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Participant Perspectives on Reach Out and Read Colorado

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Executive Summary

Reach Out and Read Colorado, as a part of Reach Out and Read nationally, seeks to educate parents about the importance of reading to their children by providing books to children at pediatric checkups from six months to five years old.

Leadership of Reach Out and Read Colorado was interested in understanding the impact that the program has on the families it serves and contracted with Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA) to conduct a study. APA surveyed 207 parents and 49 medical practitioners to gain their perspectives on their experience with the program and their perceptions of the program's value and effectiveness. There were four key areas that the study focused on:

1. Attitudes and habits of parents in regards to reading to their children
2. Experiences of families during their pediatric checkups (referred to as Well Child visits)
3. Perceived quality and usefulness of Reach Out and Read books
4. Perceived benefits and impacts of Reach Out and Read to families and providers

The study examined the experiences of families as a whole, as well as looking for any variations in the opinions and experiences of families based upon the child's age and the primary language spoken in the home.

APA found the following in each of the study's key areas:

1. Attitudes and habits of parents in regards to reading to their children

Parents universally assign a high degree of importance to reading to their children for a number of reasons including to: help their children learn to read and be ready for school; help their children learn to speak or communicate better; encourage their children's love of reading and learning, as well as spark their creativity; and as a means of spending time together as a family and showing their love for their children. Parents were also asked to report the most influential sources of information about reading to their children and information from their doctor was the source most frequently cited.

Sixty percent of parents reported that someone reads to or looks at books with their child at least once a day. This frequency is even higher when parents have children that are at least a year old. While parents reported that other family members and childcare workers or teachers also read to their children, parents said that they were the person that read to their child the most often.

2. Experience of families during their pediatric checkups (referred to as Well Child visits)

Nearly two-thirds of families receive their Reach Out and Read book directly from the doctor and another 23 percent of families receive the book before the doctor enters the exam room for

the checkup. This allows the doctor to address literacy in conjunction with the book during the course of the visit. Seventy-four percent of providers spend at least a minute discussing reading, and over a quarter of providers spend three minutes or more. All families are primarily told about the importance of reading while additional messages- school readiness, reading duration and incorporation into routine, age appropriateness, and other benefits of reading- varied by the child's age and the language spoken at home.

The vast majority of families (96 percent) reported that their toddler or child was happy to receive a book, that their toddler or child wanted to look at the book during the visit (86 percent), and that their child three years or older looks forward to getting a book (85 percent).

3. Perceived quality and usefulness of ROR books

All providers highly rated the quality of Reach Out and Read books, with 80 percent of providers rating the books as *Excellent*. Parents additionally rated the books Reach Out and Read provides in comparison to other books they have access to. The majority of families said that Reach Out and Read books were *Better* or *Much Better* in terms of age appropriateness and durability, and at least 45 percent of families said the same in the areas of the book's topic, stories, characters, and artwork. These findings were even more significant when disaggregated by language.

Providers also find Reach Out and Read books to be effective tools for discussing reading with families, modeling reading techniques, and for developmental assessment.

4. Perceived benefit and impact of ROR to families and providers

Providers reported that parents were generally receptive to the information they were given about reading. Based upon the book and information parents are given, the vast majority reported they felt that: reading was important (98 percent); encouraged them to read to their child (96 percent); and encouraged them to buy or borrow more books (90 percent). Parents were also asked whether the fact that their child received a book during their Well Child visit would make them more likely to go to their next Well Child visit and 56 percent said they were more likely to go; this was even higher for Spanish speakers. Parents that did not indicate that the book would make them more likely to go to their next Well Child visit often reported they went to their child's Well Child checkups out of concern for their child's health but that the book was a nice bonus.

Providers also indicated that Reach Out and Read was beneficial in a number of areas including: giving providers an avenue to discuss reading with families; promoting the importance of reading; educating families on the importance of reading; and providing families with access to books, particularly families that might not be able to afford books otherwise. Providers also said that their advice on reading was more effective because they gave parents the tool to follow through at the visit.

In addition to these universal findings, APA also found that the experience of Spanish speaking families tended to vary from their English speaking counterparts in many of the areas explored. The following key differences were observed:

Children in Spanish speaking families were less likely to be read to on a daily basis and less likely to be read to by a parent often.

Spanish speaking families were less likely to report that their child was read to on a daily basis (46 percent vs. 65 percent). Further, forty-three percent of Spanish speaking families reported that a parent often reads to the child as compared to 73 percent of English speaking families reporting the same. Spanish speakers were also more likely than English speakers to say that a sibling often reads to the child (21 percent).

Spanish speakers reported more tangible obstacles to reading than English speakers.

When parents were asked what obstacles hindered their ability to read to their child every day, English speakers mainly focused on having the time/energy and getting their child to pay attention, while Spanish speakers reported more tangible obstacles such as their own difficulty reading English and their ability to buy or have access to books.

Spanish speaking parents reported receiving a less nuanced message about reading than English speaking parents and often requested more information in these missing areas.

Spanish speakers were more likely to report being told about the value of reading for school readiness and learning than English speakers (54 percent vs. 36 percent), who in turn were more likely to be told about age appropriate behavior (40 percent vs. 16 percent of Spanish speakers) and making reading a part of a child's routine (45 percent vs. 26 percent).

Spanish speaking families were more likely to say they would like additional information than English speakers, with 88 percent reporting that they would like more information in at least one area, as compared with 59 percent English speakers. Spanish speakers most often wanted more information about how to read or look at books with their children and age appropriate behavior, areas that providers were more likely to cover with English speaking parents.

The quality of Reach Out and Read books is better on average than the books that Spanish speaking families have access to otherwise.

In each of the areas where Reach Out and Read books were compared to other books the family has access to, English speakers on average reported that the Reach Out and Read books were of similar quality or were slightly better than the other books, while on average Spanish speakers said that Reach Out and Read books were better or much better than other books to which they have access.

Spanish speaking families are more likely to report that their child looks forward to receiving a book and that they are more likely to go to their next Well Child check up because their child will receive a book.

Spanish speaking parents were more likely to report that their child looks forward to getting a book, with 100 percent of Spanish speakers reporting their child looks forward to the book compared to 75 percent of English speaking parents. Further, 80 percent of Spanish speaking parents said that they *Strongly Agreed* with this compared with 35 percent of English speaking parents.

Seventy percent of Spanish speakers said that they were more likely to go to their next Well Child visit because their child will receive a book compared to 48 percent of English speakers.

Overall, participant perspectives on Reach Out and Read Colorado are very positive. Providers feel that the program is beneficial in promoting literacy and educating families about the importance of reading to their children, while providing families with access to high quality books that they might not be able to afford otherwise. Families are very happy to receive a book during their Well Child checkup; a book which is often of better quality than other books they may have in their home. Further, parents feel that the program has positively impacted their attitudes about reading and encouraged them not only to read to their children more and acquire additional books, but also has made them more likely to go to their child's next Well Child checkup because of the books the program provides. Finally, Reach Out and Read has had an even greater impact on Spanish speaking families in a number of respects and has opportunities to expand upon their success with this community in the future.