking for ways to bridge the classroom and the home, the Imagination Library will allow the bridge to greater develop. This program will truly benefit our entire community!! We are the first school in the state providing this amazing instructional tool and it has been incredible watching the schools across the state come aboard."

Jeremy Jones, Danville-Neel Elementary School, Alabama

"The members of the Chamber of Commerce have invested in the Imagination Library to inspire and help young people because in Rotherham gaps in literacy at an early age lead to poorer skills and less productive workforces if these gaps are not addressed. The Imagination Library is the business community's investment in our own future."

John Lewis, Rotherham Chamber of Commerce, UK

"We are delighted to be working with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. This project will help children to develop their literacy skills, encourage parents to read and introduce a love of reading. I would urge parents to get along to the Sure Start Centre and sign up to this fantastic scheme."

Councillor Susan Loudon, Wigan Council, UK

"We are delighted to sponsor The Imagination Library. Through Wates Giving we are active supporters of education programmes like this which aim to inspire children and help them to achieve their potential."

Tim Wates, Wates Family Holdings, UK

"As a father, grandfather and a member of the committee that decided to implement the Imagination Library in Cass and Clay Counties, I would like to thank Dolly for making a difference in our area. We have surpassed the expectations and making a difference in the lives of children and their families. It is working!!"
Duane Rindy, United Way, Fargo, N. Dakota

PARENTS, GUARDIANS AND GRANDPARENTS TELL US

"As a father of two young children and the author of several children's books, I believe that The Imagination Library is truly beneficial to families in Canada. Each month a parent and child can read a new book that will contribute to their child's development. There is nothing as important and as precious as that experience."

Evan Solomon, Canada

"Reading books in English (rather than Urdu) have helped him to learn two languages."

Anon, UK

"As I'm pondering this year about what I'm thankful and grateful for I wanted to give a shout out to Dolly's Imagination Library. My son has been a recipient of your generosity for about three years and as a result has a wonderful library. He absolutely loves reading and when we get a book in the mail, I know we'll be reading that book over and over again until he knows it by heart"

Leanne & Timothy Drone, USA

"On behalf of our 7 month old son, a big thank-you for the books that you send him every month. We live in Rotherham, England, and are lucky to be in the town chosen for your Imagination Library book scheme. Freddie loves his books already at this early stage in his life".

Daniel Blackwell, Rotherham UK.

"This is a great scheme; we have benefitted so much from having all the books which we otherwise couldn't afford. They are good quality books too".

N Flood, Rotherham UK

"H' was just over three when he started reading, although we had hundreds of books at home, but what inspired him to read was receiving a book through the post with his name on it. We all know how hard it is to get the boys reading, but with help from the Imagination Library 'H' was the only child in his nursery who could read at the age of 3, and he is now a fluent reader. He has excelled in other subject areas as well. In fact his teacher says that she will be recommending him for gifted and talented. In these past two years H has grown into a confident, hardworking little boy and we know that we have the Imagination Library to thank for some of that. The books have sparked his interest in many different subjects. He will be 5 soon and I know that he is going to miss not getting a gift through post anymore."

MJ, Rotherham, UK

"Our family loves the Imagination Library - what I am most thankful for is the reminder they provide to read to my little ones... the kids LOVE to see that there's a new book on the coffee table when they come home from daycare. Additionally, this program is not income based and I appreciate that... books are not something I would regularly think to put on my shopping list, and because of budget cuts - our local library is not open at times that are convenient to our dual-working-parent family... so we sincerely appreciate these gifts in our mail"
Kim Parmeter, Duluth, Minnesota

"We are so grateful that the Dollywood Foundation is supplying us with the appropriate tools to prepare and to encourage our children to foster a life-long love of reading. My children now look forward to checking the mail for a 'surprise package' from the Imagination Library. They all know the package brings not only a world of imagination, but more importantly, individual and undivided attention from mom or dad, even if it is only for a few minutes."

Joselyn Akana, Hawaii

"My little boy just got his first book. He was so excited but I noticed something: He was much more excited about this book than other books. I believe the hype and excitement really enhanced his desire to get this book. Could we afford to buy him a book or join a book club? Sure. Would it be this exciting? No."

Eric Spears, USA

"Our family would like to thank you so much for this amazing opportunity that we have been given. Each day my kids run to the window when they hear the mail truck and run to the box to see if they have gotten a new book. On the days that new books come, they run inside with HUGE smiles on their faces and run right to the couch and crawl up on my lap and we spend hours reading the new book over and over again. They love that it is theirs to keep and that they can carry it around with them"

The Fletcher Family, USA

"My grand-daughter, Nevaeh, receives books regularly from the Imagination Library. She's not quite two but has already developed a love for books thanks in large part to you and all the others involved in Dolly's program. I am Nevaeh's babysitter and we spend time every day reading. She gets excited when she receives a new book from you and insists on sitting on my lap and reading it several times. Again, thank you and God bless all of you folks involved in this wonderful program, a proud & lucky grandpa".

Lloyd Kerr, Blue Grass, Indiana

"I am the mother of a 8 1/2 month old little boy. I look so forward each month to receiving Chadd's new book, I just can't wait to read it to him. While I was pregnant for Chadd I bought books almost every time that I went shopping. I just couldn't wait to read to him. Chadd was born on January 5th, the day that was the start of a major ice storm, here in Ohio. The following day we received a call at the hospital that our home was on fire as a result of ice build up on the power lines. The fire department did all that they could but we lost everything, including my collection of children's books. So that is why I treasure this new book collection so much. At a very hard time in our lives, sometimes it is the little things that mean so much".

Christine Martin, Columbus Grove, Ohio

"Last year I signed up my son. I wanted to write to you to say a much needed THANK YOU for what your foundation does for families! It is because of you that I see the joy in my son's eyes when he grabs a book or I get one and settle down to read to and with him. Although I cannot understand what he says, they are the most beautiful words ever spoken to me".

Freddie Bailey, Howell, Missouri



**“Dream More, Learn More, Care More, and Be More”:
Erie County’s Imagination Library Project and the Influence of Storybook Reading**

The Imagination Library in Erie County

- Started in May 2013 under the leadership of the United Way of Erie County (in collaboration with the Erie Community Foundation and other generous donors).
- **Free books available to all children in our community from birth to age five.**
- Each registered child receives one free, high quality book in the mail each month.
- Now in its third year, United Way of Erie County’s Imagination Library has reached 13,495 children in the Erie area.

IMAGINATION LIBRARY

The Research Study

- Purpose: To understand the impact of storybook reading on the children and parents receiving Imagination Library books using Clay’s (2013) *Concepts about Print* and *Letter Identification* tasks with a parent/caregiver survey about home literacy practices.
- Focused on examining the early literacy skills and strategies of young children entering kindergarten across Erie County elementary schools.
- Diverse sampling of urban, suburban, and rural school sites (six Erie County elementary schools). Surveyed 394 young children.



Findings of the Research Study

- **Young children who received the Imagination Library books performed significantly better on early literacy tasks (letter identification; word and letter concepts within text)** than their peers who did not receive the books.
- **Young children who received the Imagination Library books have stronger beginning reading skills**—both in the assessments and as reported by their parents. (This improves their success in *reading on grade level* by third grade.)



Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Impact Report 2021

**By: Alex Dorman, Research Associate
and Taneisha Fair, Research Assistant**

Updated January, 2022

Introduction

Improving Kindergarten Readiness has been the focus of many initiatives in the greater Cleveland area. Parents are a child's first teacher, and the positive impacts of reading to children for their early development and long-term academic success is irrefutable. **Recent local studies show that Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is associated with preparedness for kindergarten and family literacy habits, especially for children who live in high-poverty areas.**

About Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

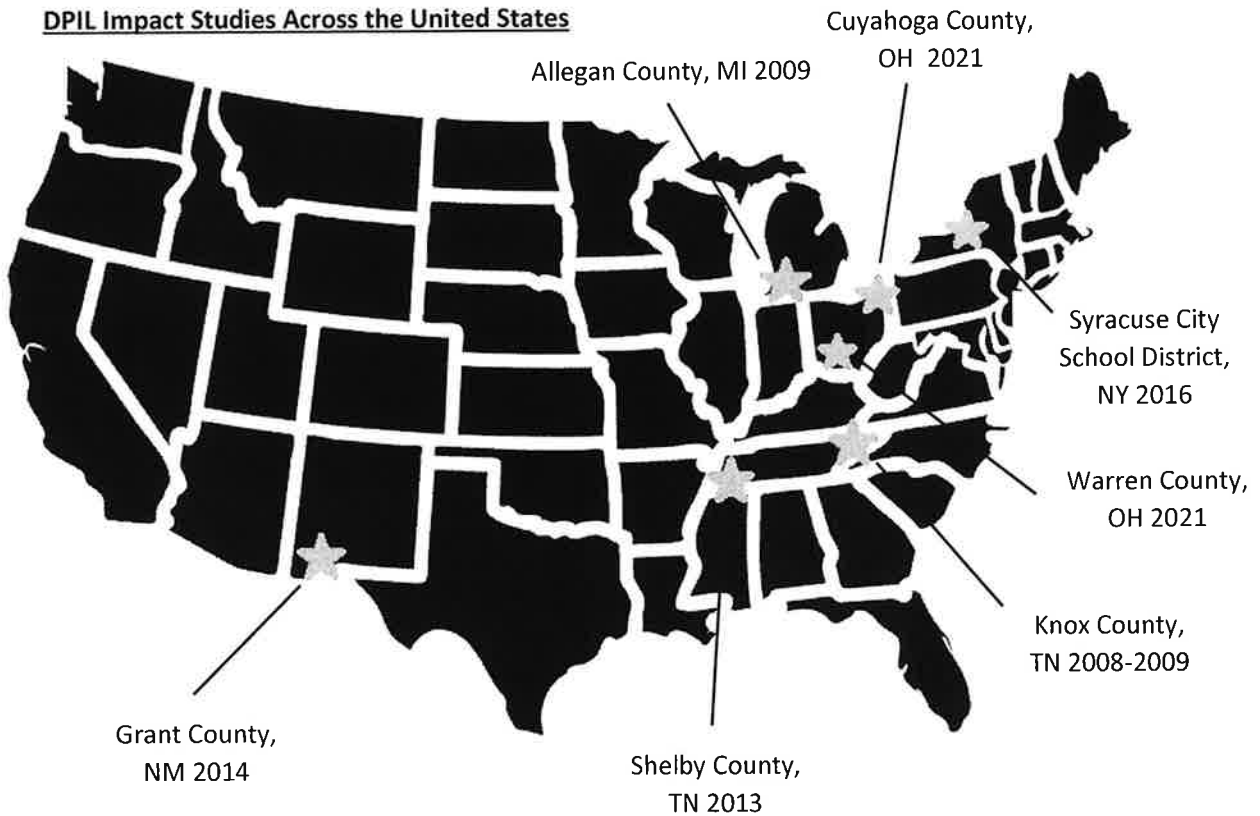
For more than 25 years, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL) has been distributing free, high-quality books to children under the age of five. Children enrolled in the program receive one specially selected book in the mail once per month. In Ohio, Imagination Library is open to all children under age five, regardless of income. As of June 2021, **more than one-third of all children under age 5 in Cuyahoga County were enrolled in Imagination Library.** Since its inception in Cuyahoga County, 750,000 Imagination Library books have been mailed and 43,000 children have been served by the program. Currently, 30,000 children are enrolled. A child enrolled from birth through their fifth birthday will have a library of 60 books when they start kindergarten. The Literacy Cooperative of Greater Cleveland became the local affiliate of DPIL in 2017. As an affiliate, The Literacy Cooperative is responsible for managing enrollment, promoting the program, and securing the funding for the books and related expenses.

Local funds are required to cover the cost and shipping of books. Thanks to an allocation of state funds, the Ohio Governor's Imagination Library currently covers one half of the cost of Imagination Library for Ohio's children. Additional financial support for Imagination Library in Cuyahoga County comes from individual donors, foundations, and local organizations.

Forty-one independent studies have shown that Imagination Library has a positive and significant impact on family literacy habits, kindergarten readiness and supporting grade level reading by third grade. New data analyzed by The Center for Community Solutions and Case Western Reserve University also found positive trends associated with participation in Cuyahoga County's Imagination Library Program.

Research on DPIL Effectiveness

The positive impacts of DPIL have been studied across the country. While not an exhaustive list of the literature published on DPIL¹, the map below gives an idea of the breadth and timing of the research, with the newest from Ohio in 2021.



¹ A more complete list of research on DPIL from across the country can be found at <https://imaginationlibrary.com/news-resources/research/>

Syracuse City School District Study

A study conducted in 2013-2014 in the Syracuse City School District of New York explored connections between engagement in DPIL and kindergarten readiness. The researchers found that a significantly higher percentage of children who consistently participated in DPIL were considered to be ready for kindergarten instruction when compared to children who did not participate in DPIL.² The effect was only significant for children who had been enrolled in the program for at least three years, which evidences the importance of engaging with DPIL early in a child's development. This research was published in the peer reviewed Journal for Applied Social Science.

Tennessee Longitudinal Studies on DPIL Impact

Two studies in Shelby and Knox Counties in Tennessee showed positive impacts as a result of DPIL participation using a longitudinal research approach.

In Knox County, scores of a cohort of third grade DPIL alumni on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) exam were compared to their non-participant peers. The TCAP exam assesses whether a student is proficient in state standards at the current grade level.³ Research showed that third graders who had participated in DPIL received significantly higher scores on the exam.⁴ Indeed, among third graders who had engaged in DPIL, 55 percent scored a "Proficient" or "Advanced" on the TCAP exam, compared to 48 percent of third graders who didn't engage in DPIL. Only 8 percent of DPIL alumni scored "Below Basic" on the exam, compared to 12 percent of non-DPIL students.

In Shelby County, a study of five elementary schools in Memphis found that students who participated in DPIL scored an average of 9.64 points higher in language and 2.01 points higher in math on kindergarten readiness testing than children who were not in DPIL. These effects were still significant after controlling for demographics variables, socioeconomic variables, pre-kindergarten educational experience, and family reading habits.⁵ Comprehensive follow-up research with this cohort of students continued to find significantly better outcomes over the next three years, as measured by the Stanford Achievement Test 10 in second grade, the Istation reading assessment in the beginning of third grade, and the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) at the end of third grade. As lead author Dr. Marie Snell put it, "the consistency in the findings is striking"⁶.

A Rural Comparison of DPIL

A random sampling of kindergartners in Grant County, New Mexico found that kindergartners enrolled in DPIL consistently scored significantly higher in the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment than kindergartners not enrolled in DPIL. This study is of note because it was conducted in a rural southwest location with a majority Hispanic/Latinx population⁷.

² Ridzi, F., Sylvia, M. Qiao, X., and Craig, J. (2016). The imagination library program and kindergarten readiness: Evaluating the impact of monthly book distribution. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1936724416678023>

³ Tennessee Department of Education. (2021). Overview of testing in Tennessee. <https://www.tn.gov/education/assessment/testing-overview.html>

⁴ Beckett, J. (2012). TN-Knox county imagination library third grade follow up study: The imagination library program and the kindergarten cohort of 2008-2009. <https://imaginationlibrary.com/news-resources/research/>

⁵ DPIL SCFBF Final Paper. (2013). Evaluating the relationship between the Imagination Library early childhood literacy program and kindergarten readiness. <https://imaginationlibrary.com/news-resources/research/>

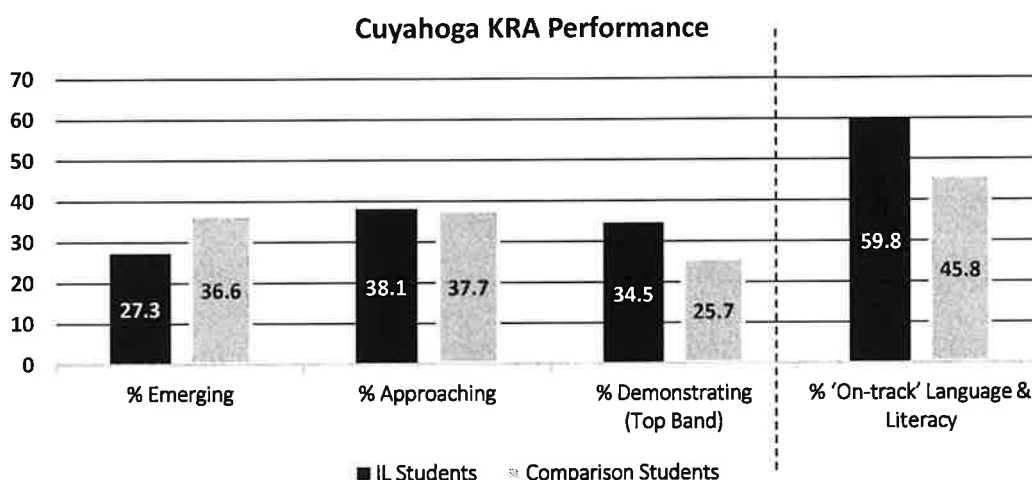
⁶ Snell, M.A., (2015) Comparisons of Academic Data for Imagination Library Participants Versus Non-Participants. <https://imaginationlibrary.com/news-resources/research/>

⁷ <https://imaginationlibrary.com/news-resources/research/>

Local Research; A Preliminary Analysis of DPIL in Cuyahoga County

The research conducted across the United States provides an indication of the possible impact of young children’s participation in DPIL, and a recent local study in Cuyahoga County indicates the positive trends related to DPIL and The Literacy Cooperative.

In Fall 2019, 472 children who participated in Imagination Library in Cuyahoga County had a valid Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) score that could be used for analysis. These students’ KRA scores were compared to KRA scores of 4,884 children in the same public school districts who did not participate in DPIL. As shown below, more children who participated in DPIL had “on track” KRA scores for language and literacy entering kindergarten than the rest of the cohort. “On-track” refers to a binary outcome of the KRA, which intends to predict a child’s likelihood of passing a reading diagnostic assessment requirement at third grade.



The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) is used at the beginning of each school year as a way to measure each student’s skill level in being able to grasp instruction. It is based on Ohio’s Early Learning and Development Standards and focuses on four areas of development, one of which is Language and Literacy. Based on their scores, students are considered to be in one of three bands. Children in “Demonstrating Readiness” show the foundation skills and behaviors and are considered fully prepared for kindergarten. Those who are “Approaching Readiness” have some foundation skills and require little intervention to be considered fully ready to learn. Those who display “Emerging Readiness” usually lack one or more of the foundational skills and behaviors and require more assistance or intervention before they can take full advantage of kindergarten classroom instruction.

As shown above, just over a third (34.5 percent) of the 472 children who participated in DPIL had scores demonstrating readiness for kindergarten. This was a larger share than the roughly one-quarter (25.7 percent) of the 4,884 children who did not participate in DPIL who were assessed as demonstrating readiness for kindergarten.⁸ Similarly, only 27.3 percent of DPIL participants assessed displayed

⁸ Anthony, E., Sorenson, A. & Steh, S. (2021). Exploring the relationship between imagination library program participation and kindergarten readiness: Results from a preliminary analysis. Prepared for Bob Paponetti at The Literacy Cooperative by The Center on Urban Poverty & Community Development at CWRU.

emerging readiness for kindergarten, compared to 36.6 percent for the comparison students. In both of these categories there is an approximate nine percentage point difference in scores.

Language and Literacy scores as assessed by the KRA were also explored for differences. Findings indicate that nearly 60 percent of DPIL participants were 'On-track' for language and literacy, compared to 45.8 percent of those who had not participated⁹.

In general, DPIL participants who fell into the "emerging readiness" band had not participated in the program for as long, in most cases for less than one year. DPIL Participants who scored as demonstrating readiness for kindergarten, had been enrolled in DPIL on average nearly four months longer (15.4 months) than their peers who scored as emerging readiness (11.1 months). This pattern also applies to performance in the Language & Literacy development area. Research from Syracuse, NY had found improvement only after children participated in the program for at least three years. DPIL is relatively new to Ohio, which expanded to countywide eligibility in early 2020, and statewide eligibility in late 2020. Therefore, we expect to see a starker contrast between children who participate in DPIL and their peers in future classes of entering kindergarteners who will have had access to the program for longer.

These findings indicate a positive correlation between Imagination Library enrollment and KRA performance among Cuyahoga County students. They also demonstrate that the longer a student is enrolled in the program, the higher their KRA score. These findings have been identified elsewhere in the literature as well. However, the authors note that a true correlation cannot be determined with this analysis given the inability to control for other potential confounding variables, such as the education level of the children's parents¹⁰. Nonetheless, the initial findings are encouraging, but require greater statistical and methodological control to better understand.

The research literature that has been highlighted in this report, including new local analysis, has consistently found that participation in DPIL is associated with improved academic performance and increased kindergarten readiness. As previously mentioned, this summary is not meant to be an exhaustive review of the literature, but instead a brief overview of some of the promising impacts DPIL has had on families in in the United States, and Cuyahoga County specifically. While each of these studies had varying research questions and methods, evidence is mounting that DPIL is an effective tool to help children enter kindergarten prepared and ready to learn. Results of a recent survey of Cuyahoga County families participating in DPIL provides some insight into how the program improves early literacy, which is explored in greater detail below.

⁹ However, when the two groups were compared on other characteristics known to also effect Kindergarten readiness, notable differences were apparent. Some birth characteristics, specifically mother's age at birth and educational attainment, suggest that as a group, the Imagination Library children are at lower risk for experiencing a lack of school readiness as compared to the comparison population. Thus, a KRA comparison between these two groups carries inherent bias in that the two groups differ not only in their Imagination Library participation, but also in the ways shown above and likely other currently unknown reasons.

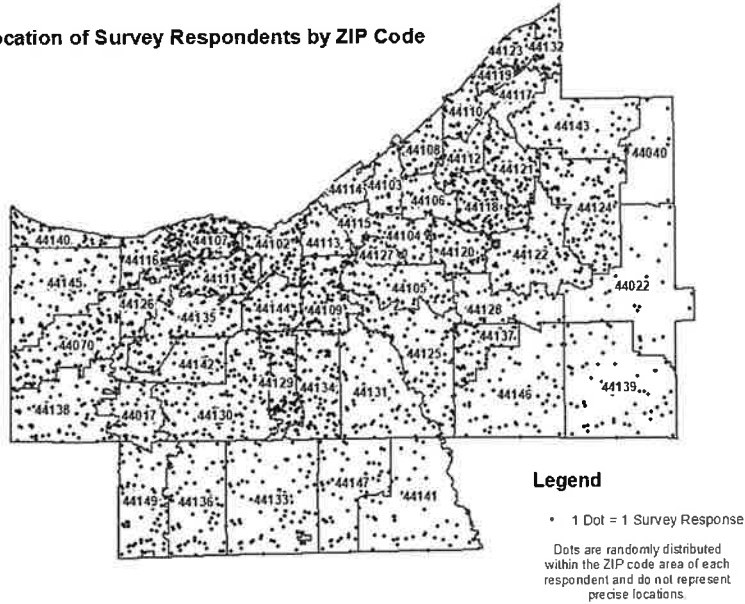
¹⁰ A plausible hypothesis is that maternal education level is correlated with length of time enrolled in Imagination Library such that mothers with higher levels of education enroll their children in the program earlier in development than mothers with lower levels of education. As a result, maternal education level, and not length of time enrolled in Imagination Library could be causing the positive association with kindergarten readiness.

The Literacy Cooperative 2021 Survey of Current Participants

About the Survey

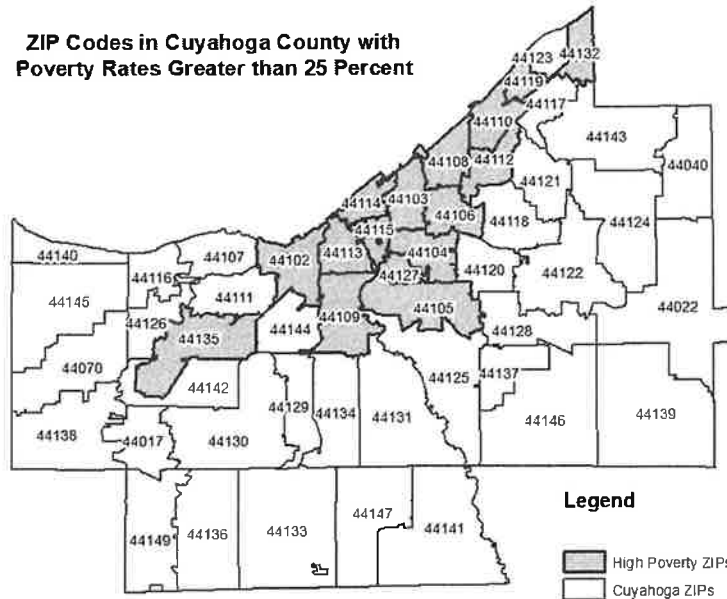
In the Summer of 2021, The Literacy Cooperative engaged The Center for Community Solutions to assist with the development and analysis of an online survey of all parents or guardians of children enrolled in Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library (DPIL) program. The survey was open for two weeks, and received 3,004 valid responses.

Location of Survey Respondents by ZIP Code



Of these responses, 623 or 20.9 percent came from 1 of 16 ZIP codes that were identified as “high poverty ZIP codes”, with poverty rates over 25 percent. Poverty rates are the percentage of households with annual income below the federal poverty line. These ZIP codes are 44102, 44103, 44104, 44105, 44106, 44108, 44109, 44110, 44112, 44113, 44114, 44115, 44119, 44127, 44132, and 44135.

ZIP Codes in Cuyahoga County with Poverty Rates Greater than 25 Percent

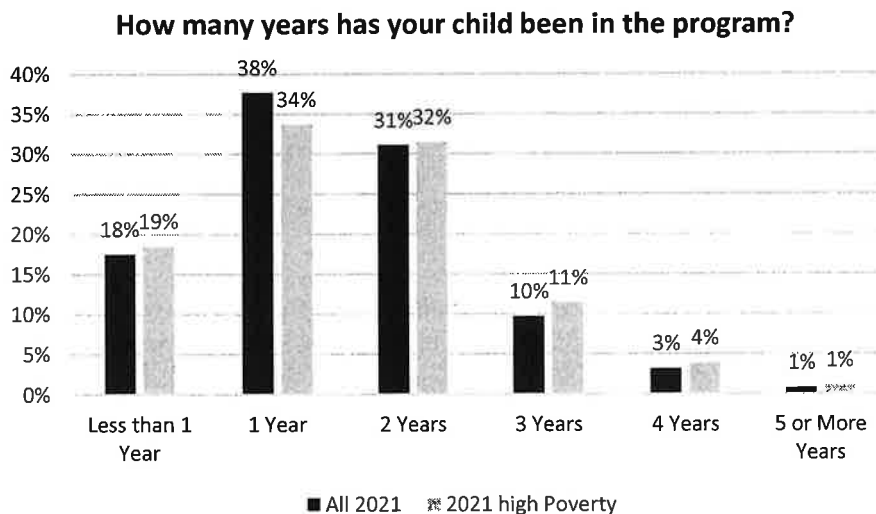


Summary

The results of the 2021 survey evidence a multitude of positive impacts for families in Cuyahoga County that participate in DPIL. Aside from the overwhelming majority of parents and children enjoying the books they receive, participants are reading more to their children, and children are more interested in reading. These positive impacts are even more pronounced in high poverty ZIP codes. Nearly all respondents believe that participation in DPIL is helping their child better prepare for kindergarten, and most people in high poverty ZIP codes often heard their children using words learned from DPIL books. These results are explained in more detail below, but broadly speaking are highly encouraging.

Time in the Program

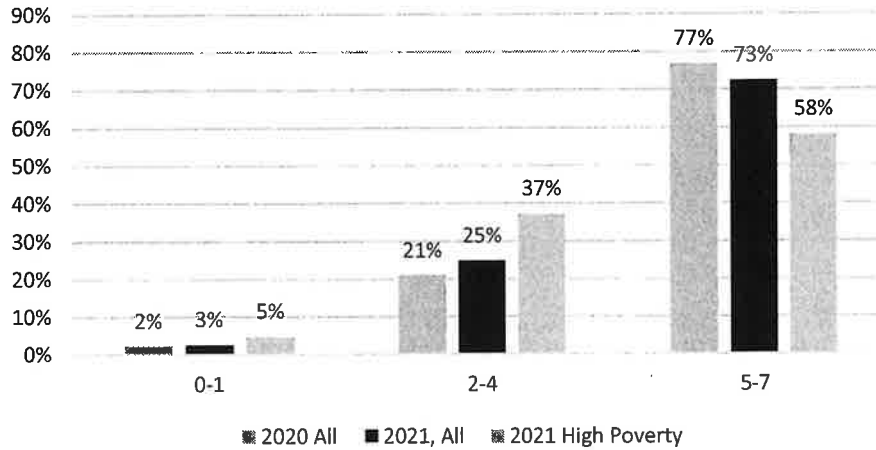
The majority (82.5 percent) of respondents had been in the program for at least one year, and there was very little difference between the total sample and the high poverty ZIP code participants in time spent in DPIL program.



Frequency of Reading

Respondents were asked how many times their child has been read to in the last seven days. The majority (73 percent) said they had read to their child between five and seven times in the last week. A quarter (24.9 percent) reported reading to their child between two and four times in the last week, and only 2.6 percent reported one or fewer times in the last week. This was a slight decrease from 2020, which saw 77 percent of respondents reading to their child nearly every day. Among higher poverty ZIP codes, respondents reported reading to their kids less frequently, with 58.1 percent reporting five to seven times a week, and 37.2 percent reporting two to four times a week.

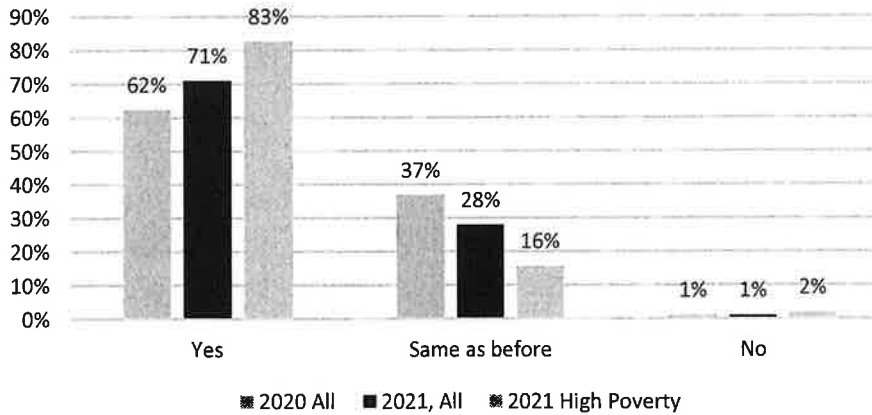
How many times have you or another adult read to your child/children in the last 7 days?



Impact of DPIL on Frequency of Reading

Well over two thirds (71 percent) of respondents stated that they read to their child more often since receiving DPIL books. This was an increase from 62 percent in the 2020 survey. About 28.0 percent of respondents replied that they didn't change their reading habits with their child. At 83 percent, even more respondents from high poverty ZIP codes reported reading more to their child after receiving DPIL books. This is a striking difference, and indicates a particularly positive impact among this sample.

Do you, or other family members, read to your child/children more often since you began receiving Imagination Library books?

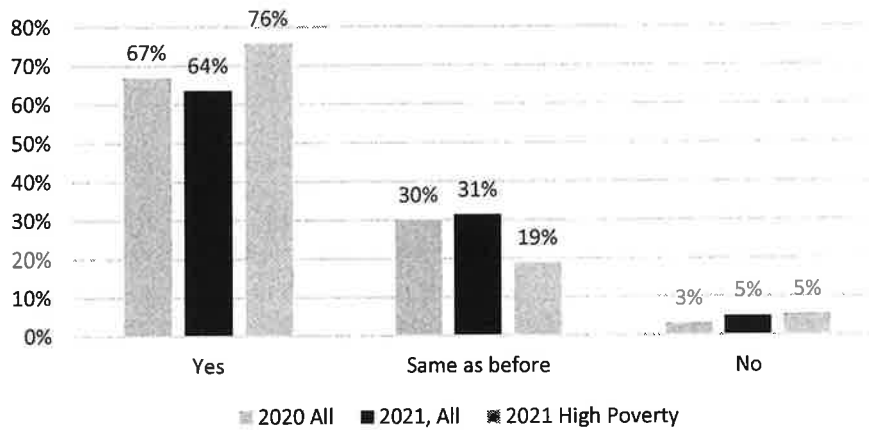


Impact of DPIL on Child asking to be read to

The majority (64 percent) of respondents replied that since receiving DPIL books, their child has been asking them to read to them more. About a third (31 percent) stated that there has been no change. Again, the positive change was more common in high poverty ZIP codes. Just over three quarters of the

respondents from high poverty ZIP codes (75.8 percent) explained that their child has been asking to be read to more since receiving DPIL books. This is another particularly positive impact in this high poverty ZIP code sample compared to the general respondent sample.

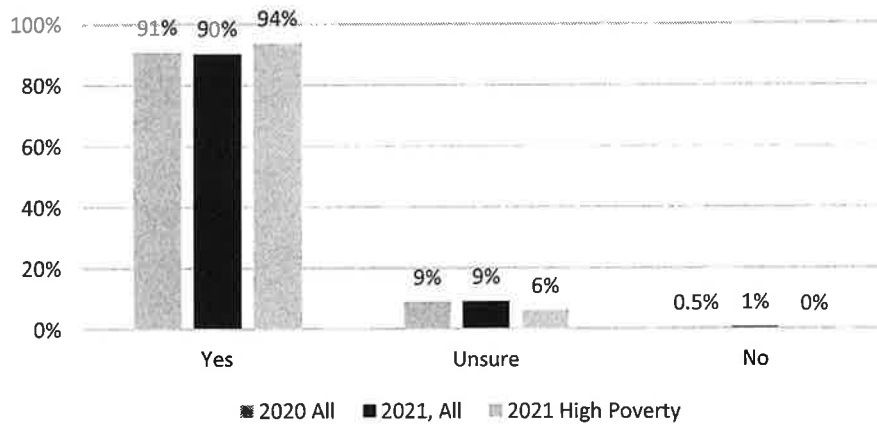
Since you've been receiving Imagination Library books, are your child/children asking you to read to them more often?



Impact of DPIL on Kindergarten Readiness

More than 90 percent of respondents felt that participation in DPIL was helping their child better prepare for kindergarten. This response rate mirrors the 2020 responses, as does the slightly higher percentage of high poverty ZIP code respondents (93.6 percent) who felt DPIL participation was better preparing their child for kindergarten. Approximately nine percent of the sample was unsure if DPIL was helping, and less than one percent felt DPIL was not helping their child prepare for kindergarten.

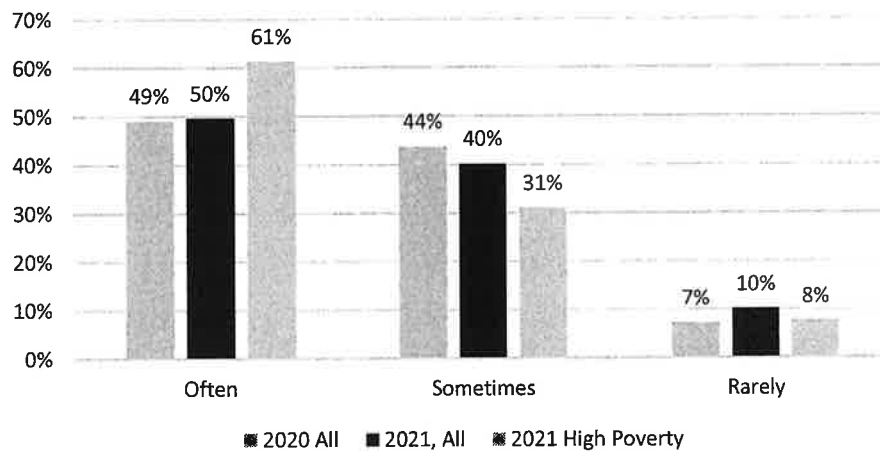
Do you believe participation in Imagination Library is helping your child/children better prepare for Kindergarten?



Impact of DPIL on Child Using New Words

In exploring the impact of DPIL and children learning new words, about half (49.6 percent) of the respondents indicated that *often* they found their children using new words they learned from the books they've read. Forty percent indicated that this happened sometimes, and about ten percent stated this rarely happened. These positive findings again mimic the findings from 2020. Of particular importance yet again, is the starkly greater percentage of respondents in high poverty ZIP codes (61.3 percent) who reported often observing their kids using words they'd learned from DPIL books. This is over a ten percent difference from the total population.

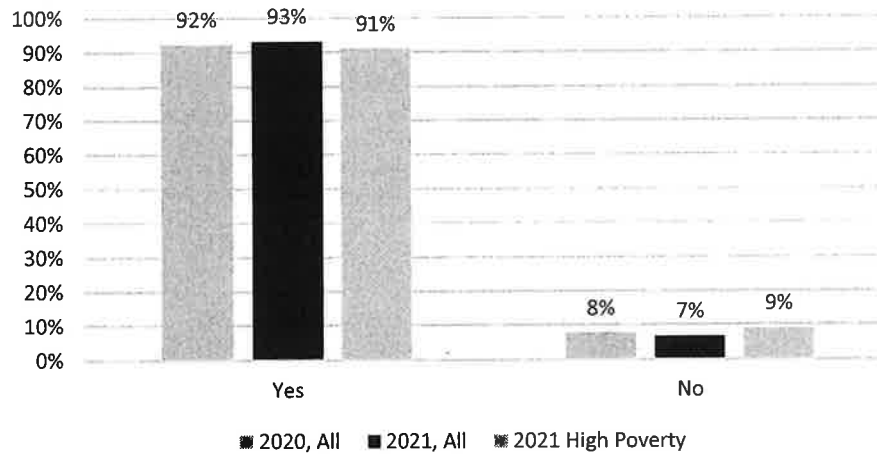
How often do you find your child/children using new words they have learned from books you have read?



Impact of DPIL on Other Older Children in the Household

When respondents were asked if the older non-enrolled siblings of children enrolled in DPIL also read and enjoyed DPIL books, over nine out of ten (93.2 percent) respondents indicated that they did. This was very similar to the responses from 2020.

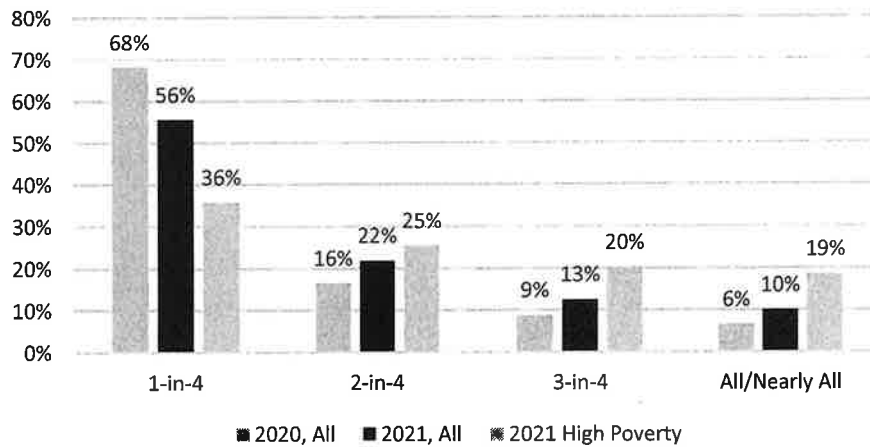
Do older non-enrolled brothers or sisters also read and enjoy the books?



DPIL Books and Home Libraries

Over half (55.6 percent) of the respondents indicated that a quarter of their home libraries were comprised of DPIL books, and 21.8 percent stated that DPIL books made up half of their home libraries. Respondents from higher poverty ZIP codes reported that DPIL books made up a larger percentage of their home libraries comparatively.

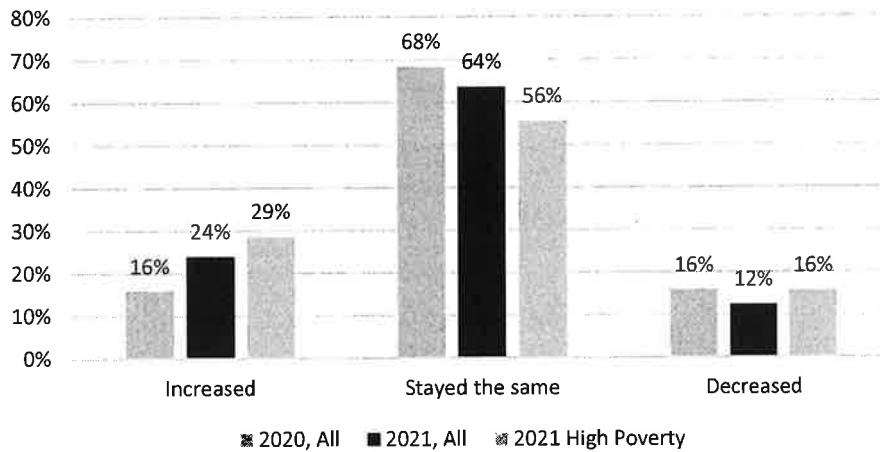
Imagination Library books make up what portion of your home library?



Public Library Use Among Enrolled Households

For the majority of participants (63.6 percent), enrolling in DPIL had no effect on their public library use. For nearly a quarter (24.0 percent) of respondents, public library use increased, and for 12.4 percent library use decreased. These results were similar for high poverty ZIP codes, with slightly more respondents indicating both increased *and* decreased use.

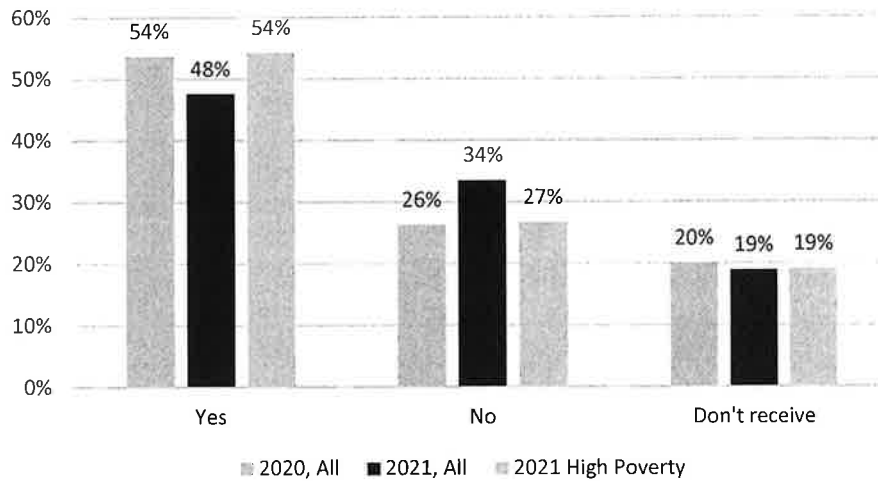
Since participating in Imagination Library, our public library use has



DPIL Newsletter Engagement

Respondents were asked about whether they regularly read The Literacy Cooperative’s Imagination Library Newsletter, and while close to half (47.6 percent) of respondents indicated they did, this response rate is unfortunately down from 54 percent of respondents in 2020. Even so, as DPIL eligibility and enrollment has expanded, so has the Imagination Library Newsletter subscription list. The very strong response rate to this online survey promoted almost exclusively via the Newsletter indicates healthy levels of engagement by participants. Similar to last year, about one in five participants said (18.9 percent) don’t receive the newsletter. The results for high poverty ZIP codes was a little more promising, with 54.3 percent of respondents indicating they regularly read the newsletter. Relatedly, respondents were asked if they have ever taken advantage of any of the information, offers, or events included in the Imagination Library Newsletter. About one in five (22.2 percent) of respondents indicated they had, and 28.3 percent of high poverty ZIP codes indicated they had.

Do you regularly read our Imagination Library e-newsletter?



Satisfaction with DPIL Books

New questions were added in 2021, which explore specific aspects of satisfaction with DPIL books. To start, respondents were asked if their child enjoys DPIL books, and the results were very positive. Seven in ten children (69.4 percent) always enjoy the books, and the remaining one-quarter (26.3 percent) usually enjoy the books. Less than half a percentage point of the respondents indicated rarely or never enjoying the books. The numbers are even more positive for high poverty ZIP codes, with eight in ten children (80.6 percent) always enjoying the books. This indicates that receiving DPIL books for children is an overwhelmingly positive experience.

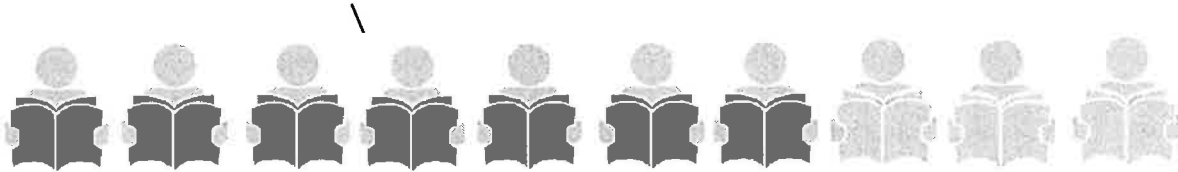
Diversity, and specifically “regard for diversity of people, their roles, culture, and environment” is a stated fundamental theme of DPIL¹¹. Therefore, The Literacy Cooperative felt it was important to ask respondents whether they appreciated the uniqueness, variety and diversity of the characters in DPIL books. Nearly all respondents indicated they did, with 95.9 percent of the respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing that they appreciated the diversity in the books. This percentage in agreement was even slightly higher in the high poverty ZIP codes (97.8 percent).

Finally, respondents were asked if they found the reading tips included on the inside flaps of DPIL books to be useful; 78.3 percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they were helpful, another 20.2 percent didn’t have an opinion on them. In high poverty ZIP codes, a greater percentage of respondents (87.4 percent) indicated that they thought the tips were helpful, and less than one percent of respondents disagreed.

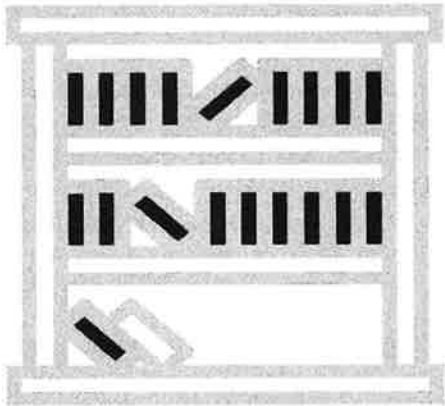
¹¹ <https://imaginationlibrary.com/usa/themes-concepts/>

Satisfaction with DPIL Books

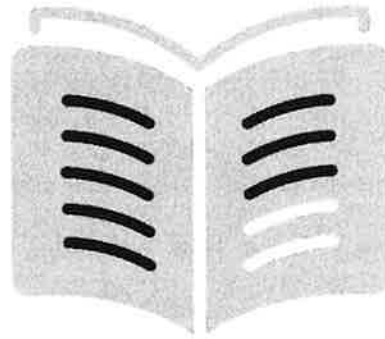
Seven in ten children **always** enjoyed DPIL Books



Nearly three in ten children **usually** enjoyed DPIL Books



19 in 20 respondents appreciated the **uniqueness, variety, and diversity** of the characters in DPIL books



Eight in ten respondents found the **reading tips** provided by DPIL books helpful

Where did you learn about DPIL?

According to the participants, the most common way they learned about DPIL was **from a friend** (38.4 percent), however learning about DPIL **through social media** was a close second (29.1 percent). Much less common was learning about DPIL through their school (3.1 percent), which is likely influenced by the fact that DPIL is targeted to children from birth to age five, often before they attend school. In high poverty ZIP codes these results were a little different, with the most endorsed source of information being **through social media** (30.0 percent). Learning about DPIL **from a friend** was still a commonly endorsed source of information (24.2 percent), however the biggest difference for high poverty ZIP codes was that over twice as many of these respondents learned about DPIL from a doctor's office (20.9 percent compared to 9.6 percent). Efforts to connect to parents via childhood well visits in certain parts of the community could explain this difference.

Conclusion

The meaningful and positive impacts of DPIL on children and their households are well evidenced. Research across the United States has shown that children participating in DPIL are significantly more likely to be assessed as ready for kindergarten. They are also significantly more likely to score higher on standardized tests of achievement beyond kindergarten, and the effect seems to hold at least through third grade, even after controlling for potential confounding variables. While not all research has produced similarly positive results, there is a strong and growing body of evidence that DPIL has a particularly positive effect on children's academic performance, and that effect is tied to early and consistent participation in DPIL.

Preliminary descriptive research in Cuyahoga County shows a promising trend with a greater percentage of children who participated in DPIL assessed as kindergarten-ready, or approaching readiness, compared to students who did not participate in DPIL. A greater percentage of local DPIL participants were also assessed as on track for language and literacy than their non-participating peers. However, until more rigorous statistical analysis is performed, these differences cannot be definitively attributed to DPIL.

Finally, the insight gained from the 2021 participant DPIL survey in Cuyahoga County illuminates many important findings. What is particularly clear from the survey results is that DPIL is having a positive impact on children and families in Cuyahoga County. For example, not only are the overwhelming majority of respondents reading to their children at least two to four times a week, most respondents indicated that the frequency with which they've been reading, and the frequency with which their child is asking to be read to, has increased since joining DPIL. Of particular note is that these findings indicated an even more positive impact amongst respondents from high poverty ZIP codes.

This increased engagement with reading is leading to perceived improvements as well. Nearly nine in ten respondents noticed their children using new words they learned while reading DPIL books, and the overwhelming majority felt that DPIL was helping to prepare their children for kindergarten. For some, DPIL engagement was also associated with an increase in public library usage.

What cannot be overstated however, is the immense satisfaction respondents experienced when interacting with DPIL books. Whether it was the child's enjoyment of the books, or the appreciation for the diversity and uniqueness of the books' characters, or the usefulness of the reading tips that come with DPIL books, the overwhelming majority of respondents found these books to be worthwhile. For every one of these satisfaction measures, an even greater percentage of respondents in high poverty ZIP codes reported being satisfied. This indicates not only a strong benefit of these books for the sample as a whole, but that the program remains especially valuable for families in high poverty ZIP codes.



Pennsylvania School Press Association
P.O. Box 385
Manchester, PA 17345
paschoolpress.org

April 25, 2024

To whom it may concern:

We, the Pennsylvania School Press Association, are writing to express our support for House Bill 1309: The Student Journalism Protection Act, a vital piece of legislation that aims to restore and protect the press freedoms of student journalists and their advisers across our Commonwealth.

High school journalism is arguably more important now than it has ever been. With local media outlets disappearing and the surviving newsrooms operating with smaller budgets and staffs, shrinking coverage areas create news deserts that are, more often than one might realize, filled by student journalism, especially in rural parts of the country. High school journalists cover their school board meetings, ensuing policy changes, sporting events, student life, and everything in between. Even in areas where local media outlets are able to cover some of these events, they often lack the access that is readily available to students working for their high school newspapers, yearbooks, or broadcast programs. Without the spotlight and transparency student journalism provides, these are all blindspots to the taxpaying public.

These students develop writing, editing, photography, marketing, design, teamwork, collaboration, and communication skills, all while keeping their communities informed, so long as they have the support to do so. One of the biggest challenges student journalists and their advisers face stems from a lack of understanding of the role of media and student journalism, in particular. Student publications are not newsletters, nor do they serve to promote the school or district. Rather, student journalists serve to inform their classmates, teachers, administrators, school board members, and district communities writ large by responsibly and ethically reporting the news. When school officials are not on the same page regarding that mission, funding and even entire programs sometimes unfairly hang in the balance.

Under current Pennsylvania code, school publications do have some protections, but we have found that many schools and their administrators may not follow this code. In order to ensure student First Amendment rights here in Pennsylvania, we need stronger protections for our students and their advisers. We need HB 1309.

Therefore, to ensure and support a free and robust press, the dissemination of knowledge and ideas, and government transparency, we're asking for your support for this bill, a variation of similar non-partisan "New Voices" bills that are already laws in 17 states, including our neighbors, New Jersey and West Virginia. These protections are needed because, without them, school administrators can (and do) censor many student publications for "any reasonable pedagogical purpose" (*Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier, 1988*). The fear of retribution against their programs or adviser causes even more students to self-censor. Censoring students not only quells their engagement in the life of their community, but sends a clear message that their voices are not valued and respected. It also prevents their vital reporting from reaching their district communities.

Thank you for your consideration of HB 1309 and Pennsylvania's student journalists and advisers.

Respectfully,

The Pennsylvania School Press Association Board of Directors:

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TO PROTECT STUDENT JOURNALISM
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📘 New Voices of Pennsylvania

📷 @newvoicespa

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Pennsylvania New Voices Testimony

April 29, 2024

House Education Committee

We ask that you support House Bill 1309, The Pennsylvania Student Journalism Protection Act. This bill ensures that student journalists' First Amendment rights are protected and that their voices remain independent and protected. This act also protects teacher advisers from professional retaliation for refusing to unlawfully censor student work.

Across the Commonwealth, school administrators frequently subject their school newspapers, broadcasts and online media, and yearbooks to prior review to scan for content they feel is controversial or sensitive; often, they ban content based on fear and ignorance. Much of the time, those school officials who are enforcing unfair and unconstitutional content restrictions have no background in journalism and are unfamiliar with the protections to which students are entitled. Many principals see it as part of their job to censor the school paper and do not view the Pennsylvania School Code as law. They are enforcing a power they should not assume to have.

Under the current code, there is no protection for teachers who advise student-run media; oftentimes they are disciplined, removed or even transferred to other schools for protecting student speech. A teacher/publications adviser's role is to teach writing, reporting, interviewing, ethics, law, and other fundamentals of journalism. They should never drive or dictate content.

The Student Journalism Protection Act is fundamental to supporting students so that they may exercise their First Amendment rights. As stated in *Tinker vs. Des Moines (1969)*, students do not shed their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse gate. Student-run media should not be a public relations tool for administrators but a voice of the students, by the students.

Fostering independent thinking, fact-finding, truth-telling and unbiased presentations of news and events is fundamental to democracy. With training in the fundamentals of journalism, including law and ethics, we should let students make their own decisions and report without censure.

This non-partisan bill:

- Protects students from undue and unconstitutional censorship
- Allows school officials to intervene **ONLY** when necessary, for example, if the story would cause a substantial disruption that interferes with classroom activities

- Protects teachers from punishment for refusing to unlawfully censor their students
- Allows student journalists to serve as truth-tellers and fact-checkers for rumors and misinformation
- Protects schools from liability for material published by students
- Promotes quality, ethical and responsible journalism at the highest standards
- **Does not** allow students to publish without feedback and impunity
- **Does not** allow students to publish content not protected by the First Amendment including libel, slander, hate speech and defamation of character

Let Pennsylvania join its neighboring states of West Virginia, Maryland and New Jersey in making House Bill 1309 a law. Currently, 17 states have New Voices legislation, and bills have been introduced in nine states, including New York, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

This New Voices legislation is supported by several local, state and national associations. The list is growing. Currently, those in favor include:

Pennsylvania State Education Association
 Journalism Education Association
 Pennsylvania School Press Association
 Student Press Law Center
 Society for Professional Journalists
 American Society of News Editors
 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
 Press Club of Western PA
 American Bar Association
 National Council for Teachers of English
 Pennsylvania News Media Association (PNA)

We have heard from other schools who have experienced censorship from their administrators. We also are concerned about self-censorship when students want to protect their advisers from retaliation and end up not reporting on important stories out of sheer concern that they will get in trouble for publishing them. Self-censorship **erodes the educational environment schools are supposed to foster**, instead creating conditions in which students fear speaking their minds at school.

Examples of censorship of important and newsworthy stories in the Commonwealth.

Neshaminy High School 2013-14:

The editorial board of the Playwickian voted 14-7 to ban the word "Redskin" from its publication. The principal "banned" the ban. The adviser was suspended without pay for two days. The principal also docked the paper \$1,200 and the Editor in Chief was removed from her position for the month of September. The case garnered national attention. The school punished the student newspaper and adviser for NOT using what they deemed as a racial slur.

Elizabethtown High School 2018

In an interview published on December 14, a new school board member made a controversial statement and also questioned the school's curriculum. When students reached out to another board member in the following issue for a response to the controversial statement, the principal told the students to remove the quote or face dissolution of the newspaper.

Conestoga High School 2009

The Spoke published an article "Obligation to Report" that exposed a district employee who was charged with armed robbery and called out sick from his jail cell. He did not report his felony charge to his employer because at the time, under Pennsylvania law, he was not required to do so. Over the summer of 2009 district officials met and tried to change school policy to permit prior review, but a grassroots movement stopped the policy change before the board could approve it. This news story went on to win the national News Story of the Year and Story of the Year, and its writer won the Courage in Student Journalism award. And, this story helped lead to the law where school district employees must report felony arrests to their employers.

Delaware County 2022 (we have been asked to keep the name of the school confidential because of fear of retaliation from the administration against the paper and the new adviser, but the testimony comes from a current college student studying journalism who has experienced censorship firsthand)

Our newspaper advisers...sat in on every pitch meeting while I was on staff (2019-2022). If we pitched a story that they believed could be controversial, they told us we couldn't report on it. When I served as editor-in-chief in 2021-22, my advisers asked me to keep things mild and make sure that none of the stories we wrote would be controversial. We didn't have an official prior review policy, but I couldn't send an issue to press until my advisers read through and signed off on it.

In 2022, I was working with a student on a story about the school district's education on the Holocaust. The student wrote about recent examples of antisemitism in the U.S. to contextualize why more education about the Holocaust was important. My advisers asked me to cut the examples and other information that could upset the school district administration. After a few rounds of edits, my advisers told me to rewrite parts of the story or cut the story entirely. This felt incredibly wrong to me, but rewriting was the only way that the important story could get published.

I felt like I was constantly walking a line between supporting other student journalists as we tried to tell meaningful stories and keeping my advisers and school administration happy so that we could continue to publish.

Conestoga High School 2023

The Spoke planned to publish its "Senior Destinations Map," a chronicle of the post-high school plans of the school's graduating class, as it had done for more than 60 years. The building principal told the student editors that she would not allow the map to be published as it did not fit

into her "vision" for the newspaper and school. She even went as far as to tell the students that they would be putting their advisers' jobs on the line if they were to publish the map. The students fought the decision, which violated school policy, Pennsylvania law and the First Amendment, and eventually won back the basic right to freedom of the press. The Editor in Chief at that time went on to be recognized as a national finalist for Student Journalist of the Year.

**Some comments from advisers across the state about their experiences with censorship.
From a New Voices PA adviser/student survey:**

The principal *"did say he would prefer that we avoid controversy and just write about 'spaghetti.'"*

Who is reading the paper prior to publication? Are they qualified? *"The final newspaper is reviewed by the Activities Director and the Principal."*

Exercising power over student publications often results in diminishing the timeliness and newsworthiness of stories. *"Under supportive administrators, we had created a "hands off" review policy that only the two principals would see, and articles would be published 48 hours later without waiting for approval. When I left this school, the principal ignored this policy of almost 10 years and threatened my former students to not allow articles to go to print if they didn't alter benign quotes that she felt could be worded better. Once, she went on vacation without approving an article, and the article missed the print deadline because the new journalism adviser would not publish it without her approval."*

From the Principal's Guide to Scholastic Journalism (<http://principalsguide.org/>)

Studies have clearly shown that students, and communities in general, do not understand the importance of the First Amendment. One reason may be that students are not allowed to practice what they are taught while in schools and thus do not believe the theories of the democratic system.

Closing Remarks

We don't allow principals to call football plays, and we don't punish teams for unconventional plays.

We don't allow school administrators to direct musicals, and we don't shut down a production if a student says the wrong lines.

We don't allow school administrators to dictate who runs for student council president, and we don't rig elections in favor of a pro-administration candidate.

So, why are we allowing principals to thwart free speech when it erodes the educational environment we are supposed to foster?

Please consider moving House Bill 1309 forward and showing your support for the constitutional rights of Pennsylvania student journalists.

Thank you.

The Pennsylvania New Voices Committee

The **PRESS** Club of Western Pennsylvania

Please note: The Press Club of Western Pennsylvania has supported the New Voices effort in Pennsylvania for the past four years. This letter was written when the first bill was proposed in the state Senate by former Sen. Andrew Dinniman. Feb. 5, 2020

Sen. Andrew Dinniman
182 Capitol Building
Senate Box 203019
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3019

Dear Sen. Dinniman,

On behalf of The Press Club of Western Pennsylvania, I am sending this letter of support for Senate Bill 806 that you sponsored, the Pennsylvania Free School Media Act. Our organization recognizes that this piece of legislation would positively impact students, teachers, and consumers across the Commonwealth.

The Press Club knows how important it is for our students to have their voices heard without the fear of administrative censorship, and it's a cause other states have already signed into law with 11 additional states exploring future legislation. We want to see Pennsylvania help lead the way on this path for positive change. In an era where newspaper staffs are dwindling and able to cover less ground, the role of student journalism has become all the more crucial in shedding light on the happenings of their communities and informing the taxpaying public. We have seen our daily newspapers in the Pittsburgh area cut staff and coverage, particularly for local government and school boards, and we know high school newspapers are often stepping up to cover their school boards as a result. That is not only an important journalistic endeavor but also it gives the students civics lessons that they cannot learn in a classroom.

We appreciate your efforts and those of your co-sponsors, Senators Brewster, Muth and Browne, and we have learned that the bill has made its way to the Senate Education Committee. We also have learned that Rep. Melissa Shusterman has agreed in principle to sponsor the bill in the House. We join with the Society of Professional Journalists, the Student Press Law Center, Point Park University, and Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association in supporting this legislation.

I'd welcome the opportunity to meet with you at your convenience to discuss this further. You can reach me at hfallon@pointpark.edu or 412-392-3982.

Thank you for your support of high school journalism.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Helen Fallon". The signature is written in black ink and has a fluid, connected style.

Helen Fallon
President, Press Club of Western Pennsylvania Board of Directo

11022 Sunset Drive
North East, PA 16428

April 24, 2024

Dear Members of the Pennsylvania House Of Representatives Education Committee,

Public education is one of the most powerful government entities in the United States. We teach children to ensure we have an educated electorate and citizens who protect our way of life.

However, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania we are not doing such a great job at showing students that the First Amendment is a guaranteed right to them for their whole lives.

Student journalists in this state are researching and telling real stories that are happening inside our high school. They are the only ones who can do that authentically because they live inside every day.

When students do that, they are being censored by administrators because adults do not want the details of incidents in schools out in the public.

As a decades-long Pennsylvania educator and product of Pennsylvania public education, I am concerned that we are teaching students that their rights do not matter. There are things in schools that need to be reported whether or not adults like it. I am also an administrator certified by this state and an elected public school board member, so I have a 360° view of what is happening in schools. Censoring students shows the public we are hiding things that need not be hidden.

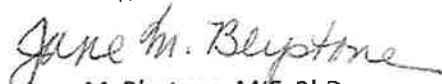
One of the best ways we can deal with rumors and false accusations in public education is to allow the truth to be told. That does not happen when we censor those who are trained to find the facts and tell the story without bias. These reporters of truth are high school journalists. Not every story is rosy, but every story needs to be told in a clear and truthful way, even when adults do not want any light shed on issues.

I have worked with students across this state who have been suspended from editorial leadership positions for publishing the truth, with adviser/teachers who have been suspended without pay for several days because they would not censor students, and with advisers who have been publicly shamed at school board meeting because they will not censor their student writers who write fact-checked stories with integrity and open disclosure. If you consider the fact that teachers are government employees, who cannot, by law, restrict students' rights to practice the First Amendment, you must protect government employees from retaliation because they refuse to censor students for writing truth.

Pennsylvania boasts the first student newspaper in the country and yet, students here are not honored for the intelligent, truthful research and writing they do. Advisers are asked to censor students, administrators censor students and punish teachers for not censoring students. Censorship is a chain around the necks of our future citizens because school leaders do not want the public to see the truth. You can change that.

Therefore, I implore you, our state elected legislators, to pass legislation that would protect both student journalists and educators/advisers who supervise them from censorship and retaliation.

Sincerely,


Jane M. Blystone, MJE, PhD

To whom it may concern:

My name is Cole Skuse, and I have been a student journalist for the past seven years of my life — for three years at Freedom Area High School and four years at Carnegie Mellon University. While in high school, I served as News Editor and Copy Editor for the FHS Press. While in college, I served as Lead Copy Editor and Editor-in-Chief of The Tartan. Though I will not pursue journalism as a career, it has certainly shaped the path I am on, and I hope my extensive experience with student journalism informs why New Voices is a good step forward for student expression and journalism in Pennsylvania.

I've had the unique opportunity to work on both high school and collegiate publications, with only high school publications being subject to prior review. Before having the freedom on the collegiate level to explore any story I wanted without the fear of prior review, I didn't understand what it meant to self-censor. It's the concern that your story is going to be cut by administrators at the last minute; it's the fear that the principal is going to call you into their office and criticize a story you wrote, even though you covered all your bases; it's the feeling that you have to make sure that you aren't upsetting anyone with power over you.

As a result, it's hard to encourage students to go after the stories that matter to them. How can they express their criticisms of a system they are in if they have to worry about being silenced? How can administrators expect to get honest feedback about the systems that are in place if students are too scared to express their thoughts about them?

We need to make sure that we are protecting the free speech of students, and New Voices is one of the best ways to ensure that happens. When I was in high school, I didn't even realize how much I was self-censoring because I was too concerned about administrative censorship. For instance, when the head coach of our football team got arrested, our paper decided not to cover it because we didn't know what kind of reaction that would get from the administration.

How can we expect students to cover stories that matter to their community and encourage change for the better in their schools if they feel like they can't cover the events that matter? Speaking from personal experience, not having that worry builds a better relationship between student journalists and administrators because it creates more opportunities for open dialog between these journalists and administrators without fear of administrative censorship.

We should encourage students to express their opinions and ideas and allow them to tell the stories that matter to them without fear of administrative censorship. I've seen the difference between writing under prior review and being able to print without it, and when people can freely express their ideas and write stories that matter to them, it creates a more open space for conversation. This is what we should be encouraging to student journalists — not that they should be scared of being censored via prior review. As such, I believe it's necessary to remove this barrier for students, and New Voices is one of the best ways to do that.

Thank you for your consideration of New Voices,

Cole Skuse

FHS Press 2017-2020

The Tartan 2020-2024

April 25, 2024

Rep. Peter Schweyer, chair
Rep. Jesse Topper, Republican chair
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Education Committee

Dear Reps. Schweyer and Topper,

As a Point Park University journalism professor emerita, active journalist and longtime supporter of high school journalism, I support House Bill 1309, The Pennsylvania Student Journalism Protection Act that will be reviewed by the House Education Committee on Monday, April 29. This bill ensures that student journalists' First Amendment rights are protected and that their voices remain independent and protected. This act also protects teacher advisers from professional retaliation for refusing to unlawfully censor student work.

I taught high school students as well as my Point Park students for much of my 34-year career. During summer workshops, I and other professors and media professionals worked with them for a week and published a newspaper, audio and TV broadcast programs, and websites during that time. As we reviewed journalistic practices, standards and principles, I heard their stories of prior review and censorship, as well as those who were free to write about important issues and events at their high schools. Those in the latter category stood out from their peers, and many planned to head to college and study journalism and later pursue a career.

What I recognized early on as an educator is that those students who were permitted to tackle solid news, feature and sports stories without threat of reprisal from administrators grew in their writing and communication proficiencies and grasped those important journalistic standards. Moreover, they knew to prepare for reporting with solid research skills, strive for accuracy, seek balance and context in their reporting, and respect their sources. The more they wrote and edited, recorded and broadcast, the better they became. And as they did, they learned about critical thinking, fairness and, important to me, the role of the media in our democratic society. I could always tell in my Point Park classes – I taught beginning journalistic writing every semester – who had solid high school media experience. They grasped what I was teaching more readily and progressed faster toward professional-level journalistic writing much faster than their peers.

I have been privileged to work at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette throughout my teaching career and after it. I heard more of the same stories from the young reporters whose work I edited. They told me tackling important stories and writing toward a professional journalistic level helped them win scholarships and prepared them for college-level work and beyond. They lauded and respected their teachers and advisers who led them in their growth as student journalists.

Earlier in my career I also taught summer classes for high school journalism teachers, and throughout, led fall and spring summer workshops for high school students, teachers and advisers. I also judged contest for them for many years and continue to do so through my professional affiliations. Their dedication and service to the students who work on student media needs support. I know of several teachers who either stopped advising, quit or lost their positions when they stood up against prior review and censorship. I also know some, fearful of the repercussions, chose to resign rather than fight a losing battle.

A final point: I serve on the boards and have held leadership positions on the Press Club of Western Pennsylvania, Women's Press Club of Pittsburgh and the Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association Foundation. The Press Club has long supported this bill, and the other organizations are also supportive of this proposed legislation.

I appreciate the work, time and effort that brings this bill before you today, and I hope the bill is approved and moved for a full House vote.

Thank you for accepting this letter in support of the bill. If you have questions for me, I can be reached at hfallon@pointpark.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Helen Fallon".

Helen Fallon
Former director, Honors Program
Professor emeritus, School of Communication

April 25, 2024

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Hannah Shumsky, and I am a former student journalist who attended Freedom Area High School and Slippery Rock University. I am currently in my third year of teaching and my second year of teaching journalism courses, and in my roles as a teacher, adviser, and former student journalist, I am a strong advocate for HB 1309.

Although I'm only 25 years old, I have over 11 years of experience in the journalism industry. This is because I was incredibly fortunate to be at Freedom which had not only one of the strongest journalism programs in Pennsylvania, but also had an administrator that largely understood my rights and responsibilities as a student journalist.

When I was 15, I joined Freedom's Print Media Workshop class which is responsible for the monthly FHS Press and the Shawnee Yearbook. As assistant news editor, I was in charge of assisting the news editor with section edits and monitoring school district news. As students, we were the only journalists in our school every single day. I took ownership of that role and covered some of the most important events in the mid 2010s, such as the opening of a new elementary school, water quality concerns in the area, and changes in administration. Without a strong and supportive journalism program, I would have never been able to cover these topics.

I was 15 when I covered my first school board meeting as an assistant news editor. I attended nearly every meeting for three years to bring back to my staff. Being in a rural area with only one county newspaper, I rarely (if ever) saw a local reporter at those meetings. At Freedom, I had the support of my adviser who taught me about ethics, reporting, and news writing. Aaron Fitzpatrick had a lot of trust in me to show and represent our publications well.

I succeeded at Freedom because of Aaron and because he always supported me even with tougher stories. When I covered an email outage that prevented outside accounts (including FAFSA and college admissions emails) from emailing students, I covered and published the story even when the director of technology was concerned about the story topic. As an adviser, Aaron always went to bat for me.

Further, everything I learned in high school journalism was the same standard I used in my college student newspaper, and my college newspaper staffers all follow these same professional standards in their current work in the media industry. The standards from the Society for Professional Journalists used in scholastic journalism are just one example of these professional practices taught in these programs. Taking journalism courses in high school taught me how to cover controversial topics following professional standards and practices.

While I had an incredibly positive experience in my program, the reality is that other administrators and districts are not nearly as supportive of student journalist rights in our commonwealth.

Despite the training of advisers and students and the professional standards we follow, administrators can still censor student content. As a teacher now, I know that censorship is not an effective way to teach students. Censorship promotes a sense of fear and causes students to self-censor by not even trying to pursue stories simply because the topic is controversial. If I had a different set of administrators when I was a student, they could have censored my pursuit of stories like budgets, furloughs, and major email changes simply because it put the district in an undesirable light—even though every story I published met the standards I learned in my journalism classes.

Undue censorship is a disservice to our students and our future leaders. Being a younger teacher (even with one with tons of prior experience), I still have fears of what could happen if my students were to publish a piece that an administrator wants removed. I have these fears even with an administration team that has been extremely supportive of me during my first few years of teaching. Having clear adviser and teacher protections would be a substantial shift in how I pursue these situations.

This bill would revert PA's standard to the "material and substantial disruption" standard of the *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District* case. Students should not shed their constitutional rights to speech and press at the schoolhouse gate. Further, this bill empowers teachers to support students when otherwise legally protected speech is censored in schools. It still gives the power for administrators to intervene with unprotected speech, like libel and works that violate school policies.

To support New Voices is to support students and our journalists. To support New Voices is to support teachers and advisers in fear of consequences for advocating for students' First Amendment freedoms. To support New Voices is to ensure that student journalists can thrive in any community, especially ones that don't have an immediate news presence. And to support New Voices is to ensure that students in journalism programs are confident journalists who follow the standards of the media industry if they pursue that career path.

I'm forever thankful to have had an adviser who taught me the beginnings of what I know. Being a teacher and adviser now, I can only hope that I had a fraction of that impact on my current students. However, I can only continue to keep doing what I know best when my students and I have the protections afforded by HB 1309.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Hannah Shumsky



April 26, 2024

House 1309 Support Letter

Dear Chairman Schweyer, Minority Chairman Topper, and Members of the House Education Committee,

On behalf of the Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association, which represents print and digital news organizations across the Commonwealth, I write to support House Bill 1309, which protects individual student journalists' constitutional right to speak as well as their audience's constitutional right to receive information without undue government interference. A core aspect of PNA's mission is to support the Fourth Estate. We also advocate for legislation that seeks to curb censorship and ease the flow of information from and about the government. We believe this legislation creates critical protections for the next generation of journalists as they become the eyes and ears of the communities they serve and as they speak truth to power.

This bill is intended to remedy the damage caused by the U.S. Supreme Court's 1988 decision in *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, which permits censorship of student journalists when "reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns." This standard is very vague and ripe for abuse, and the goal of this legislation is to restore student journalists' constitutional rights. As the U.S. Supreme Court also said in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, students do not shed their First Amendment rights at the schoolhouse door, and we urge you to vote in favor of the bill to enshrine that concept into Pennsylvania law.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

William M. Cotter

President & CEO

Cc: The Honorable Melissa Shusterman



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1309

Pennsylvania Student Journalism Protection Act

April 29, 2024

Thank you for considering HB 1309, restoring and protecting the press freedom of Pennsylvania's student journalists. The Student Press Law Center stands in strong support of this legislation. We would be happy to answer any questions or concerns the committee may have regarding this legislation or other student press freedom matters.

The Student Press Law Center (SPLC) is an independent, non-partisan organization that, since 1974, has helped students of all ages participate in civic life and learn essential skills, ethics and values through the vehicle of journalism. Our hotline provides free legal services to student journalists and advisers. As such, we see daily the significant need for such legislation.

For more than a generation, Pennsylvania's student journalists have come of age under a U.S. Supreme Court decision, discredited by every journalism education organization in America, that teaches them to doubt themselves and report what is popular instead of what is important to their communities, guarantees them less freedom of expression than other students on campus, and places advisers at risk of professional consequences for trusting what their students are capable of.

While most students are held to the so-called "Tinker Standard," a legal precedent stemming from the U.S. Supreme Court's *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969) ruling that student speech cannot be censored unless that speech violates state and federal laws (including those against libel and slander, as well as privacy and copyright laws) or materially or substantially disrupts the school environment, student journalists face a much different standard. In *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* (1988), the Court ruled that most student media could be censored if school officials could show that their censorship was "reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns." Unfortunately, what constitutes "legitimate pedagogical concerns" has never been clarified or widely understood. While a student journalist adhering to proper journalistic procedures is unlikely to stumble over the "Tinker Standard," responsible students are often censored by *Hazelwood* for writing stories that administrators at another school would never contend violates any legitimate pedagogical standard. *Hazelwood* specifically allows school officials to censor student journalists simply by declaring an article, for example, "poorly written," "biased," "unsuitable" or — a line lifted directly from the Court's opinion — "inconsistent with the shared values of a civilized social order." *Hazelwood* remains, three decades after the Court's ruling, an arbitrary and capricious standard that causes confusion among student journalists and school administrators alike.



In Pennsylvania, this confusion has created a patchwork where students across the state and even within the same districts operate under different standards. Just last year, a PA adviser contacted the SPLC for guidance on whether her students could be censored just for covering a book ban at their school. Meanwhile, a student in another district was able to push back against compelled speech because of a favorable board policy allowing them to refuse publication. And at yet another school this year, student journalists were left in a state of publication limbo for over a month as their principal decided whether an article about covering certain topics in health class was allowed to be published. These stories, and countless others, present a troubling truth, that student journalists, their advisers, and even administrators are uncertain about the rights of student journalists. Without the clear guidelines that this bill provides, this confusion will continue to prevent students from learning the skills needed to be the civically engaged critical thinkers we all want in the world. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania deserves such critical thinkers.

Nationwide, SPLC has seen yearbooks censored because students wore MAGA shirts or the swim team wore bathing suits. Newspapers have been censored for reporting on graffiti visible to all students and administrators routinely censor pieces providing oversight into the administrators' own activities. Award-winning advisers have been reassigned or fired for refusing to infringe upon students from reporting on, among other things, the high cost of feminine hygiene products, a vigil for a current student, the improper withholding of documents relating to an administrator's resignation and curriculum changes. In recent months, students have reported blanket restrictions to any commenting on decisions by administration, reporting sudden disappearances of staff, or even discussing community events.

The result of *Hazelwood* censorship is not that students do not grapple with the issues that make adults nervous, it is simply that they do so disempowered by their administrators and informed by rumor and social media algorithms instead of rigorous fact-checking and journalistic ethics. Students learn that adults believe them incapable of the sort of discourse we expect them to engage in the moment they graduate.

We recognize there are instances in which administrators may need to exert authority to keep their students safe and the school day orderly. HB 1309 protects that authority. School officials can step in, for example, when there are concerns about an unwarranted invasion of privacy, or the media will be demonstrably disruptive to the school environment - the same "Tinker standard" they apply to all other students. HB 1309 merely ensures that students are no longer censored for subjective or ambiguous reasons. It enables student journalists to tell the truth without fear of reprisal, protects capable and supportive advisers and allows Pennsylvania's schools to fulfill their mission to produce the engaged thinkers ready to be our next generation of leaders.

Pennsylvania will join the seventeen states that have already enacted similar student press freedom laws. The verdict is clear; these laws do not impact the safety of the school or keep



administrators from intervening when necessary. In no state has there been an outbreak of unethical journalism. No school has had a libel lawsuit. (In fact, libel lawsuits against high school student journalism programs are exceedingly rare; to date, we are aware of *just one* published libel lawsuit in the country ever holding a school district liable for work published by its student media, and that suit occurred just before that state adopted a law similar to this.)

Thank you for your support of HB 1309, and Pennsylvania's student journalists.

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HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

PSEA Comments on House Bill 1309

On behalf of PSEA's 178,000 members, we urge you to support House Bill 1309, sponsored by Rep. Melissa Shusterman, and championed by student journalists and school media advisors in Pennsylvania and around the country. Freedom of speech and expression is a founding ideal of our country, and one that must be nourished for generations to ensure its continued existence and legacy. That legacy begins in our schools with young people joining a yearbook or media clubs and school newspapers, participating in a televised school news station, or perhaps enrolling in a journalism course.

Students' freedom of speech/expression is governed by two historic Supreme Court decisions. The first, *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969), related to three students' suspension for wearing black armbands to protest the Vietnam war. The 7-2 decision resulted in the famous words that students don't "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gates." The majority of the court took the position that school officials could not limit speech based on the mere suspicion that student speech would lead to disruption of the educational process.

The second Supreme Court ruling in *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* (1988), related to the removal of articles on teen pregnancy and the impact of divorce in a student newspaper. The 5-3 ruling held that a high school newspaper produced as part of class, and not a public forum, could be censored for a "legitimate pedagogical concern." However, the term "legitimate pedagogical concern" was never defined and can be interpreted differently by different people. In this case, school staff were even sued. Nevertheless, even with the Hazelwood decision, concern over disruption or disagreement with the content of student media is not a legitimate pedagogical concern.

Another layer to this issue can be found in 22 Pa Code § 12.9 maintains that content can only be excluded if determined to be: 1) libelous, slanderous, or obscene; 2) an unwanted invasion of privacy; 3) violating Federal or State law; 4) inciting students to commit an unlawful act or violate the school entity's policies; or 5) materially and substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school entity. Moreover, the regulations specifically delineate that students "have a right and are as free as editors of other newspapers to report the news and to editorialize..." and "school officials may not censor or restrict material simply because it is critical of the school or its administration."

Like many things in life, this can be a complicated issue for students and educators, including school administrators who are under pressure from school boards and parents to limit controversy in public schools. Passionate community debate is not unknown to Pennsylvania's public schools today. But that does not mean that our Commonwealth should avoid student media programs or in any way censor existing student media. Unfortunately, educators have faced discipline and transfers in their efforts to uphold students' First Amendment rights – including here in Pennsylvania. Today, seventeen states, including Arkansas, West Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, and others, have taken the important step to protect the first amendment rights of student journalists and school media advisors.

House Bill 1309 would provide much needed clarity across the public education spectrum, as well as strengthen free speech protections for students. The bill codifies the current free speech exclusions referenced in 22 Pa

Code § 12.9 (referenced above), but importantly also reinforce that only a student editor may grant approval for a publication or broadcast of school-sponsored media. The student media advisor shall appoint the student editor, and only act as an educator and advisor to the student media group. The bill further protects student media advisors by ensure they cannot be dismissed, suspended, disciplined, reassigned or transferred for taking action to protect a student journalist or refusing to infringe on the conduct of a student journalist under the school entity's policies. The bill requires school entities to update their policies to comply with the act. Additionally, and we would argue of great importance, is the requirement for student journalists to receive media law training. Student media programs teach students about the First Amendment, how to write, broadcast, interview and otherwise produce content within the confines of state and federal laws. These students have a passion that could lead to future careers. Public schools have the capability of supporting this potential career pathway, no different from career and technical programs, or encouraging the next generation of teachers.

PSEA members discussed HB 1309 on three occasions between September 2022 and October 2023. And while initially cautious in their endorsement of HB 1309, the more they learned about the history of free speech protections in student media, the actions of seventeen other states, and what has happened to their colleagues who presently or previously served as student media advisors, the more they felt it was necessary to enact the Pennsylvania Student Journalism Protection Act. With that said, they are not immune to the pressure on school administrators and school boards – especially in our current environment where school board meetings have become partisan battlegrounds for political disagreements. Consequently, they urge the House Education Committee to extend the media law training requirement to school administrators and school boards as part of their professional development and mandated training requirements. Training will not stop community controversy, but it can better inform school leaders to provide answers to their communities if and when questioned. It could also be a proactive step to protect against retaliatory actions against student media advisors.

PSEA appreciates the advocacy of New Voices Pennsylvania, the Student Press Law Center, and the Pennsylvania students and teachers presenting to the House Education Committee. House Bill 1309 is an opportunity to strengthen student media programs and embolden our young people to step away from social media and bring conversations about important topics into public forums. Censoring students or pushing them away from covering topics ultimately fails students. It sends the message that their ideas aren't important. It is possible to strengthen student journalism, protect First Amendment rights, and have hard conversations in responsible ways. PSEA maintains that House Bill 1309 is a vital component to that process. Again, we urge your support for House Bill 1309 and consideration of an amendment to broaden media law training to further strengthen the legislation. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

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