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Business Alliance for Early Learning
Fast Facts on Child Language and Literacy Development

The following Fast Facts were developed by David Lawrence, Brittany Birken and Laura Bailet. References are listed for each fact. As you review the document, Laura asked that you to consider the following:

- List length - we can identify a shorter list if that is everyone's preference.
- David recommends not using references older than the year 2000, but a couple of the older facts are so commonly cited and compelling, that they are included for now.
- This should be viewed as a working document. Laura will add other facts that members suggest, as long as we have the reference.
- Please consider how to use this information, individually and collectively.

Brain Development

- Babies are born learning, and parents play a huge role in a child's future success, starting before birth.[1]
- Babies start forming memories as young as 3 months.[2]
- 700-1000 new neural connections form in a baby's brain every second, and connections = learning.[3]
- By age 2, a child's brain has more than a hundred trillion connections.[4]
- 85% of brain growth happens by age 3.[5]
- The brain never stops developing, but the early years set the critical foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health.[3]

Language and Early Literacy Development

- Babies recognize their mother's voice at birth.[6]
- "Baby talk" is great for babies, especially the higher-pitched, exaggerated talk in one-on-one conversations.[7]

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- By 18 months of age, differences in vocabulary size are evident between families with higher education and income and families with lower education and income.[8,9]
- By 4 years of age, children from language-rich environments have heard about 30 million words more than children from language-poor environments.[8]
- Children's books have more varied vocabulary than adult conversation or TV, so reading with children helps build their vocabulary skills.[10,11]

Book Access for Children

- Approximately 21% of children have 10 or fewer children's books in the home; 2% have no children's books at all.[12]
- Having children's books at home is twice as important for a child's developmental progress as the father's education level.[13]
- In middle-income neighborhoods the ratio of books per child is 13 to 1; in low-income neighborhoods, the ratio is 1 book to 300 children.[14]
- 80% of preschool and after-school programs serving low-income children have no age-appropriate books for them.[15]
- When children are given 10 to 20 self-selected children's books at the end of the school year, about 50% maintain or increase their reading skills over the summer.[16]

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[11]Cunningham, A., E., & Stanovich, K. E. (2001). What reading does for the mind. *Journal of Direct Instruction, Vol. 1*(2), 137-149.

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[13]Evans, M., J. Kelley, J. Sikora, and D. Treiman. 2010. Family scholarly culture and educational success: Books and schooling in 27 nations. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobilit*y 28: 171–97.

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School Readiness and Learning to Read

- 20-30% of children enrolled in prekindergarten score below average in reading readiness.[17, 18,19]
- A child should know 15-18 alphabet letters by the end of preK to have a strong chance of reading on grade level by the end of 1st grade.[20]
- 30-40% of beginning kindergarteners are significantly behind in language and reading readiness skills needed for academic success.[21,22]
- A child who is behind in reading at the end of 1st grade has only a 12% chance of reading at grade level by 4th grade.[23]
- Children who are not proficient readers by 3rd grade are 4 times less likely to graduate from high school on time; such children who also live in poverty are 13 times less likely to graduate high school on time.[24]
- 61% of FL 4th graders are below the "proficient" level on a national reading test.[25]
- 70% of FL 8th graders are below the "proficient" level on a national reading test.[25]
- 43% of FL 3rd graders failed the FL State Assessment in Reading in 2014.[26]
- 45% of FL 10th graders failed the FL State Assessment in Reading in 2014.[26]
- For out-of-school reading, a good reader in 5th grade reads as many words in 2 days as a poor reader reads in an entire year.[27]

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