



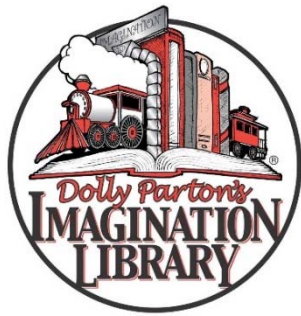
UNIVERSITY of
LOUISIANA
L A F A Y E T T E

**Picard
Center**

REPORT

Dolly Parton Imagination Library 2014-15 Study

November 2016



United Way of Acadiana

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United Way of Acadiana

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The single most important activity for building knowledge for their eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.

*Becoming a Nation of Readers,
Anderson, 1985*

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Dolly Parton Imagination Library

2014-15 Evaluation

Summary

Since adoption in 2009 by the United Way of Acadiana, the Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL) program has provided books to 21,000 children in Acadiana. For the year ending December 31, 2015, the program had enrolled over 11,000 active participants in the four-parish region. This study presents evidence that students in the DPIL program are 16% more likely meet literacy benchmarks as measured by the spring Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills assessment (DIBELS) (Dewey, Latimer, Kaminski, & Good, 2012), as compared to a non-DPIL group of students. More importantly, results suggest that demographic subgroups traditionally most prone to reading challenges were more likely to be on benchmark on the spring DIBELS assessment than a comparison group including boys (+16%), African Americans (+18%), and children in poverty (+13%).

Moreover, this program has proven extremely popular with parents as 99% of the parents surveyed were mostly or extremely satisfied with the program. Children receiving the DPIL books are excited to read; consequently, when they receive the books they tend to cherish and to treat them as their property. The majority of parents reported reading to their children at least "a few" times a week for 10-20 minutes each. The report concludes with suggestions that focus on promotion of the DPIL and on several minor issues related to the distribution of books as suggested by some parents.

Reading Readiness = Kindergarten Readiness

Many factors impact reading readiness in young children. A convergent body of 50 years of research provides insight on these factors and informs families and educators of the skills and needs of young children as they approach formal schooling. The National Early Literacy Panel (Westberg, 2006) identified critical predictors of early reading which include alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, the ability to rapidly name a sequence of random letters, digits or colors, name writing, and capacity to remember spoken information for short periods of time (auditory memory). Additionally important are combinations of the elements of alphabet knowledge and concepts about print, as well as the ability to produce or comprehend spoken language, which includes vocabulary and grammar. All of these skills are engaged when parents and children read together. Furthermore, reading to and with children provides opportunities for increased parent-child relationships, self-regulation of behaviors, and a love of learning. "Children that read the most read the best, and learn the most (Terlease, 2006)."

Whether rich or poor, residents of the United States or China, illiterate or college graduates, parents who have books in the home increase the level of education their children will attain. Evans, Kelley, Sikora, & Treiman, 2010

Today, virtually all early childhood programs place a significant emphasis on learning language and words through social interactions with adults and peers. Joint activities, such as looking at picture books and storybook reading, appear to be particularly conducive to vocabulary learning (Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Elley, 1989; Ninio & Bruner, 1978; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Tabors, Snow, and Dickinson, 2001) report that the significance of teachers' use of extended discourse and rare words at preschool is a strong predictor of 4th-grade reading comprehension. Facilitated play, especially pretend play, strengthens children's use of lexical and syntactical features of language (Bruner, 1984) and narrative production (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001)—important skills needed for comprehending and producing decontextualized texts in later reading and writing (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005).

The Importance of Home Reading

Children develop literacy skills and an awareness of language long before they can read. Since language development is fundamental to all areas of learning, skills developed early in life can help set the stage for later school success. By reading aloud to their young children, parents help them acquire the skills they will need to be ready for school.

Children who lack the fundamentals of language awareness and literacy skills early in life are more likely to fall behind in school (Scarborough, 2002) and are more likely to drop out later on. Numerous studies point to parent-child book reading during the preschool years leads as a contributor to higher reading achievement in elementary school (Missal et al., 2007), which also leads to greater enthusiasm for reading and learning. In an international study involving 15-year-olds from 14 developed countries, students whose parents read books with them regularly during the first year of primary school scored an average of 14 points higher on a comprehensive reading assessment at high school (OECD, 2011).

<http://www.childtrends.org/indicators/reading-to-young-children/>

Extensively examined (Scarborough and Dobrich, 1994; Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995), the consensus is that children benefit from being regularly read to at home. Early work established that parent-child book reading contributes or inspires children who read at an early age (Clark 1975; Durkin, 1966; Durkin, 1974-75), and leads to oral language development, which is a key to future reading comprehension (Lonigan, Dyer, & Anthony, 1996; Raz & Bryant, 1990; Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). Furthermore, there is theoretical and empirical support, which suggests that phonological awareness is potentiated by language development (Goswami, 2001; Metsala, 1999).

The longitudinal Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development (Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001) examined the development of language and literacy skills of children from low-income homes and provided evidence of the long-term impact of book reading practices (DeTemple, 2001). Parental reports on children's book-related experiences (e.g., frequency of book reading, library use, book ownership) predicted end-of-kindergarten status. Growth

models from kindergarten through fourth grade indicated that the impact of these early experiences continued to be significant four years later.

While it is valuable to know that book reading in the home can have such an impact, it also is well documented that many families have difficulty providing children the book experiences they need. Most parents are busy; low-income parents frequently have limited access to appropriate books, and some have limited literacy skills themselves. Given these constraints, it is important that support is provided to families and that preschools do as much as possible to provide all children with varied and engaging opportunities to hear and discuss books.

Background Information

In 1995, Dolly Parton launched the Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program, to benefit the children of her home county in East Tennessee, USA. Dolly's vision was to foster a love of reading among her county's preschool children and their families by providing them with the gift of a specially selected book each month. By mailing high quality, age-appropriate books directly to their homes, she wanted children to be excited about books and to feel the magic that books can create. Moreover, she could insure that every child would have books, regardless of their family's income. <http://www.imaginationlibrary.com/>

Nurturing a love and appreciation for books is a companion to successful early literacy and the greater goal of learning. The Dollywood Foundation encourages community-based agencies across the United States to participate in this program. In 2009, the United Way of Acadiana began providing the program to a four-parish region that includes Acadia, Lafayette, St. Martin and Vermilion parishes. One of its principal ongoing activities is to promote the DPIL program to families in this community by registering children in the program, maintaining a database of participating families, and purchasing and mailing books to enrolled children each month.

Since DPIL's inception in 2009, the United Way of Acadiana and the program have provided books to 21,000 Acadiana children. As of December 2015, the program had over 11,000 active participants enrolled in the four-parish region. Also, there are more than 9,000 'graduates' of the program. The majority of these children are from Lafayette Parish.

In January 2010, United Way of Acadiana contracted with the Picard Center for Child Development at University of Louisiana at Lafayette to conduct an evaluation of the DPIL program that measured its impact on young children as well as its progress toward the goals and outcomes identified in the project's Logic Model. In December 2010, The Picard Center for Child Development provided United Way of Acadiana with its initial report of findings.

Table 1: Children Served by Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL)

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Active</i>	<i>Graduated</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% Served</i>
<i>Acadia</i>	1,642	1,345	2,987	18%
<i>Lafayette</i>	5,277	3,817	9,094	55%
<i>St. Martin</i>	1,069	1,191	2,260	14%
<i>Vermilion</i>	1,300	990	2,290	14%
Total	9,288	7,343	16,631	

* Estimated percentage by United Way of Acadiana Dec 2014

Study Description

The DPIL project sends a book to children ages 0 to 5 each month from the point of enrollment. This evaluation is designed to measure the impact of these books on children’s reading readiness skills at kindergarten. The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (DIBELS) universal screening tool is used to measure reading readiness quantitatively. Based on DIBELS results, students are divided by those achieving at or above a standard composite benchmark versus students who fall below this benchmark. The bulk of the quantitative analysis will report the percentage of students on this benchmark.

This evaluation involves two groups and two time periods. The two groups are those students confirmed to be in the DPIL program and a comparison group. Also, this study uses a DIBELS evaluation at the beginning and at the end of kindergarten to consider the immediate effect of the DPIL and the compound effect of kindergarten. Then the DPIL and comparison groups are divided by demographic subgroup to look for a differential effect.

Finally, this evaluation reports the results of a parental survey. The intention of the survey is to qualitatively understand the behavior of the family as they receive the books, the parent perceptions of the DPIL, and areas where the program could be more successful.

Basic Evaluation Question

The research design included both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative design methods were utilized to measure the behavioral impact of the DPIL program on parents and their children through online parental surveys. Quantitative design methods were used to understand differences between those students who participated in the DPIL program and other kindergarteners in the area schools.

Research Question 1: What is the difference in DIBELS assessment performance for DPIL students versus a comparison group?

Research Question 2: Is the relative performance of students in the DPIL program affected by demographic categories of the participants including race, gender, and poverty status?

Research Question 3: What are the parents’ perceptions of the DPIL program?

Study Population and Sample

Picard Center received written permission from 1,262 parents to include their children in the academic analysis of the program. Children are exiting the program as they enter kindergarten and the standardized DIBELS assessment is available at that time, so only children entering kindergarten are studied. For successful analysis of subgroups, it is necessary to increase the comparison group. Children entering kindergarten in the 2014-15 school year (92) were combined with children entering in the 2013-14 school year (136), which constituted a total of 228 known DPIL students.

The majority of DPIL parents did not provide permission; thus, we cannot be certain that the participants are representative of the 'universe' of the DPIL population. In fact, it appears that the sample of children approved for examination is not representative. The identified DPIL participating children are compared to all other students in the four school districts stratified only by the year. Strict demographic/academic stratification or propensity score match would risk comparing known and unknown DPIL students. Thus, DPIL students are compared to the general population of students in the four districts.

The potential study group included 228 known DPIL students and 7,458 other kindergarten students in the four-parish region with available data (secured by permission of the school districts). The imbalance between the test group and the rest of the population would create a statistical analysis that was both overpowered and possibly able to hide effects. A decision was made to select randomly 1.5 comparison students for every known DPIL student. Oversampling from non-DPIL students keeps the comparison group within a reasonable size but reduces the effect if a true but unknown DPIL student were part of the comparison group.

Table 2 summarizes the differences between the three groups on the main indicators. The *comparison group* and *the students not studied* were not significantly different on any of the descriptive measures. Thus, it is reasonable to believe that the randomly selected comparison group used for this study is substantially similar to the entire population of students in the four-parish region.

The *DPIL* and the *comparison group* were statistically different in two ways. First, the significant difference in the percentage of students on benchmark in the Spring DIBELS is discussed below. Second, the differences in the racial balance were also significant with the DPIL student containing 12% more White students and 9% fewer Black students than the comparison group. Other racial groups did not meet reporting standards and omitted from the analysis for the racial breakdown. There is no evidence to indicate whether the DPIL study group was representative of the students receiving books. Demographic subgroup analysis is still possible as discussed below.

Table 2: Comparisons of Students on Percent in Key Categories Across Groups*

<i>Percent in Group</i>	<i>DPIL Study</i>	<i>Comparison</i>	<i>Not Studied</i>
<i>On Fall Benchmark</i>	43%	44%	42%
<i>On Spring Benchmark</i>	74%	63%	65%
<i>Male</i>	55%	49%	52%
<i>Poverty</i>	69%	67%	66%
<i>Black</i>	29%	38%	36%
<i>White</i>	66%	54%	56%
<i>Total</i>	228	342	7458

* Demographic data not available for all students (at least 75% available).

Rows do not total. Cells are the percent in that group.

The results of the study will give insight into the ability of this program to change the lives of children in need. The following section will first consider the qualitative evaluation of the program through parental survey results followed by a quantitative analysis of student performance on the DIBELS universal screening tool.

DIBELS Assessment Results

The State of Louisiana adopted the DIBELS assessment to children's readiness to read. DIBELS for kindergarten focuses on pre-literacy skills such as the ability to recognize letters and capacity to associate sounds with letters. These skills become an important indicator of actual reading formally assessed late in first grade.

In this study, the key variable is the percent of students on benchmark. The composite score is a combined age-adjusted measure, which brings together multiple DIBELS scales into one. The pre-literacy measures represent the child's ability to identify letters, letter sounds, and to understand that groups of letters make words. The composite score can be best understood as a percent on benchmark (Core) because it is a combination of scores and the raw score could be misinterpreted. Due to the relatively small number of DPIL students for whom we have permission to track, DIBELS scores were reduced to two categories, Core (On Benchmark) and Below Benchmark (Intensive and Strategic Intervention).

The true posttest for the DPIL program occurs in the fall of the kindergarten year with the first DIBELS assessment measure in kindergarten. However, it is reasonable to believe that families continued to use the books provided by the DPIL throughout kindergarten. The effect of in-school instruction coupled with in-home book use likely potentiates the impact of the DPIL program through the kindergarten year. For this reason, differences on DIBELS were tested at both the fall and spring assessment periods to determine the effect of DPIL.

The result of the analysis suggests that DPIL students outperformed the comparison group on the spring DIBELS assessment.

As displayed in Table 3, DPIL participants were less likely to be on benchmark in the fall DIBELS assessment, but that difference was not significant, so researchers accept that the two groups are substantially equivalent at the point of the fall assessment. In the spring DIBELS assessment, significantly more DPIL students were likely to be on benchmark than the comparison group.

Table 3: Percent of Students on DIBELS Benchmark

	<i>DPIL</i>	<i>Comparison</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Fall</i>	43.4%	47.3%	43.7%
<i>Spring*</i>	73.7%	64.9%	67.1%
<i>Count</i>	228	340	578

*Differences significant (Chi Square=7.1, p=0.008) Cramer V = 0.113

Evaluation of the Spring Assessment indicate that the DPIL students were 9% more likely than the comparison group to be on benchmark (74% versus 65%) supporting a significant chance that the difference is real and representative of all students. Since the study sample is above 500, the chi-square could have been affected by sample size. The Cramer V tests effect size or the importance of the effect. The calculated Cramer V was 0.113, indicating a moderate effect size. The result of the analysis leads researchers to believe that the DPIL students did outperform the comparison group on the spring DIBELS assessment.

Spring DIBELS Assessment Based on Fall Assessment Level

The researchers decided to expand the DIBELS analysis by looking at the interaction of the DPIL on students that did not achieve benchmark on the fall assessment. In effect, did DPIL students who failed to make benchmark in the fall do better on the spring assessment? Table 4 summarizes the percent on spring benchmark divide by study group (DPIL and Comparison) and the benchmark level in the fall. The percentages indicate that DPIL and comparison students, who were On Benchmark in the fall, were equally likely to be On Benchmark in the spring. Despite the 5% differences between DPIL (87%) and Comparison (82%), the Chi-Square did not indicate a significant relationship between group membership and the chance of being on the benchmark in the spring.

Among students who were below benchmark in the fall, DPIL students were significantly more likely to be on the benchmark on the spring DIBELS assessment.

The Chi-Square test supports a relationship between DPIL participation and spring benchmark status among students who fell below benchmark in the fall. DPIL were significantly more likely to be on benchmark in the spring. Among the students who were below benchmark in the fall, 64% of the DPIL were on the benchmark in the spring and 48% of the comparison group.

Table 4: Spring DIBELS Percent on Benchmark Based on Fall Assessment

	<i>DPIL</i>	<i>Comparison</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Fall Below Benchmark*</i>	63.7%	47.9%	54.1%
<i>Fall On Benchmark</i>	86.8%	82.0%	83.8%

*Among students who were below benchmark in the fall, DPIL students were significantly more likely to be on the benchmark on the spring assessment (Chi Square=7.57, p = 0.006). Other differences are not statistically significant.

Demographic Effects

The purpose of demographic analysis is to identify subgroups that benefit the most from the DPIL. In this study, the test will be the interaction between group membership (DPIL and comparison) and demographic categories (See Table 5). It is not designed to identify differences between subgroups. For example, the analysis will look at the differences between boys in the DPIL program and the comparison group rather than the differences between boys and girls.

Table 5: DIBELS Percent on Benchmark and Counts by Subgroups

		<i>DPIL</i>	<i>Comparison</i>	<i>Total</i>
Gender				
<i>Fall</i>	Female	41.6%	47.7%	45.5%
	Male	45.1%	39.9%	42.1%
<i>Spring</i>	Female	79.2%	71.8%	74.4%
	Male*	69.8%	53.6%	60.2%
<i>Count</i>	Female	101	174	275
	Male	122	168	290
Ethnicity				
<i>Fall</i>	Black	44.6%	40.3%	41.8%
	White	44.2%	46.8%	45.6%
<i>Spring</i>	Black*	71.9%	54.3%	60.1%
	White	75.7%	68.8%	71.8%
<i>Count</i>	Black	65	129	194
	White	149	186	335
Poverty				
<i>Fall</i>	In Poverty	41.0%	39.2%	40.1%
	Not in Poverty	48.3%	50.0%	49.3%
<i>Spring</i>	In Poverty*	76.2%	62.7%	68.8%
	Not in Poverty	77.6%	74.3%	75.8%
<i>Count</i>	In Poverty	134	153	287
	Not in Poverty	60	74	134

*Significant relationships (Discussed Below).

In no case, was the fall assessment found to be significantly different between DPIL and the comparison group so that assessment will be omitted from consideration. This section uses Chi Square to identify differential effects of the DPIL program by subgroup. Since subgroup tests involve less than 500 students, Cramer V is also not necessary.

Gender

In past evaluations, using DIBELS, girls have tended to perform better on the DIBELS assessment than boys. The fall assessment indicated nearly identical percent on benchmark ranging from 40% for males and 48% for females in the comparison group. The significant difference came in the spring assessment. 70% of boys in the DPIL were on the benchmark in the spring – nearly closing the achievement gap with girls (79% for DPIL and 72% for comparison girls) and 16% higher boys in the comparison group. The percentage difference indicates a significant effect of the DPIL on kindergarten boys.

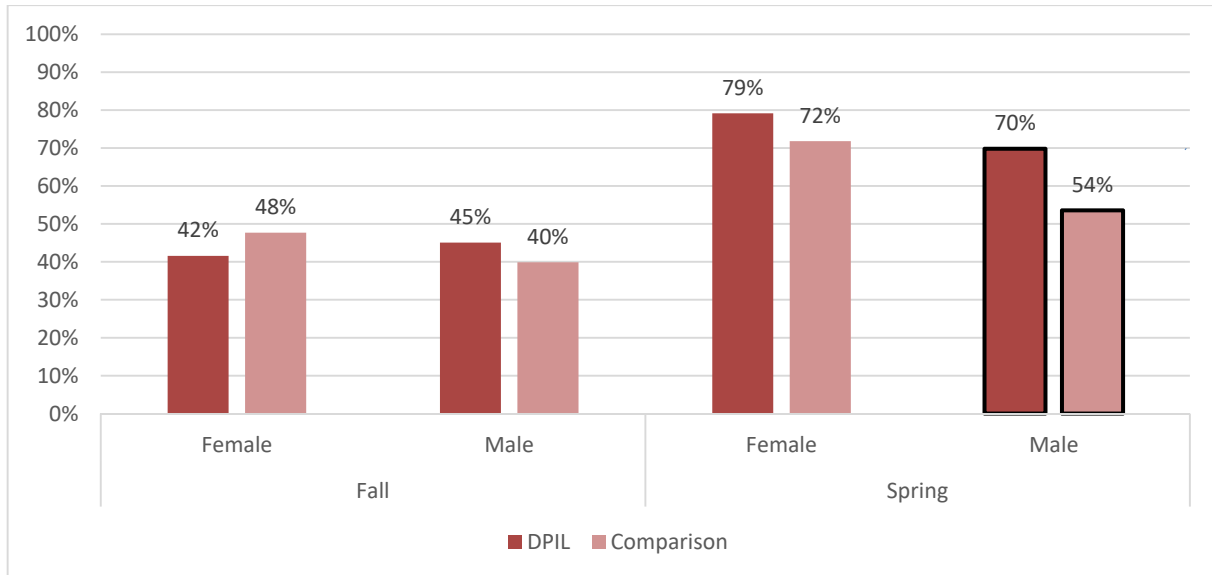


Figure 1: DIBELS Percent on Benchmark by Gender*

*Difference between males in the DPIL program spring assessment and other males on the spring assessment was significant (Chi Square= 7.57, $p = 0.006$). Other differences are not statistically significant.

Ethnicity

In the sample, only two groups had sufficient representation to report results, Caucasian (White) and African Americans (Black). In the fall assessment period, there was no significant difference between DPIL and comparison students. On the spring DIBELS, there was a significant difference between Blacks student in the DPIL (72% on benchmark) and comparison students (54% on benchmark) – a difference of 18%. This result indicates a step toward gap closure with white students with benchmark levels of 76% for DPIL and 69% for comparison students.

African American DPIL students were 18% more often on benchmark (spring DIBELS) than the Black comparison group.

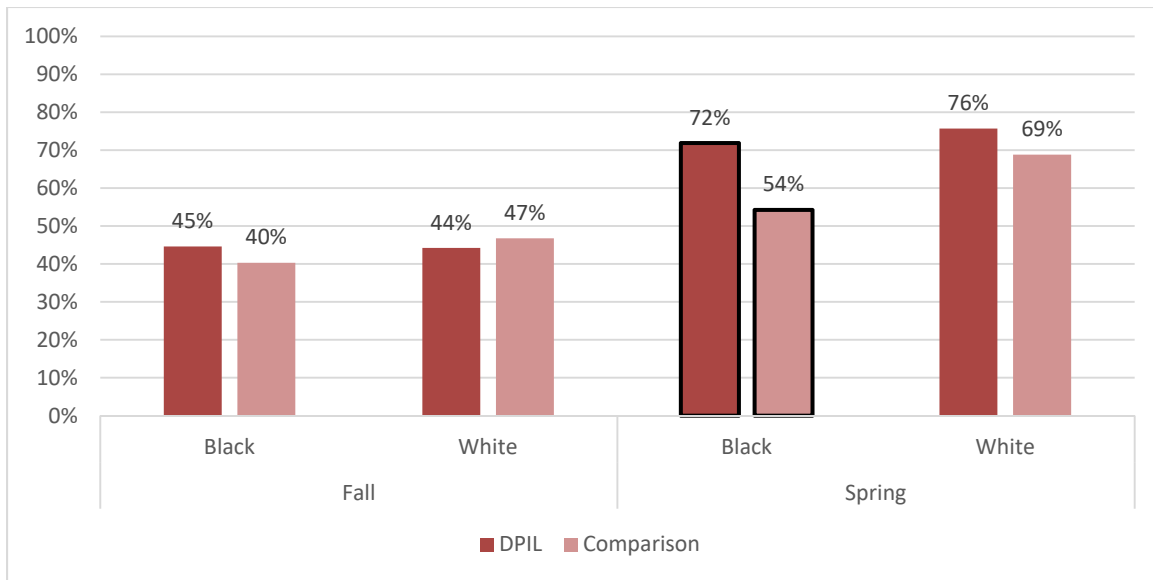


Figure 2: DIBELS Percent on Benchmark by Ethnicity*

*The difference between black students in the DPIL and other black students on the spring assessment was significant (Chi Square=5.53, $p = 0.02$). Other differences are not statistically significant.

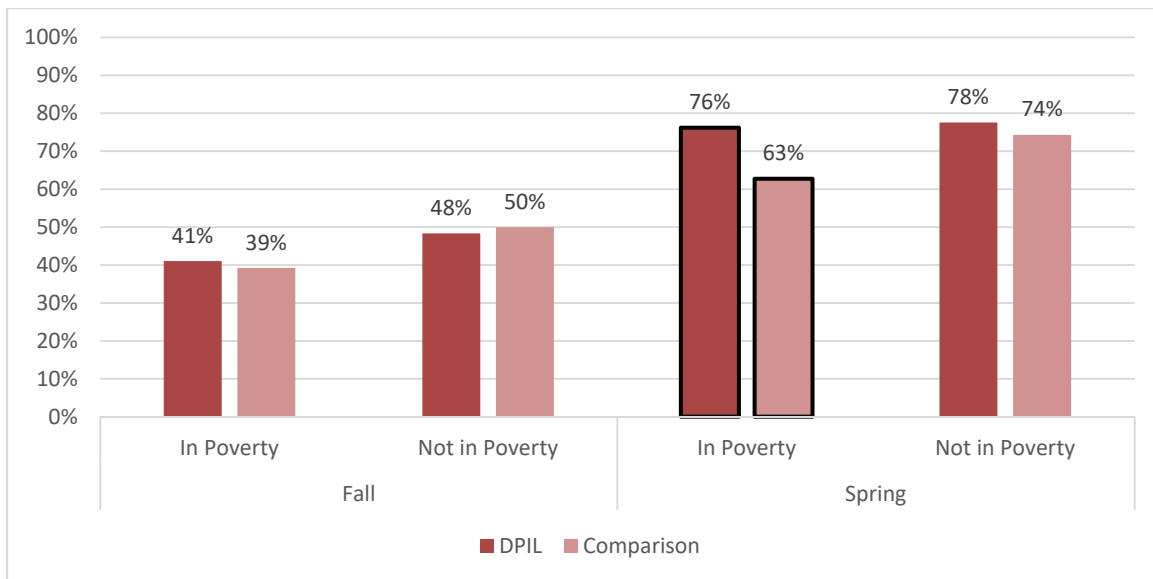


Figure 3: DIBELS Percent on Benchmark by Poverty*

*The difference between poverty students in the DPIL and comparison group on the spring assessment was significant (Chi Square=5.82, $p = 0.02$). Other differences are not statistically significant.

Poverty

The normal definition of a student in poverty is one participating in the free or reduced-price lunch program. As with ethnicity, the difference between DPIL and comparison students was not significantly different on the fall assessment although there was approximately a ten percent difference between poverty (40%) and those students not in poverty (49%) overall. On the spring DIBELS assessment, 76% of the DPIL students were on benchmark – equal to the overall percent for students not in poverty and 13% higher than the comparison group of poverty students (See Figure 3).

Summary of Quantitative Analysis

The analysis of students' DIBELS benchmark performance indicates some important effects. First, while equivalent at fall assessment points, DPIL students were more likely to be on benchmark at year end (spring assessment) than students in the comparison group. This overall effect translates into significant gap closure for historically endangered subgroups (See Table 6). While this does not guarantee future success, there is a reason to believe in a positive effect of the program. Congruent with findings of Mol and Bus's meta-analysis of the association between print exposure and components of reading (2011), the print and language skills acquired at home with parents will likely grow stronger as children continue to develop and contribute to stronger reading skills in early elementary school.

Table 6: Spring Benchmark Performance by Subgroup*

	DPIL	Comparison		
Male	70%	54%	<i>All Females</i>	74%
Black	72%	54%	<i>All White</i>	72%
Poverty	76%	63%	<i>All non-Poverty</i>	76%

*Differences between DPIL and Comparison Groups all found statistically significant.
No other relationships tested.

Parental Survey Results

In a separate study, a survey of DPIL parents between February 26 and March 31, 2016, yielded 1,456 completed responses. Due to the number of parents with multiple children, the survey represents more than 1,840 children currently receiving books and 340 past recipients. This section will look at the results of this survey. As above, the majority of the surveys come from the population center in Lafayette Parish (See Table 7). The respondents do not accurately reflect the population of the region. Only 13% of respondents were not white compared to 34% of the students studied above. 75% of families surveyed have at least one parent with a 2-year college degree or more and a median household income between \$50,000 and \$75,000; whereas, 2015 data indicate that both education and income medians are considerably lower. Future surveys will explore options to reach a more representatively distributed sample.

Table 7: Demographic Distribution of Survey Respondents

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Count</i>
<i>Acadia</i>	14%	202
<i>Lafayette</i>	60%	869
<i>St Martin</i>	10%	145
<i>Vermilion</i>	15%	225
<i>Other</i>	1%	15
		1456
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
<i>Black</i>	8%	105
<i>White</i>	88%	1215
<i>Other</i>	5%	68
		1388
<i>At least 2-year college degree</i>		
<i>No College Degree</i>	25%	353
<i>One Parent</i>	36%	518
<i>Two Parents</i>	39%	556
		1427
<i>Income</i>		
<i>\$0-\$24,999</i>	12%	164
<i>\$25,000-\$49,999</i>	20%	278
<i>\$50,000-\$74,999</i>	25%	342
<i>\$75,000-\$99,999</i>	20%	274
<i>\$100,000 or more</i>	22%	299
<i>Grand Total</i>	100%	1357

The results of the quantitative analysis (reported on above) suggest that minority and low-income students may derive the greatest benefits from DPIL inclusion, as they are likely to have less access to books. However, the Parent Survey suggests a very different demographic distribution of DPIL resources. It is unclear if the survey accurately reflects the participants or

if the participants do not completely reflect the population most in need of the DPIL – or both. In either case, encouraging greater diversity of participants is a reasonable goal of DPIL promotion. Table 8 summarizes how parents learn about DPIL opportunities generally and by race. The most common referral source for all recipients of is through interpersonal channels, specifically friends or relatives (55%) and teachers/schools/preschools (8%). United Way direct promotion efforts are the second most effective referral source, especially to the African American community. White parents receive information via mediated channels including traditional, social media, and visits to Dollywood more than other subgroups. Professionals including the medical professionals, teachers, and librarians informing parents account for slightly over 20% of referrals and is stronger for families in the non-white communities. As the region becomes more diverse, continued engagement of the professional communities may increase referrals of those most in need of DPIL.

Table 8: How Did the Parents Learn About the DPIL?

<i>Source</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>All</i>
<i>Friend or relative</i>	57.1%	42.9%	45.6%	55.4%
<i>United Way</i>	12.9%	21.0%	11.8%	13.5%
<i>Doctor, nurse or hospital</i>	9.6%	15.3%	14.7%	10.3%
<i>Media</i>	10.4%	7.6%	7.4%	10.1%
<i>Teacher, school/preschool</i>	7.6%	9.5%	11.8%	8.0%
<i>Library</i>	3.4%	3.8%	8.9%	2.9%
<i>N=</i>	1209	105	68	1382

Young children who are regularly read to have a larger vocabulary, higher levels of phonological, letter name, and sound awareness, and better success at decoding words (Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002). The number of words in a child’s vocabulary can be an important indicator of later academic success (Hart & Risley, 1985). Children’s vocabulary use at age three is a strong predictor of language skill and reading comprehension at age 9-10 (Biemiller, 2001). Further, vocabulary use in first grade can predict more than 30 percent of 11th-grade reading comprehension (Biemiller, 2006). Child Trends, 2015

Of significant interest to the DPIL leadership are responses reported in Table 9. All early literacy research and experts agree that early and routine parent-child reading has a myriad of important benefits including direct pre-reading such as increased vocabulary, phonological awareness, phonological memory, story recall and comprehension, and early critical thinking skills. The consensus by leading professional and policy organizations, American Academy of Pediatrics, Reading is Fundamental, NAEYC, and the International Reading Association recommend daily short engaged reading of approximately 15 minutes. The results of which include a myriad of cognitive and social and emotional benefits.

It is encouraging that each of the families in the survey reported reading at least five to ten minutes a few times each week. It is likely that with modest United Way efforts, more

families could move from “a Few Times” to “Daily.” More encouraging, the families spend time talking about the books to their children, reinforcing the lessons of the reading.

Table 9: Parent-Reported Reading to Child by Days and Minutes

<i>Days Reading</i>	<i>5-10 mins.</i>	<i>10-20 mins.</i>	<i>20+ mins.</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Every day</i>	16%	27%	10%	52%
<i>Few times a week</i>	19%	25%	4%	48%
Total	34%	52%	14%	N=1405

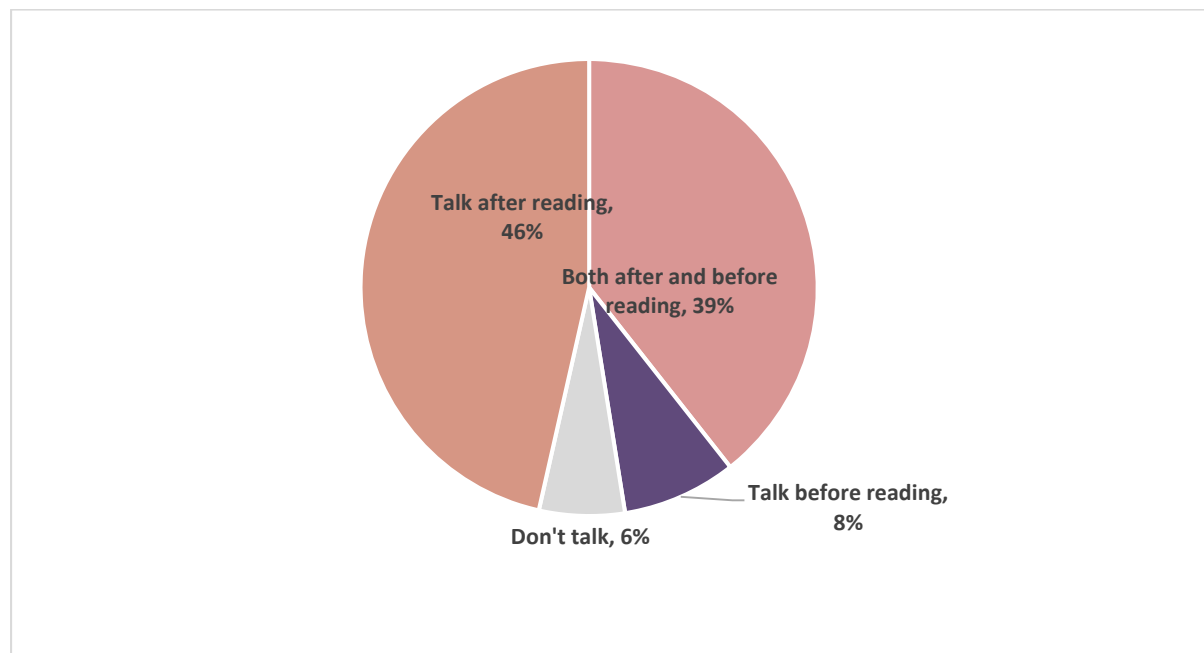


Figure 4: When do Parents Talk with Child?

Figure 5 provides insight into behaviors of the young DPIL participants in response to their new books. As would be expected, almost all children were reported to be excited to receive new books and demonstrate this by requesting parents to read these books, which leads to the enjoyment of reading. Children are also reported to take ownership of new books, which may be related to previously identified research that indicates that the number of books in homes is related to future reading success. In fact, Evans and colleagues (2010) suggest that the number of books in the home (greater than 10) is a better predictor of reading than parent education level.

Responses to “Use of words...” and “Understand printed words carry meaning” may reflect the developmental/age continuum of respondent children; otherwise, it may suggest that families could benefit from simple reading strategies that promote language use and print awareness (see recommendations).

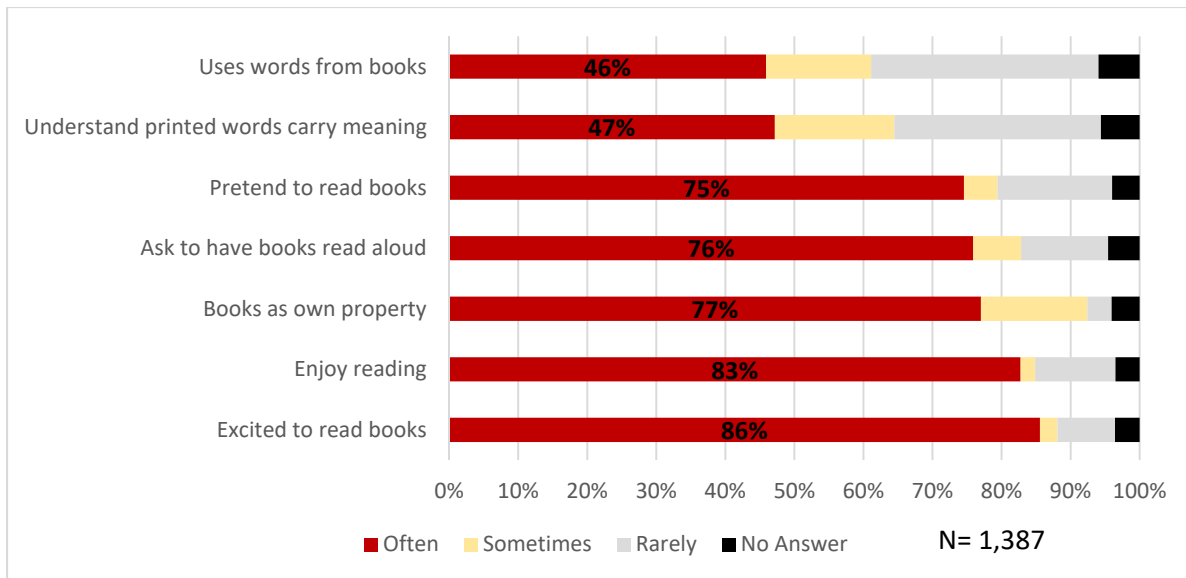


Figure 5: Behavior of Children

Rarely is an education program as universally enjoyed by parents as the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, which has a universal appeal with few parents ever encountering problems. Figure 6 summarizes two key questions of parental satisfaction. Ninety-two percent of parents indicate that their children are better prepared for kindergarten as a result of the DPIL. Most of the remaining 7% reported that their child was too young or just starting the program.

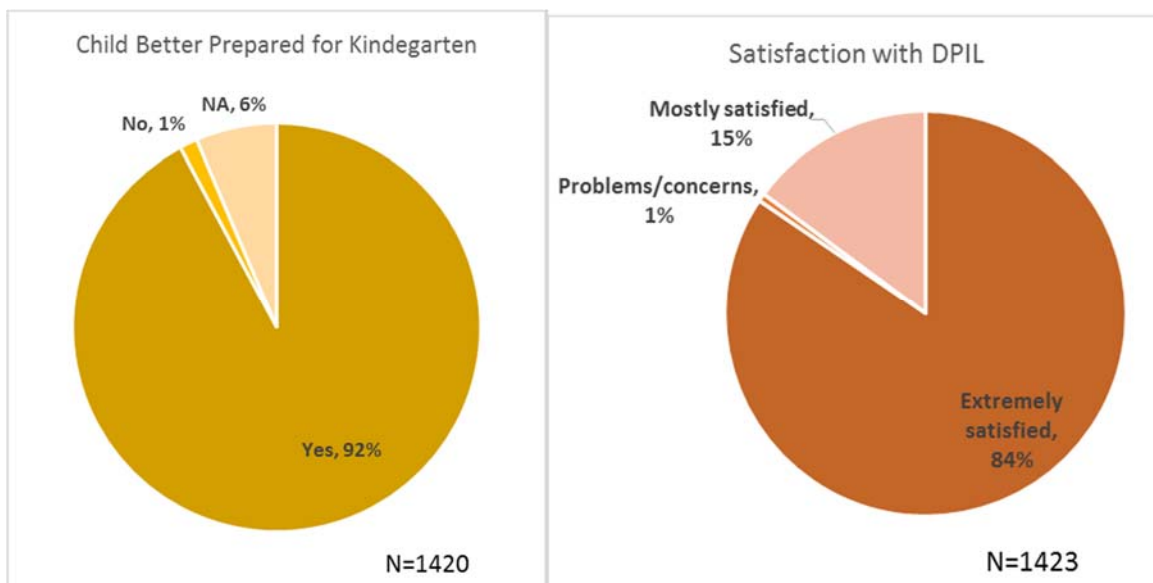


Figure 6: Parent-Reported Satisfaction

Parents report that their children are thrilled to get their books each month, and eagerly anticipate the arrival of new books. Open-ended comments are most likely to use words like

“Thank-you” and “Love” the program. Eighty-four percent of parents are extremely satisfied. The most common concern expressed were requests to expand the program to other children, regions, or older ages. Some parents request a greater variety of books (same for one sibling as another), board books, or gender-based selections.

Recommendations

The DPIL is a highly successful program. This commendable undertaking of delivering thousands of books to thousands of children has resulted in clearly positive results.

Recommendations are minor but may help serve the community better:

1. For several years, the United Way has distributed information about the DPIL through multiple sources including nurses, doctors, hospitals and Librarians. This particular professional avenue has been most successful with reaching the minority community. If possible, strategically expand this referral method to more health care providers and professionals in low-income communities to families most likely to have the greatest need for the program.
2. Given that most parents surveyed are regularly reading with children and, if possible within the DPIL guidelines, consider providing parents with simple and developmentally appropriate early literacy strategies corresponding to the ages of their young children each month.
3. Some parents asked for simple changes that could improve service. For example, children were not receiving books or parents were unaware of eligibility of a second child. A point of contact for information and concerns regularly distributed (perhaps with the books) could correct some of the parental concerns.
4. Several parents noted redundant delivery of books to a second child. Correcting this problem may be difficult to manage but would reduce waste.
5. As parental permission to examine child academic performance has dropped significantly in the last few years, develop recruitment strategies to increase the number and diversity of families/children engaged in the survey component of the evaluation. Ensure that respondents are representative of their communities and are from diverse ethnic/racial groups and across income strata. As DIBELS is phased out as an evaluation tool, it may not be possible to combine the subject pool across years.
6. Finally, in the event of a new Louisiana statewide kindergarten assessment, develop a system for identifying comparable constructs and converting scores across measures for the purpose of longitudinal assessment.

Limitations

This evaluation report attempts to examine a large program from a small volunteer sample. Generalizability is challenging with a study group that is both small and not scientifically drawn. Since there are unknown DPIL participants in the general population, it is possible that the comparison group may include children that were also in the DPIL program. This redundant assignment may limit the ability to find an effect of the program. This year is only the second year that local school systems have taken on the responsibility of delivering data to the Picard Center for study. While cooperation has been excellent, there has been some problem with data consistency and completeness. It is possible that missing/unusable data has altered the results.

Conclusions

The data presented in this report suggest two important conclusions. The first is that United Way Acadiana does an effective and efficient job administering a program that delivers thousands of books to equally as many children. Overwhelmingly, families give the program high marks. Few families had any complaints with the quality or delivery of books. As indicated, families frequently referred to the program with superlatives such as, “Love the Dolly Parton Program,” or, “My child can’t wait for the new books.” Anecdotally, families report that the DPIL books contribute to the enjoyment of reading and their children’s enthusiasm for learning. United Way Acadiana is to be commended for implementing the program in an efficient manner.

Second, greater percentages of participants achieved benchmarks of readiness than their non-participating peers. Furthermore, even with the limitation of the sample design, there is evidence of *gap closure* in key demographic subgroups, which remains a primary goal of local school districts and the Louisiana Department of Education. Thus, there is compelling reason to believe that the DPIL continues to be a fruitful and effective program that promotes home reading and prepares young children for formal schooling.

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