

Executive Summary

The Great Start Collaborative (GSC) of Jackson County is part of the statewide Great Start system. The purpose of the Great Start system is to assure a coordinated system of community resources and supports to assist all Michigan families in providing a great start for their children from birth to age eight. The GSC is dedicated to supporting young children's early learning and development, especially as it relates to school readiness. One of the goals of the GSC set by the Office of Great Start is children are prepared to succeed in fourth grade and beyond by reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

One of the ways the GSC is able to support early literacy development is through the Imagination Library program, which provides free children's books to participating children under age five, which are age-appropriate, high-quality, and provided on a monthly basis. Additionally, the Jackson County Intermediate School District, in partnership with the GSC, assesses the early literacy skills of every beginning kindergartner in the county, using the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) assessment. The PALS assesses five core early literacy skills, including: Individual Rhyme, Individual Beginning Sound; Lower-case Alphabet; Letter Sounds, and Spelling, yielding individual scores in each area, as well as an overall composite literacy score.

This report describes the Imagination Library program and its participants, including the home literacy activities that participating families engage in, and discusses the associations between Imagination Library and children's early literacy skills. This report analyzes data from the previous three school years, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015. Overall, findings indicate that participation in the Imagination Library program is associated with higher early literacy skills, as measured by the PALS assessment. These findings are in line with earlier findings from a 2012 report on Imagination Library and children's literacy skills in Jackson County (Brophy-Herb & Lee, 2012).

A summary of key findings are as follows:

Imagination Library Families and Home Literacy Activities

- ❖ Most participating families indicate that their child enjoys reading books.
- ❖ The majority of parents and children (over 85%) indicate that they like the books that Imagination Library provides to them.
- ❖ Nearly 70% of families report that they read more since they have been involved in Imagination Library.

Describing Imagination Library and its Participants

- ❖ Between the school years 2012-2013 and 2014-2015, over 2,400 beginning kindergartners had participated in the Imagination Library program.
- ❖ The average length of children's participation in the Imagination Library program was 38.4 months in 2014-2015, which has increased over the past three years, up from 29.5 months in 2012-2014 and 35.8 months in 2013-2014.
- ❖ The total number of books distributed by GSC Imagination Library program has increased nearly every year since 2008, with over 47,000 books distributed in 2014 alone.
- ❖ Free lunch status was negatively related to whether or not a child participated in Imagination Library ($r = -.07$), and was also negatively related to the length of time participating children were enrolled in the program ($r = -.16$), though the association was small. This suggests that children who are lower income are less likely to be enrolled in Imagination Library, and, when they are enrolled in Imagination Library, they are enrolled for a lower length of time.
- ❖ Being enrolled in preschool had small, positive correlations with participating in Imagination Library ($r = .15$) and for being enrolled in the program longer ($r = .04$).

Imagination Library and Relations with Children's Early Literacy Scores

- ❖ On average, children who were enrolled in Imagination Library performed better than children who were not enrolled in Imagination Library on the PALS overall composite, and all of the individual literacy subtests. The effect size of being enrolled in Imagination Library vs. non-Imagination Library was $d = .07$ for the overall PALS composite score, which is considered a small, but significant, effect size.
- ❖ Even when controlling for other important demographic characteristics such as free lunch status, gender, and preschool experience, participating in Imagination Library was a significant and positive predictor of children's literacy scores.
- ❖ Length of time participating in Imagination Library was also a significant predictor of children's literacy scores, even when considering other demographics factors. Children who were in Imagination Library longer had higher literacy scores. Specifically, the effect size between those children who participated in IL for 48-60 months and those who participated in Imagination Library for 0-20 months was $d = .23$, which is considered a small effect size.