

READING SUCCESS SUMMIT



Community Listening Sessions Full Report

Background and Introduction

Achieve Brown County (ABC) and the Brown County Library are pleased to submit this Community Listening Session report to Brown County K-12 partners as part of a broader community-wide campaign for grade level reading and the Reading Success Summit (RSS). Specifically, this report summarizes key themes from sixteen community listening sessions held at twelve different locations from April to September 2022.

The overall goal of the community listening sessions was to hear from parents their perceptions on reading, early literacy, and reading proficiency. A special focus was given to engaging with traditionally underprivileged communities in Brown County: economically disadvantaged families and bilingual families.

Methodology

To prepare for the Community Listening Sessions, ABC and Brown County Library staff created and finalized a set of protocols and an initial set of questions. Focus groups were facilitated by members of the Reading Success Summit team. This included staff from ABC, the Brown County Library, and Green Bay Area Public Schools.

After using the initial questions for four sessions it was believed the questions could be streamlined and improved to elicit more information from the parents. We learned that information on how your family does or does not support reading is a sensitive issue to talk about in a group, and questions needed to be carefully constructed to draw out more discussion without creating a negative atmosphere of blame or guilt.

Milwaukee Succeeds provided advisory help to revise the questions. They had previously done similar Community Listening Sessions around the topic of reading and had some experience they could share. The revised set of questions developed after this consultation, as well as the final set of protocols for the sessions, is shown in Appendix A.

The initial format was a presentation of information to a group of parents with time for questions and responses throughout the presentation. This was called a “Listening Session.” This presentation format required a commitment of approximately half an hour of time from each participant. Participants received a \$25 ‘thank you’ gift card for participating in the session.

It was challenging to recruit parents for that large of a time commitment, so the “Rapid Response” process was put into action to increase the number of responses. For “Rapid Response,” participants were interviewed 1x1 by an RSS team member. Questions had to be added to the list of questions from the “Listening Session” protocol to fit the change to an interview format. The list of questions used for “Rapid Response” can be found in Appendix B.

The “Rapid Response” sessions were done at times and locations where parents were already gathered for a different purpose. It proved to be very successful at quickly increasing the number of responses. Sixty responses were collected in four “Rapid Response” sessions, compared to sixty-seven responses from the previous twelve “Listening Sessions.” Participants in the “Rapid Response” session were given a \$10 ‘thank you’ gift card.

At the close of the RSS Community Listening Session project there were a total of 127 participants with recorded responses from sixteen sessions. See Appendix C for the list of dates and locations of all sessions.



Methodology Continued

Notetakers at each session manually documented major points. After the sessions the notes were entered into Qualtrics.

ABC data analysts exported the notes from Qualtrics to Excel for coding of the open-ended questions. The coding analysis identified common themes across all responses. In addition to common themes, attention was also given to unique insights and ideas since this was a qualitative study looking for new perspectives.

Findings are reported below. Before presenting the findings, however, we note the following caveats and limitations that are inherent to at least some degree in the data:

Anonymity

While all participants were told their answers would be anonymous in the final report, it is possible that those who participated in groups for the “Listening Sessions” may have been reluctant to share information that did not put themselves or their family in the best light due to peer pressure. Reading at home with your children is a value-laden subject so there may have been some hesitancy to share less-than-optimal conditions. To minimize this potential bias the questions were structured to reduce implied value judgements.

This would have been less of an issue in the “Rapid Response” individual interviews, although participants may still have felt some motivation to overstate the positive in their family reading activities to get the implicit approval of their interviewer.

There is no indication this was an extreme problem in any of the sessions, but the reader should be aware of the possibility when reviewing the responses.

Generalizability

There is no way to assess the extent to which the information provided by parents during the sessions is representative of all parents (either in specific cultural or socio-economic groups, or in Brown County overall). Given that participation was voluntary, there may be some degree of selection bias inherent in who participated in the groups. Particularly in the “Listening Sessions,” which required a relatively large time commitment, it is possible that parents with a greater interest in reading participated than parents who did not prioritize reading at home.

This possible selection bias was minimized by reaching out to additional groups in many different locations, making the recruitment effort as broad as possible while still focusing on the populations of greatest interest: economically disadvantaged families and bilingual families.

Data Quality

We did not have access to verbatim transcripts of the groups; therefore, the session notes rely on the notetakers’ ability to accurately capture major points. Most of the notes appeared to be thorough and were easily interpreted. However, we note that to better analyze session notes, it is helpful for notetakers to indicate speakers by assigning a number to each participant. This allows analysts to capture the relative frequency of each topic (i.e., whether it is one participant who brings up a concern multiple times, or whether it is multiple participants bringing up the issue). In this report, we use quotation marks around text that was taken directly from the session notes; the quotation marks do not necessarily indicate a direct participant quote.



Findings: Major Themes

These were the major themes from the sessions:

1. Lack of motivation for reading books is a big problem – technology is a distraction - it's easier and more fun to play video games or talk to Google
2. Many parents are tired and/or overworked supporting the basic needs of their family – reading is not a priority
3. Incentives for reading, like pizza coupons or little toys, would be a big help
4. We need more activities for families to do together that focus on reading

Below is a deeper look into the responses to each of the major questions.

Findings: Parents' Experience with Reading in their Youth

Question – How was reading either supported or not supported for you when you were growing up?

Common themes for Supported:

- Parents or other relatives read to me
- We had books in our home
- Good reading programs at school, frequent mention of Pizza Hut reading incentive program (Book It)
- I had access to books at school and/or daycare
- Our family went to the public library

Unique answers for Supported:

- In summer reading program
- Watched educational tv

Common themes for Not Supported:

- Reading and books were not a priority in our home
- My parents were too busy working to read to me
- Few reading programs at school for me
- My parents were not English speakers
- My parents had difficulty reading
- Reading wasn't recognized as important in our culture (work, playing outside more important)

Unique answers for Not Supported:

- My parents used reading as a punishment
- My parents didn't know how to support our reading

Findings: Current Approach to Reading within your Family

Question – How has that experience influenced your own approach to reading with your children or children in your life?

Common positive themes:

- I read with my children, play games that include reading
- I encourage my children to read
- There are books in our home
- I've learned how important reading is for the education and nurturing of my child
- Having no reading support in my childhood motivates me to break the cycle and provide it for my children



Findings: Current Approach to Reading within your Family Continued

Common positive themes continued:

- We visit the library, have library cards
- We get great reading support from the schools
- Test children on their reading abilities
- Expose them to bookstores and other places with books

Unique positive responses:

- Children read on their own
- Watch educational tv, use audio books
- Found school and community support for dyslexic child (took some effort)
- Use Little Free Library
- Do bilingual reading at home

Common negative themes:

- We don't do much reading in our home
- Difficult to find time to read to child
- Extra challenging due to my child's disability
- Children would rather play video games
- Difficult to break cycle of the past, no reading support at home in my childhood
- I have difficulty reading myself

Unique negative responses:

- No incentives like the Pizza Hut reward anymore

Findings: Barriers to Reading Proficiency in Brown County

Question – What barriers do you see or do you believe exist in our community that are contributing to the decline in reading ability for kids across Brown County?

Common themes:

- Too many distractions, especially the prevalence of phones and video games
- Tired/overworked parents
- Parents have difficulty reading, had no reading role model, don't know what to do
- Resource differences across families (books, time, transportation, technology for learning)
- Lack of incentives to read, no motivation
- Some parents don't understand or believe in the importance of reading
- Children with special needs that make reading a challenge (ADD, autism, etc.)
- School issues: Overcrowded classrooms, under-resourced, burned-out teachers
- Pandemic (disrupted learning)
- Lack of accountability for reading (Children? Parents? Schools? Community?)
- Limited access to books, especially books at the appropriate age level
- School has low expectations for reading, passes children too easily
- Not enough family activities around reading
- Parents unaware of community resources to help with reading
- Reading levels we expect aren't developmentally appropriate
- Parents not having/knowing the tech system used by schools



Findings: Barriers to Reading Proficiency in Brown County Continued

Unique responses:

- Not enough high-quality childcare – long waiting lists and high turnover
- Pushing kids to read too much at school
- Children with special needs need advocacy to get help from school
- Parent has vision problems
- Homeschooling from parents that aren't teachers

Findings: Ways to Improve Reading

Question – What signs of hope do you see or you believe exist in our community that could help increase reading for all kids across Brown County?

What's working great:

- Our schools
- Our public library system
- Bilingual programming, like Escuelita
- Little Free Libraries
- Neville Museum
- Waterford Upstart
- On The Mark

Common themes for improvements:

- More reading incentives for children; understand and improve their motivation
- More reading activities for families
- More parent involvement
- Give out more books
- More bilingual programming
- More reading mentors; 1x1 reading supports
- More after school programs; books clubs for children
- More school resources; cut class sizes in half
- Schools change reading instruction: need more read-out-louds, book reports, reading supports, etc.
- More advertising of reading events and reading programs in the community
- More book fairs
- Public library improvements: larger children's area, funds for library fines, more classrooms and youth organizations making library visits
- Embrace technology: Encourage audio books, make Tik-Toks, read captions on tv
- Limit use of phones and tablets at school and home
- More reading programs for parents
- More books in Spanish at the library and school
- Increase minimum wage (reduce necessary work hours) so parents have more time to read with their children
- Accommodate shift workers when scheduling reading programs, bookmobile, and library hours
- More high-quality childcare
- Determine family needs related to reading and connect them to resources



Findings: Ways to Improve Reading Continued

Unique responses:

- Have doctors test for dyslexia at medical check-ups
- List of tips from parents for parents on getting your kids to read
- Summer reading program at parks with 'parkies'
- Summer book camp at the Y
- More quiet places at home and school for reading

Findings: Generational Cycle of Reading Support

Question – What is the generational impact of parents not having had support for reading in their childhood homes? How likely are they to change the pattern and encourage reading in their own home with their own children? Is this different from what is seen in homes where parents had grown up with support for reading?

Note: for this analysis we can only include respondents that gave an answer to both questions (presence of reading support in their childhood home and presence of reading support in their current home).

Reading was supported in childhood home: 30

Currently support reading in their family: 25 (83%)

Currently DO NOT support reading in their family: 5 (17%)

Reading was not supported in childhood home: 29

Currently support reading in their family: 26 (90%)

Currently DO NOT support reading in their family: 3 (10%)

Is this a statistically significant difference? No, there is only a 52% chance these groups of participants are different in their support of reading. This is well below the typical 90% probability requirement for assumption of a real difference. We should assume both groups of respondents have the same likelihood of supporting reading in their home: 80 to 90%. This tells us that most parents who did not experience reading support in their home as a child have been able to break the generational cycle and are now supporting reading with their children.

Of course, we do not know if this level of reading support would be the same or different for the families that did not participate in the surveys (see previous comments on caveats and limitations of this study).



Appendix A: Community Listening Sessions Guide

Attendees:

Parents/guardians from Brown County

Facilitators/Adult Attendees:

Diana Delbecchi, Katie Guzek, Ann McCotter, Daisie Mathias

Session duration:

30 minutes to 1 hour (varies)

Objective for the Sessions/what information are we hoping to gather?

- Parent/guardian personal experience becoming a reader
- Parent/guardian values related to reading
- Parent/guardian perspectives on barriers related to developing strong readers
- Parent/guardian perspectives on strengths in our community related to developing strong readers

Introduction and Instructions:

- Introduce the facilitator.
- Explain the set up: Round of questions, data, second round of questions
- Review Exit Ticket details and verbally ask for consent to sharing the data.
- Ask for permission to take photos.

Community Listening Session Questions:

1. How was reading either supported or not supported for you when you were growing up?
2. How has that experience influenced your own approach to reading with your children or children in your life?
3. What does reading look like in your home? Where does reading occur? Who is reading? What is being read?
4. What percentage of kids in Brown County do you think are reading at a proficient level or above as measured on the 3rd grade Forward exam?
5. What barriers do you see or do you believe exist in our community that are contributing to the decline in reading ability for kids across Brown County?
6. What signs of hope do you see or believe exist in our community that could help increase reading for all kids across Brown County?
7. Given that goal, what else would you like to share about reading, our community, or your own story?



Appendix B: Rapid Response Guide

Rapid Response Questions:

1. Parent/Guardian Name:
2. Ages(s)/Grade(s) of child(ren) in your home:
3. Do we have your permission to ask you questions about your experiences and your child(s) experience with reading, to record your answers and to share your answers with participating organizations to include Achieve Brown County, The Brown County Library, Green Bay Area Public School District and Waterford Upstart?
4. Would you like a copy of the report when it is produced?
5. E-mail for contacting you:
6. How was reading either supported or not supported when you were growing up?
7. How has your experience with reading influenced your own approach to reading with your children or children in your life?
8. What does reading look like in your home? Who does it? Where does it take place? What does it look like?
9. What barriers do you think exist in our community that are contributing to a decline in reading ability for kids across Brown County?
10. What do you think would help our community increase reading ability for kids?
11. Do you have anything else you would like to share about reading, our community or your own story?
12. Name of Notetaker:



Appendix C: Community Listening Session Dates and Locations

| Date | Location | Session Type | Number of Responses |
|-----------|---|-------------------|---------------------|
| 4/4/2022 | Brown County Central Library | Listening Session | 0 |
| 4/4/2022 | Brown County Central Library | Listening Session | 1 |
| 4/13/2022 | Brown County Central Library | Listening Session | 0 |
| 4/13/2022 | Brown County Central Library | Listening Session | 5 |
| 4/27/2022 | House of Hope | Listening Session | 10 |
| 5/16/2022 | Brown County Central Library | Listening Session | 2 |
| 5/18/2022 | Casa ALBA Melanie | Listening Session | 8 |
| 5/18/2022 | Freedom House | Listening Session | 4 |
| 5/19/2022 | Boys & Girls Club of Greater Green Bay (East) | Listening Session | 7 |
| 5/24/2022 | Fort Howard Elementary School | Listening Session | 16 |
| 6/30/2022 | YWCA | Listening Session | 8 |
| 8/11/2022 | Howe Elementary School | Rapid Response | 20 |
| 8/17/2022 | Oneida | Rapid Response | 2 |
| 8/23/2022 | ICS | Listening Session | 6 |
| 8/24/2022 | Back to School Store | Rapid Response | 30 |
| 8/29/2022 | Circles Green Bay | Rapid Response | 8 |
| | | Total | 127 |