

**EVALUATION OF DELAWARE'S STATE IMPROVEMENT GRANT:  
2007 DELAWARE PUBLIC POLL**

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## **DelaSIG findings from the 2007 Delaware Public Poll**

### **Background**

As part of the outcome evaluation of the Delaware State Improvement Grant (DelaSIG), a segment of this year's public poll focused on determining the public's perception of home literacy and inclusive efforts in Delaware schools. These issues directly relate to two major goals of the DelaSIG: 1) all students with disabilities will have improved literacy and reading skills and 2) all students with mild or moderate disabilities will gain access to, and progress in, the general curriculum. Part of this year's evaluation focuses on determining Delaware parents' perceptions and practices regarding home literacy development and Delaware citizens' perceptions regarding Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and inclusive efforts in the classroom. This report describes the results from the Delaware public poll conducted by the Delaware Research & Development Center. From November 2006 through February 2007, telephone interviews were conducted with 910 citizens throughout the state of Delaware. The sampling plan for this poll was scientifically developed and data were collected using random digit dialing to obtain a random sample of Delaware citizens. Complete data for all SIG items on the public poll can be found in Appendix A.

### **Part 1: Family Home Literacy Beliefs and Practices**

*Home literacy* is a term used to describe the level and types of literacy activities provided for children in the home environment. Research indicates that parental literacy beliefs and actions play a significant role in children's motivation to engage in literacy activities (Baker & Scher, 2002) and literacy development (Sonnenschein, et al., 1997; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006).

“Beliefs serve as a linchpin, explaining considerable variation in the activities parents use to promote the development of language and literacy-related skills” (DeBaryshe, 1995, p.19).

Parents<sup>1</sup> of Delaware children were asked several questions concerning their opinions of their child's literacy; for example, parents were asked which types of reading materials are available for their children to use in their homes, how often they

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<sup>1</sup> Responses of the 340 Delawareans who answered “yes “ to the poll question, “Are you the parent, step-parent, or guardian of a child that is 18 or younger and lives in Delaware?” are included here.

encourage their children to read for pleasure, and their beliefs about who is responsible for teaching children how to become better readers.

In addition to the poll findings, here, portions of a literature review regarding parental literacy beliefs are presented to give context to the poll findings. The complete review of the literature regarding parental beliefs regarding literacy can be found in Appendix B.

### **Helping children become better readers**

Weigel, Martin and Bennet (2006) examined the connection between parents' literacy beliefs and pre-school children's literacy development. Their analyses showed mothers' beliefs aligned by degree toward one of two major strands: facilitative or conventional. Facilitative mothers believed more that their children could develop their literacy skills before going to school and engaged more in activities that supported this belief than conventional mothers. Conventional mothers believed more that schools were better equipped to instruct children in literacy and that their children were too young to benefit from engaging in literacy activities than facilitative mothers.

### **Poll Results**

Delaware parents' responses to the poll question regarding their perceptions of their ability to help their child become better readers indicate over one-quarter (28%) agree or strongly agree they would like to help but do not know how to help. Figure 1 depicts poll respondents' views on their ability to help develop their child(s) literacy.

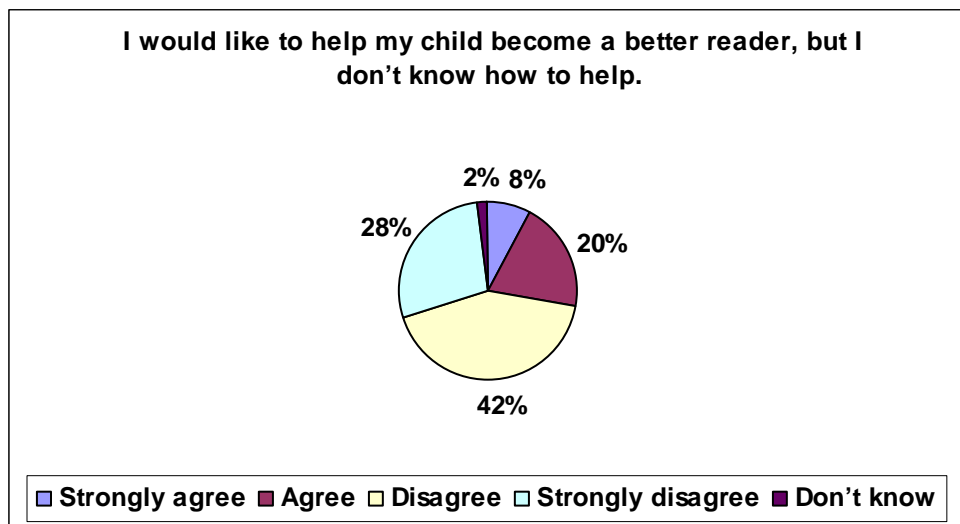


Figure 1. Delaware parents' beliefs of their ability to help their child become a better reader.

In addition, Delaware parents were asked if they believed schools rather than parents are responsible for teaching children to become better readers. Over half of the parents (57%) polled disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. Figure 2 depicts all the responses.

How much do you agree that schools, not parents, are responsible for teaching children how to become better readers?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
		11%	30%	42%	15%

Figure 2. Percentage of agreement with who is responsible for teaching children to be better readers.

### Home Literacy Environment

Sonnenschein et al. (1997) investigated the influence of children’s home literacy environments on their entertainment and skills development. Children’s socialization to literacy as entertainment entails promoting reading or writing activities primarily for enjoyment. This might include acting out scenes from a book, dressing up like storybook characters, or writing and producing a play. Conversely, literacy as a set of skills describes purposeful literacy activities including the use of drill and practice workbooks and flashcards. The researchers noted that while many parents provided opportunities for their children to engage in both entertainment and skills development literacy activities, low socio-economic status (SES) parents demonstrated greater orientation toward skills development activities, and higher SES parents placed greater weight on literacy as entertainment activities. Parental endorsement of literacy as entertainment activities varied with middle income parents giving higher ratings than low-income parents. Conversely, middle-income parents gave significantly lower endorsement ratings to literacy skills development activities than low-income parents.

One question on the public poll pertaining to the home literacy environment asked Delaware parents to indicate the types of reading materials available in their home for their children’s use. Parents noted a wide variety of reading materials available to their children. The most common material was his/her own books with (98%) followed closely by magazines (85%), internet (84%) and newspapers (81%). Figure 3 depicts the kinds of materials that Delaware parents reported having in the home for children to use.

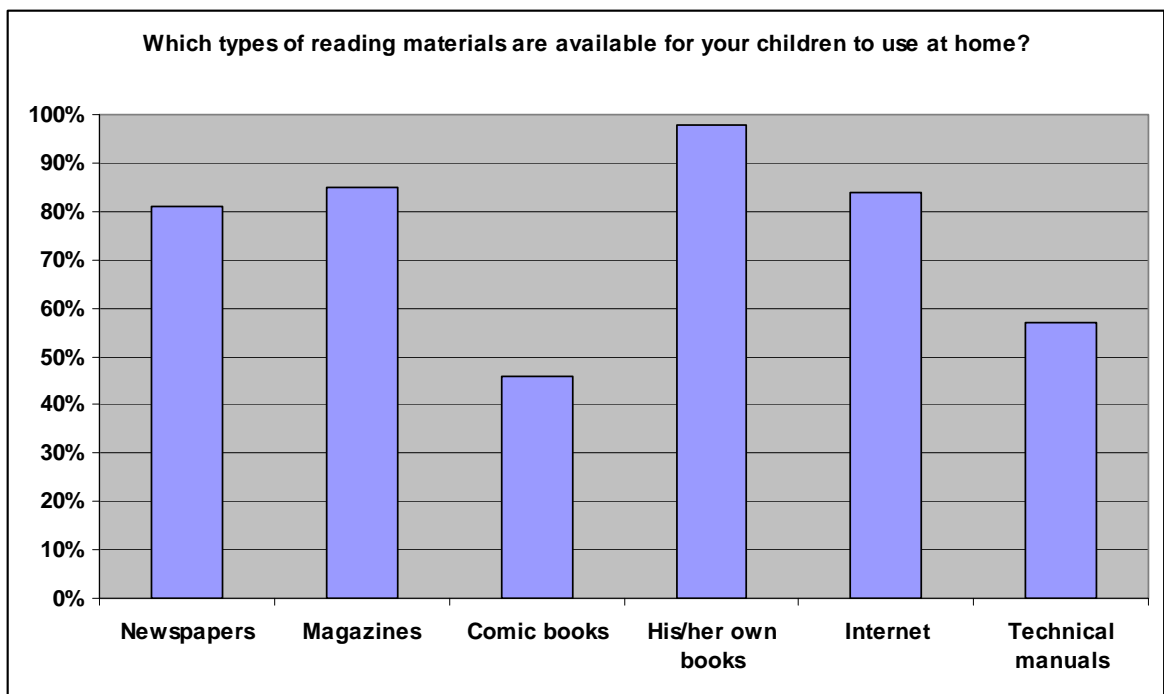


Figure 3. Types of reading materials available in the home for use by the children.

### Reading for Enjoyment

“parents are as important as teachers... the goals of reading are enjoyment, knowledge, and oral language growth rather than reading instruction...” (DeBaryshe, 1995, p. 6).

When Delaware parents were asked how often they encourage their child to read for pleasure, most parents (88%) indicated they often or always encourage this type of reading.

### Dissemination of Literacy Information

Delaware parents were asked two questions regarding the dissemination of literacy materials. Twice as many parents acknowledged they had received literacy information from their children’s schools than had attended any literacy information session in the last 12 months. All responses are shown in Figure 4.

	Yes	No	Don't know
Have you attended any literacy information sessions in the last 12 months?	23%	77%	0%
Have you received any literacy information from your child's school in the last 12 months?	52%	46%	0%

Figure 4. The dissemination of literacy materials in the last twelve months.

## **Part 2: Inclusion**

Inclusion refers to the practice of ensuring students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum in the general education setting. Including students with disabilities in general education classrooms, in addition to offering supplementary aids and services when needed, is one of the most effective ways to ensure such access is achieved (Lee, et al., 2006; Wehmeyer, 2006).

As a follow-up to the results of Delawareans surveyed in 2003 on the issue of inclusive efforts, Delaware citizens were surveyed again in the spring of 2007. Select results from 2003 as they compare to 2007 poll data are presented here. Complete data for all DelaSIG items on the public poll can be found in Appendix A. 910 randomly selected citizens throughout the state of Delaware responded to the poll questions concerning inclusive efforts.

### **Background**

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA '97) have focused attention on the need to improve academic outcomes for students with disabilities. In his discussion of universal design for learning, Wehmeyer (2006) identifies two ways in which general education curriculums can be modified to meet the needs of students with mild cognitive disabilities in general education classrooms. One method of modification includes adaptations that restructure the presentation of curriculum content and/or activities to increase clarity and understanding of learning tasks; another augmentation adds content and/or activities to the curriculum in order to provide students with additional skills or strategies to bolster successful academic task completion. In addition, Lee et al. (2006) point out that traditional curriculum modifications have mainly focused on alterations that steer the curriculum for students with disabilities away from the general curriculum (e.g. life skills). These authors outline several strategies educators can use in general education classrooms to promote access to the curriculum for students with disabilities. Their review of research indicates that adapting and augmenting general curriculums with specific learning strategies that support the processing and recall of what was learned can be beneficial to students with special needs. Wehmeyer (2006) also suggests educators only consider special needs beyond the general curriculum (e.g. alterations) after a program is in place to help students with disabilities access and progress in the general curriculum.

## **Inclusion**

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a comprehensive approach to instructional design that seeks to ensure access to the general curriculum for individuals with diverse learning abilities. The three major tenets of UDL are instructional opportunities that provide multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement (McGuire, Scott, & Shaw, 2006; Wehmeyer, 2006).

According to Leyser and Kirk (2004), inclusion in education is a worldwide movement. In the United States, amendments to IDEA '97 give rights to parents in the referral, testing, as well as program planning, placement, and evaluation of their special needs child. However, research shows parents' opinions may differ towards inclusion due to the type and severity of the child's disability, the age and current placement of the child. Leyser and Kirk's research found that parents whose children has mild disabilities held more positive attitudes about the benefits of inclusion and general education teachers' ability to teach children with special needs than parents with children who have moderate to severe disability. In addition, parents whose children's current placement is not inclusive/mainstream, showed more confidence in general education teachers' ability to accommodate children with disabilities in regular education classrooms.

Research indicates the nature and manner in which children's disabilities are exhibited in the classroom influences teachers' instructional attitudes toward children with disabilities (Cook, 2007; 2000). Further, Gerber (1988) specifies that teachers' tolerance for teaching students who present academic or classroom management challenges changes proportionately in relation to the availability of resources and structural supports, with their tolerance decreasing as access to relevant resources and support decreases. This relationship can be problematic given the legislative and educational policy push toward inclusion to meet the mandates of IDEA '97 often without the allocated resources to support its success (Gallagher, 2006).

## **Poll Results**

Delaware citizens were asked several questions about their opinions regarding inclusion. For example, respondents were asked whether the general education curriculum should be flexible enough to meet the needs of nearly all students and if they believe most teachers are able to work effectively with children with disabilities.

## **Students with mild or moderate Disabilities in General Education Classrooms**

Several poll questions sought to gauge Delawareans' familiarity and understanding of inclusive practices. Results for these questions are compared with results from the 2004 Delaware public poll. When asked about their knowledge of the UDL concept, in 2007, 74% of Delawareans were not at all familiar with the concept of UDL. In 2003, 69% of Delawareans were not at all familiar with the concept of UDL.

### **Universal Design and the Role of the Teacher**

- In 2004, more than half of the citizens (52%) reported most teachers are not able to work effectively with children with disabilities; in 2007, the percentage remained about the same (57%).
- In 2004, many Delawareans (69%) surveyed were *not at all familiar* with the concept of Universal Design for Learning; in 2007, the percentage stayed about the same (74%).
- In 2004, about half of Delaware citizens (56%) reported that having to teach students with disabilities places an unfair burden on the majority of classroom teachers; in 2007, the percentage increased slightly to 64%.

### **Impact of Inclusion on Students**

- In 2004, two-thirds of citizens (69%) polled believe that the challenge of being in a general education classroom would promote the academic growth of a child with a disability; in 2007, the percentage remained the same (68%).
- In 2004, many citizens (63%) also believe that the integration of students with mild to moderate disabilities into the general education classroom would not harm the achievement of other students; in 2007, the percentage dropped slightly to 55%.

### **Time spent in Regular Classroom**

Delawareans were asked how much of the school day they thought students with mild to moderate disabilities should spend in the regular classroom;

- in 2007, less than one-quarter of those polled (18%) said "all of the day," while this was reported by slightly more (23%) in 2004;
- in 2007, the majority (62%) reported "some of the day," in 2004, this was reported by 67% of those polled;
- Only a few of those polled (8%) said none or did not know in 2007, in 2004, this was reported by about the same (9%).



Overall, Delawareans’ responses regarding time spent in the regular classroom stayed consistent from 2004 to 2007. In addition, the 2007 responses of those Delawareans who chose “some of the day” were consistent with those from 2004. Less than one-quarter said students should be in the regular education classroom more than half the school day, about half of the respondents thought half the school day would suffice, and another quarter of the respondents believed the students with mild to moderate disabilities should remain in the regular education classroom for less than one-half the day.

### Flexible Curriculum

Delawareans were asked how flexible the Delaware curriculum should be to meet the needs of nearly all students. Between 2004 and 2007, responses of those polled remained consistent. Figure 5 shows the poll responses.

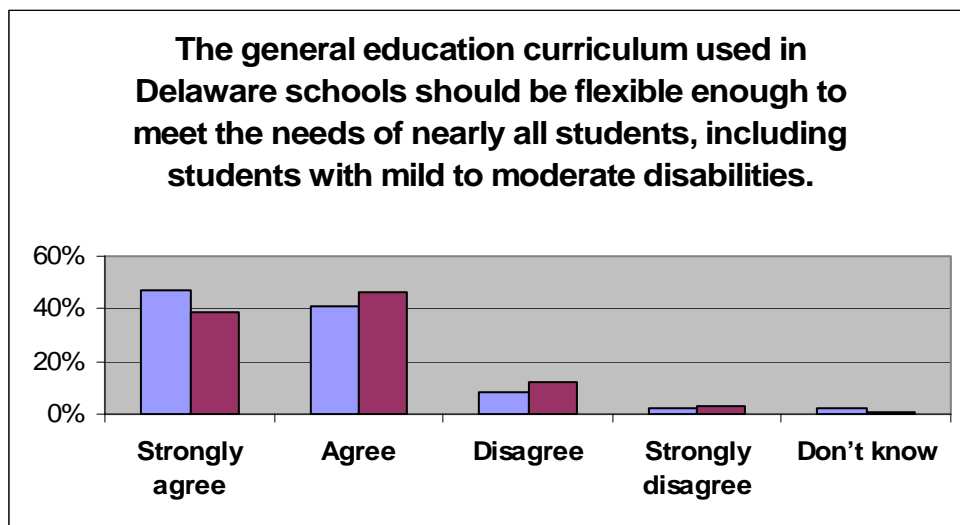


Figure 5. Perceptions of Delaware having a flexible curriculum for nearly all students.

### Conclusions

When parents were asked about home literacy efforts, overall, parents seem to want the same thing as teachers, information about how to help their children become better readers. The majority of parents polled are providing a wide variety of literacy materials in the home and think they are responsible for helping to teach their child to read. However, poll results for questions pertaining to inclusive efforts in 2003 are virtually the same as the results from the 2007 Public Poll. One reason may be that information pertaining to this effort was not disseminated in a way that effectively

reached the public. Program coordinators may want to investigate other forms of dissemination for their Inclusive efforts to increase public awareness.

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APPENDIX A: SIG LITERACY ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC POLL ON THE CONDITION OF EDUCATION IN DELAWARE 2007

	<u>Strongly agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly disagree</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	
To what extent do you agree with the following statement:						
I would like to help my child become a better reader, but I don't know how to help	8%	20%	42%	28%	2%	
Which types of reading materials are available for your children to use at home? (check all that apply) .	<u>Newspapers</u>	<u>Magazines</u>	<u>Comic books</u>	<u>His/her own books</u>	<u>Internet</u>	<u>Technical manuals</u>
	81%	85%	46%	98%	84%	57%
How often do you encourage your child to read for pleasure?	<u>Always</u>	<u>Often</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Seldom</u>	<u>Never</u>	
	58%	30%	8%	2%	1%	
Have you attended any <u>literacy information sessions</u> in the last 12 months?	<u>Yes</u>		<u>No</u>		<u>Don't know</u>	
	23%		77%		0%	
Have you received any literacy information from your child's school in the last 12 months?						
	52%		46%		0%	

SIG ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC POLL ON THE CONDITION OF EDUCATION IN DELAWARE  
2007 COMPARED TO 2004 RESULTS

	<u>Very familiar</u>	<u>Somewhat familiar</u>	<u>Slightly familiar</u>	<u>Not at all familiar</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
How familiar are you with the concept of Universal Design for Learning?	<b>2%</b> 4%	<b>12%</b> 13%	<b>12%</b> 14%	<b>74%</b> 69%	<b>&lt;1%</b> < 1%
To what extent do you agree with the following statements:					
	<u>Strongly agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly disagree</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
The general education curriculum used in Delaware schools should be flexible enough to meet the needs of nearly all students, including students with mild to moderate disabilities.	<b>47%</b> 39%	<b>41%</b> 46%	<b>8%</b> 12%	<b>2%</b> 3%	<b>2%</b> 1%
The challenge of being in a general education classroom would promote the academic growth of a child with a disability.	<b>11%</b> 14%	<b>57%</b> 55%	<b>22%</b> 22%	<b>2%</b> 4%	<b>7%</b> 4%
The integration of students with mild to moderate disabilities into the general classroom would not harm the achievement of other students.	<b>10%</b> 17%	<b>45%</b> 46%	<b>32%</b> 28%	<b>8%</b> 6%	<b>4%</b> 4%
Having to teach children with disabilities places an unfair burden on the majority of classroom teachers.	<b>17%</b> 13%	<b>47%</b> 43%	<b>24%</b> 32%	<b>7%</b> 7%	<b>4%</b> 4%
I believe that most teachers are not able to work effectively with children with disabilities.	<b>16%</b> 12%	<b>41%</b> 40%	<b>32%</b> 38%	<b>5%</b> 5%	<b>6%</b> 5%
	<u>All</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	
How much of the school day should students with mild or moderate disabilities typically spend in a regular classroom setting?	<b>18%</b> 23%	<b>62%</b> 67%	<b>4%</b> 5%	<b>4%</b> 4%	
	<u>More than half</u>	<u>About half</u>	<u>Less than half</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	
If some of the school day: Would you say they should spend more than half of the school day, about half, or less than half of the school day in a regular classroom?	<b>12%</b> 19%	<b>56%</b> 52%	<b>26%</b> 26%	<b>5%</b> 3%	

## **Appendix B: Literature Review of Parental Perspectives on Literacy**

### Parental Perspectives on Literacy

#### **Background**

Reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (Ornstein, 1985) and the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) have focused national attention on improving student achievement and academic outcomes. A major part of this focus is boosting children's literacy development from pre-school through completion of high school. While there are many factors that influence children's literacy development, here the focus is parental literacy beliefs.

Understanding parents' literacy beliefs is critical for understanding differences in children's attitudes toward literacy, their literacy behaviors and literacy achievement (Sonnenschein et al., 1997), particularly because the foundation for these literacy attitudes, behaviors and outcomes is thought to be established long before children begin formal schooling (Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006). Furthermore, there is general agreement among literacy educators and researchers that parents are their children's first literacy teachers; they model attitudes and patterns of engagement and communicate the values they associate with literacy to their children (Baker & Scher, 2002; DeBaryshe, 1995).

#### Parent Literacy Beliefs

Evans, Fox and Cremaso (2004) describe beliefs as "knowledge or ideas accepted by an individual as true or as probable answers to questions of fact" (p. 131). In line with contemporary understanding of the influence of beliefs, four major research questions currently guide the study of parental literacy: determining the etiology of parental literacy beliefs, examining the content of parental literacy belief, understanding the manner in which parental literacy beliefs translate into actions and describing the impact of parental literacy beliefs on children's literacy development and achievement (DeBaryshe, 1995). The literature on parental literacy beliefs is explored here, with the exception of etiology of parental beliefs. This report does not explore the etiology of parental beliefs because the focus of this investigation is directed toward parent-child interactions and further, the literature connecting the etiology of parental beliefs with child interactions is limited.

The next section of this review looks at the findings of research regarding the content of parents' literacy beliefs, the relationship between parents' literacy beliefs and the literacy environment they create for their children, as well as the impact of parental literacy beliefs on children's literacy outcomes.

### Content of Parental Beliefs

Research on the content of parental beliefs about literacy explores two central questions: what is the significance of literacy and what are the best instructional methods for teaching literacy? While most parents typically hold literacy in high regard, researchers have found significant differences in parents' perceptions of the importance of literacy or reading as well as their beliefs about the best way to ensure adequate and appropriate literacy skill development of young children. Of major significance is that parental beliefs typically differ by parents' socio-economic status (SES), and level of literacy and education (Baker & Scher, 2002; DeBaryshe, 1995; Evans, Fox, & Cremaso, 2004).

### Significance of Literacy

Parents generally recognize that literacy skill development and reading are necessary to improve their children's future prospects. However, parents' beliefs regarding why these activities are important differ considerably. In their noteworthy examination of the motivational factors that influenced 65 beginning readers from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, Baker and Scher (2002) found a significant difference in parental endorsement of reading that varied by social class and race. Specifically, in their interviews with parents, middle income White parents were more likely to regard reading as important to enhance children's ability to learn (70%), whereas lower-income White parents were the least likely to reference this belief (8%). Black parents mentioned learning in their responses with equivalent frequencies 53% of high income parents and 42% of low-income parents. In addition, low-income parents were more likely to report that reading was important for social reasons (31% of White parents and 25% of Black parents) than middle-income parents (9% of White parents and 0% of Black parents). Finally, the authors found that lower-income parents (69% of White parents and 58% of Black parents) were more likely to endorse reading as important for ensuring future



economic capacity by referencing employment, than middle income White (22%) and Black (13%) parents.

Sonnenschein et al. (1997) studied the beliefs about literacy and literacy development of the parents of 41 children attending Baltimore City-Schools. Although sample limitations prevented the researchers from exploring ethnic differences, significant distinctions in parental belief orientations existed among the participants by SES. The researchers formed/created 9 categories to capture parents' beliefs about why reading is necessary: daily living, learning, getting an education, specific skills, self-esteem, enjoyment, empowerment/self-actualization, employment and social relations. In terms of SES, middle-income parents (83%) were more likely to report reading as important for learning than lower-income parents. In addition, low-income parents' actions support literacy *skill development* more than middle-income parents. However, only 13% of all parents endorsed reading as important for *enjoyment*. Middle-income parents' actions support literacy *as entertainment* to a greater extent than low-income parents based upon parents' self-reports of the literacy activities they have engaged in with their children.

Several qualitative studies further support the findings that lower-income parents view literacy skill development as important for their children's future economic viability. Karther (2002) explored the literacy beliefs of two fathers with low literacy skills whose children and wives were participating in an Even Start Family Literacy program in north-central West Virginia. When asked about the value of education, both fathers' responses connected/linked the importance of reading to their children's future potential.

One father (Jim) indicated that reading "is the biggest thing right now... the guy with the diploma gets the job" (Karther, 2002, p. 191). Another father in the study, Mike, commented, "I don't mind being a mechanic... but when you look at your kids you always want better for them than what your doing... if he is going to take to books, just because I'm doing something different don't mean I won't push him... I hope to see him go to college" (Karther, 2002, p. 188).

Neuman, Celano and Fischer (1996) explored the perceptions of the importance of literacy of 18 adolescent mothers residing in a highly impoverished area and attending an comprehensive alternative education program. Focusing on promoting self-reflection and

discourse among the participants, the study employed rigorous qualitative methodologies to ensure their voices were accurately captured and portrayed. The researchers identified critical issues raised by the participants: literacy strengths and family needs. The researchers noted that beyond being a basic skill, the mothers perceived literacy as a cultural tool with the capacity to help them present their children with social models, hope and possibilities in the midst of their daily experiences living in a high crime and poverty-ridden community. Some mothers also felt that they could use literacy as a way to foster their children's pride in their identity. One participant commented: "When I read a book like this to my son, it makes him feel good. And by offering this to him, he'll have a better chance to get along with others... we need more of these books for kids, especially Black kids. Our young Black kids need to be proud of who they are and where they come from" (Neuman, Celano, & Fischer, 1996, pp. 512-513).

### Literacy Instruction

Parental beliefs about children's literacy instruction differ. Researchers have found that the primary differences are not dichotomous but vary by the degree to which parents' perspectives align with two major pedagogical paradigms: constructivist (also known as whole language, meaning and top-down) and graphophonemic (also known as decoding, traditional skills-based, conventional and bottom-up) approaches (DeBaryshe, 1995; Evans, Fox, & Cremaso, 2004; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006). DeBaryshe, Binder and Buell (2000) explain that to advocates of the constructivist approach "listening, speaking, reading and writing are seen as inter-related aspects of the same underlying linguistic competence... children are thought to acquire literacy skills by immersion in a functional literate environment, just as they acquire spoken language through immersion in a functional conversational environment" (p. 121). Conversely, proponents of the graphophonemic approach to literacy development place greater emphasis on developing children's "ability to sound out words independently, on developing oral reading accuracy, on developing skill in associating phonemes with graphemes, and on phonic generalizations and sounding out to recognize unfamiliar words" (Evans, Fox, & Cremaso, 2004, p. 131).

Research indicates that there is a relationship between the degree to which parents embrace either approach to developing children's literacy, which varies by parents' socio-economic status (SES), and level of literacy and education (DeBaryshe, 1995;

DeBaryshe, Binder, & Buell, 2000; Evans, Fox, & Cremaso, 2004; Sonnenschein et al., 1997). Specifically, Evans et al. (2004) found parents with lower SES level, lower literacy and education were more likely to believe children's literacy is best promoted by focusing on the basics through drill and practice of letter and word recognition skills. While parents with higher SES, higher literacy and education typically valued basic skill instruction, they believed to a greater extent that children's literacy should be supported by encouraging children to use contextual tools, such as paying attention to clues found within pictures and surrounding language of the text.

Several studies support the findings that parental literacy beliefs differ among parents by level of income, education and literacy (Baker & Scher, 2002; DeBaryshe, Binder, & Buell, 2000). DeBaryshe et al's. (2000) study of family literacy practices and beliefs focused on parent-child reading interaction. This research was a follow-up study of 19 children and their parents who were originally recruited through newsprint advertisements.

The researchers found that parents' belief orientations varied significantly only by their level of education. Mothers with higher endorsements of the constructivist approach to children's literacy development had higher levels of education. No statistical differences were found with regard to income level. Differences in literacy levels were not explored. Although the researchers found that mothers who ascribed greater value to the constructivist paradigm modeled facilitative literacy skills, such as reading for personal enjoyment or administrative purposes, more often than mothers who relied more on conventional skills-based strategies or those who did not endorse either literacy paradigm. Constructivist mothers were also more likely to engage in writing activities with their children than the other mothers.

Weigel, Martin and Bennet (2006) used cluster analyses to classify 79 mothers into groups based upon self-reported responses to a parental literacy beliefs survey, examined the connection between these beliefs and pre-school children's literacy development. Cluster analyses showed that mothers beliefs aligned by degree toward one of two major strands: facilitative or conventional. Facilitative mothers believed more that their children could develop their literacy skills before going to school and engaged more in activities that supported this belief than conventional mothers. Conventional mothers believed more that schools were better equipped to instruct children in literacy and that

their children were too young to benefit from engaging in literacy activities, than facilitative mothers. There is no analysis by ethnicity or SES because a major delimitation of this study is the homogeneity of its sample. Ninety-four percent of the study participants were White and the median family income was US \$60,000 or higher. Participants were recruited by advertising the study at randomly selected licensed childcare centers. Choosing to use only licensed childcare centers seems to have precluded the participation of other segments of the population; therefore care must be taken when interpreting the results of this study in relation to more diverse populations.

### Parental Beliefs as Actions

The literature on how parental literacy beliefs are enacted explores parents' views on their role in their children's literacy development, as well as the type and degree of literacy engagement provided for the child in the home environment. Much of the research-based literature indicates that parental beliefs play a significant role in determining their literacy engagement and the types of literacy environments they provide for their children (Evans, Fox, & Cremaso, 2004; Sonnenschein et al., 1997; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006). The following sections will discuss how parental beliefs are transformed into actions that influence children's literacy experiences.

### Parental Beliefs of Parental Roles in Children's Literacy Development

Parental beliefs regarding their roles and responsibilities in children's literacy development influence the degree and type of engagement and literacy environment they avail their children. As a component of their longitudinal study, Evans et al. (2004) explored 148 parents' perceptions of the importance of literacy and whether home or school had responsibility for children's literacy development compared to 9 other domains: character-moral development, health-safety awareness, creative activities, verbal communication, mathematics skill, knowledge of the world, computer competency and physical fitness. Exclusive of character-moral development, participants ranked parental influence over literacy development highest. In addition, 42% of the parents surveyed believed that the school had the primary responsibility for their children's literacy development. Twenty-five percent believed that the home is responsible; the remaining parents (33%) did not or could not make a determination. Conversely, 98% of the parents surveyed indicated that the home had primary responsibility for children's

character and moral development and 2% did not or could not make a determination. Parental beliefs did not vary significantly by SES, educational status or age. With such a large percentage of missing responses, it is uncertain how parental literacy beliefs (importance ranking) translate into actions (parents' perceptions of responsibility for literacy development).

### **Father's Involvement**

Supporting the findings of previous research, Ortiz's (2001) study of 26 fathers of children enrolled in kindergarten to second grade found these parents valued literacy as a pathway to academic and future success. While this qualitative investigation does not have a particularly strong methodological design, it is significant because it is one of the few studies that captures data on fathers' literacy beliefs. Missing is a detailed description of the analytical process employed by the researcher; however, one of the emergent themes reported by the researcher is fathers involved in more egalitarian relationships with their spouse reported more engagement in activities that promote children's literacy development than those in more patriarchal relationships. Furthermore, an emergent theme was fathers felt the major impetus for their involvement came in response to their children's curiosity of print, occurring naturally in and outside of the home, rather than as a planned activity. One father commented that his child was "the driving force... my son [sic] always wants to know what it means or why people have to document so much" (Ortiz, 2001). Thus, it appears that a father's active engagement in childcare facilitates an increased role in his children's literacy development either because of a desire to impart personal values or in response to children's demands.

### Literacy Engagement

Much of the research suggests parents' differing beliefs about the significance of literacy and optimal literacy instruction methodologies influence the type and degree of their literacy engagement with their children (Baker & Scher, 2002; DeBaryshe, 1995; DeBaryshe, Binder, & Buell, 2000; Sonnenschein et al., 1997). As a component of their research, Sonnenschein et al. (1997) investigated the orientation of children's home literacy environments toward entertainment or skills development. Children's socialization to literacy as entertainment entails promoting reading or writing activities primarily for enjoyment. This might include acting out scenes from the book, dressing up like storybook characters, or writing and producing a play. Conversely, literacy as a set

of skills describes purposeful literacy activities including the use of drill and practice workbooks and flashcards. The researchers noted that while many parents provided opportunities for their children to engage in both entertainment and skills development literacy activities, low SES parents demonstrated greater orientation toward skills development activities, and higher SES parents placed greater weight on literacy as entertainment activities. Parental endorsement of literacy as entertainment activities varied with middle income parents giving higher ratings than low-income parents. Conversely, middle-income parents gave significantly lower endorsement ratings to literacy skills development activities than low-income parents.

DeBaryshe (1995) found similar results in two very significant studies of maternal belief systems of emergent literacy, as a component of these studies the degree to which mothers' embraced a facilitative view of readings was measured, characterized by the extent to which they believed:

“parents are as important as teachers, that the goals of reading are enjoyment, knowledge, and oral language growth rather than reading instruction... that limited time and material resources should not prevent parents from reading aloud, and that language is influenced by environmental stimulation” (DeBaryshe, 1995, p. 6).

In DeBaryshe's (1995) first study, the mothers' total score for reading beliefs indicate they tended to agree with the facilitative view of reading literacy. On a four-point scale, with higher scores indicating greater facilitative beliefs, the mean score for each item on the belief scale was 3.34. As stated above, however, mothers with higher SES, more education and greater literacy skill were more facilitative than mothers with lower SES, less education and lower literacy skills. In addition, path analyses of data obtained from audiotaped home reading sessions of half of the families showed that mothers' beliefs systems had a significant impact on their reading socialization practices. Socialization practices were captured by coding the occurrences of six types of questions, five types of feedback, book-related discussions and straight reading of the text during the audiotaped reading sessions.

Similarly, in DeBaryshe's (1995) second study, the mothers' total reading belief score also indicated general agreement with the facilitative view of reading. As in the first study, path analysis indicated that mothers' reading beliefs significantly influenced their reading socialization practices. The data from both studies show that mothers with

more facilitative literacy beliefs engaged their children in broader discussions about text and used more questions that are open-ended with greater frequency than less facilitative mothers.

Baker and Scher (2002) also reported similar findings. In their study of beginning readers' motivation for reading, they documented and analyzed the home literacy environments of their 65 participants through parent self-reports. They found that while all families reported equitable and greater usage of story books, lower-income families reported higher use of literacy skill building books than higher-income families. Analyses of variance show that the differences among the four socio-cultural groups' use of skill building books are significant. Analyses of family income level and ethnicity show that the four socio-cultural groups also differ in the level of unsupervised time with basic skill books; more specifically, the significant differences in both analyses of variance exist between low-income Black families' and both middle income groups. Finally, the four groups differed in the degree to which shared reading times was spent with an adult or another child. More beginning readers in lower-income families spent shared reading time with another child than in higher-income families. In higher-income families, beginning readers' shared reading time was mostly spent with an adult. The authors concluded that the quality of reading experiences is most likely a significant explanatory factor for differences in beginning readers' motivation to read much more so than the amount of reading time, since most families recognize the value of engaging in the activity.

### Child Outcomes

Literature on the impact of parental beliefs on child outcomes seeks to explore the connections between parents' literacy beliefs and the literacy experiences they provide for their children, and child outcomes on various literacy measures. Research indicates that parental literacy beliefs and actions can influence children's literacy motivation (Baker & Scher, 2002; DeBaryshe, 1995) and competence (Evans, Fox, & Cremaso, 2004; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006).

### Children's Motivation to Read

Parental literacy beliefs influence the type and extent of literacy engagement their children experience which in turn influences children's motivation for reading. Baker

and Scher (2002) explored how parents' literacy beliefs and the home experiences they provided influenced the reading motivation of beginning readers. The authors found no significant connection between children's reading motivation and the frequency of shared story book reading or library visits.

In examining other predictors of children's reading motivation, the researchers investigated socio-cultural differences in children's motivation for reading. Using hierarchical stepwise regression to observe children's scores on the total motivation scale and the enjoyment and perceived competence subscales, they found that including parents' income level and ethnicity did not significantly account for any variance. The data showed that parents' endorsement of reading, as entertainment was the only identified variable that consistently and significantly explained large amounts of the variance. As previously discussed, literacy as entertainment focuses children's attention to the pleasurable aspects of reading and writing, whereas literacy as skill development focuses on improving children's ability to recognize and reproduce fundamental aspects of literacy.

Examining data collected from parent reports of children's reading interest, DeBaryshe's (1995) studies of maternal literacy beliefs found supporting evidence for the hypothesis that parental literacy beliefs are related to children's reading interest. In the first study, path analyses showed that the degree of parental endorsement of facilitative beliefs directly influenced children's interest in reading; in her second study, path analyses showed the existence of a similar positive association. Similarly, Weigel et al. (2006) analyzed parent responses to survey questions on children's reading interest and found that the children of parents with more facilitative literacy beliefs had significantly greater interest in reading at both observation time points over the one-year study, than children of parents with more conventional literacy beliefs.

One study (DeBaryshe, Binder, & Buell, 2000) explored the link between parental literacy beliefs and family enjoyment and had results contrary to the findings of other research. The authors' analyses indicated that the degree of alignment of parental beliefs to constructivist or conventional views had no significant relationship with children's interest in reading or writing. Differences in the manner of measuring children's interest may explain these contradictory conclusions. While other studies' measurement procedures included the collection of motivational data directly from children (Baker &



Scher, 2002), DeBaryshe et al. (2000) collected data on children's reading interest from parent questionnaires. Thus, the former findings may more accurately reflect the relationship between parents' literacy beliefs and children's motivational outcomes.

### Literacy Competence

Parental literacy beliefs are also believed to impact children's literacy development and competence. In their longitudinal study, Weigel et al. (2006) collected data on the emergent literacy skills of 79 three-year old children who were not enrolled in kindergarten, including print knowledge and emergent writing skills. Two literacy skill measures were taken spanning a one-year period. Controlling for children's age, repeated measures MANCOVA indicated that children whose parents' literacy beliefs were more facilitative had significantly higher print knowledge than children whose parents held more conventional beliefs at both time points. No statistically significant differences were noted in children's emergent writing skills.

### **Literacy as Entertainment or Skill Development**

In their longitudinal investigation, Sonnenschein et al. (1997) explored the relationship between the alignment of parents' literacy beliefs as entertainment or skill development with children's literacy development. Literacy development was measured by examining children's knowledge of print, phonological awareness and narrative competence in the spring of children's pre-kindergarten and kindergarten years. The researchers found that during pre-kindergarten, the children of parents who had greater endorsement of literacy as entertainment had significantly higher phonological awareness and knowledge of print than children of parents who had greater endorsements of literacy as skill development. The children whose parents had an entertainment orientation also had significantly greater knowledge of print and narrative competence during kindergarten than children whose parents had a skills-development orientation.

### **Conclusions**

While there are many factors that influence children's literacy development, here the focus was on parental literacy beliefs. Parental literacy beliefs were found to impact children's literacy development and competence. Parents are their children's first literacy teachers; they model attitudes and patterns of engagement and communicate the values they associate with literacy to their

children. The research also indicates that parental literacy beliefs and actions influence children's literacy motivation and their literacy engagement

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