The Role of Churches in



The Reading Success Movement and

Read-Talk-Play Campaign

Summary

***Introduction***

Reading success is foundational to academic and life success. It is the single most effective pathway out of poverty. Despite our country’s best efforts, far too many children are being left behind, especially children from under-resourced families. According to the latest report from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) Nation’s Report Card, on average less than 20% of under-resourced children are proficient in reading. This is a national crisis, which is impacting the future of our country.

Most children who struggle with reading entered kindergarten one to three years behind in the foundational pre-reading skills that empower reading success in grades K-3. Most at-risk students have the innate capacity to learn but have a significant language awareness and vocabulary gap and are unfamiliar with how text works because they were not talked to and read to enough in their early years. When they enter school, they don’t grasp the alphabetic principle (the concept that sounds are represented by meaningful written symbols) or develop vocabulary quickly enough to keep pace with peers who, through more extensive experience, have better assimilated the principles of the language. In general, most schools do a fair job of teaching grade-level curriculum, but struggle to catch up the children who are behind.

To address this national challenge, we must do two things: 1) improve every child’s exposure to language and skill development activities during ages 0-5, and 2) improve every elementary school’s system for catching students up in grades K-2.

The solution must be community-driven and churches play a major role in the foundation of every community.

***Role of Churches***

Sufficient research and experience demonstrate that most children can learn how to read if provided adequate exposure to language and skill development activities. The challenge is in the implementation. The Reading Success Movement intends to engage and empower every community to create a local system that can address this need. Churches can play an important role to help organize and implement this system.

Possible action items include:

1. Endorse the Movement.
   1. Go to <http://readingsuccessmovement.org> (in process) to learn more.
   2. Click on the link to endorse the campaign. No commitment or obligation is entailed; just help to build awareness and support the mission in principle. Everyone benefits by solving this problem.
2. Inform the congregation.
   1. Most parents do not fully understand the critical role they can play in the successful development of their child’s reading skills.
   2. Please encourage all members to go to the RSM website to learn more.
   3. Brochures are available that can be downloaded, printed, and distributed.
   4. Encourage members to spread the word and join the Movement.
3. Interact with other local community organizations.
   1. Explore connections any church members may have with other organizations.
   2. Inform and encourage those organizations to join the Movement.
   3. Explore working with other local organizations to help create and support more community Read-Talk-Play (RTP) parties.
4. Host RTP Parties.
   1. Reading or RTP Parties are weekly gatherings where parents can come to participate in activities that will help their children become successful readers.
   2. Each participating church would select a day or evening, or several, to host. Hopefully, churches in the same area would coordinate efforts so there are more programs available throughout the week. For example, one church could select Monday evenings and another Wednesday evenings.
   3. The program would be open to any family in the community.
   4. The church would ensure there are sufficient responsible adults present to supervise the activities.
   5. Parents can be recruited to help participate.
   6. It is intended that a responsible adult family member for each child would stay present during the program and not just drop off children.
   7. The program would last a minimum of 30 minutes and could go as long as an hour or so.
   8. As possible, food and beverages would be provided, perhaps via potluck, with help from church members and from sponsors.
   9. Each church would coordinate with local elementary school(s) and libraries to provide books and games. As possible, local sponsors would be sought to help pay for any costs.
   10. Program elements
       1. Training for parents as needed
       2. Reading/talking to children, primary activity
       3. Activities that support reading for children
   11. Programs will be organized to support each elementary school in a community.
5. Recruit, train, and supervise volunteers for other community reading programs and in schools.
6. Become the lead organization in your community to organize the overall program.

***Why Churches Care***

* Churches represent a safe haven and stable resource in each community.
* A strong successful community helps all community organizations and members.
* Participating helps churches to better connect with their communities.
* Participating helps to ensure that all children become successful readers, which in turn empowers their ability to participate in church functions better, read the Bible, and help to build a better community.