



# Raising A Reader MA

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*Early literacy for lifelong achievement*

## 2011-2012 Program Year Report

**Raising A Reader MA 2011-12 Program Year Report**

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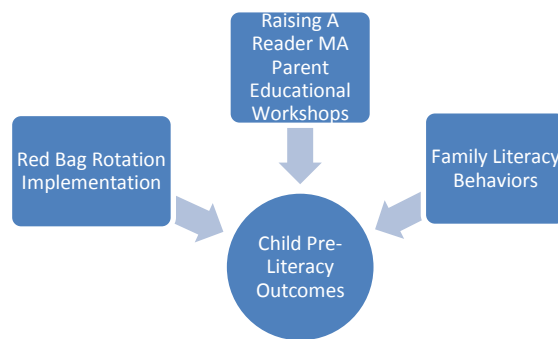
Thanks to Mark Maples, New Sector Summer Fellow, for analysis of implementer and parent surveys, and Jacqueline Sims, Evaluation Intern, for analysis of mid-year check-in phone calls with parents.

## Introduction

As an evidence-based organization, Raising A Reader MA operates a multi-stranded evaluation strategy to consistently assess our progress and practices. We incorporate ongoing formative assessments to look closely at our work and determine whether our activities are on the right track with year-end summative assessments to gauge our success overall. This measurement profile points to the continued success both of the key aspects of our dual intervention- providing families with access to books through our signature red bag rotations, as well as to educational workshops about how to use these books effectively, regardless of parents' own literacy or language ability.

Our evaluation strategy is a three-legged stool, incorporating our program partners' fidelity to the bag rotation model within their own educational settings; Raising A Reader MA's work directly with parents through our five-part parent education workshops; and how families are incorporating dialogic (interactive) reading strategies into their home literacy routines. Together, these components serve as important indicators for children's pre-literacy skills (see figure 1). Research shows that when families have books to share, when they are given the opportunity to learn more about their role as their children's first teacher, and when they put these lessons into practice through interactive reading, children benefit. They enter kindergarten ready to learn, which kicks-off a lifetime of academic success.

Figure 1: Raising A Reader MA's Evaluation Strategy



This report summarizes the results of a number of different evaluation tools used during the 2011-2012 program year. These include both quantitative and qualitative data, from a number of different perspectives (see figure 2). Taken together, the results of these assessments create a rich picture of Raising A Reader MA's 2011-12 services and point toward priorities for the 2012-2013 year. Throughout the report, "Data Lessons" indicate opportunities for staff to integrate evaluation findings into their programmatic work.

Figure 2: Evaluation Tools

Tool	RAR MA staff	Parents	Early Educators/ Program Implementers
Kindergarten entrance observations			X
Observational and attendance data	X		
Mid-year phone calls		X	
Parent Educational Workshop Surveys		X	
Implementer Year-End Surveys			X
Parent Year-End Surveys		X	

### 2011-12 Program Year: Who did we serve?

In the 2011-12 year, RAR MA served 8239 children from 84 program partners (child care centers, public pre-schools, home visiting programs, playgroup systems, family childcare cohorts) in 5 core, direct-service, regions. In addition, we served 94 children in our first satellite, indirect-service, community of Plymouth (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Children Served

Community	Brockton	GB1 (Chelsea, Revere, Boston)	GB2 (Tri-City, Cambridge/ Somerville)	Lawrence	Lowell	Plymouth (Satellite)	Overall
# of children	1147	2110	2625	1696	661	94	8333
# of program partners	9	25	21	20	9	1	85
# of implementers	65	124	150	125	46	6	516

Parent surveys indicate an economically, linguistically, and educationally diverse group. We remember that these demographics (which were optional to answer) are a sample of our entire population, and may be skewed toward those who felt comfortable completing a written survey (see figures 4-6).

Figure 4: Parent Education Level

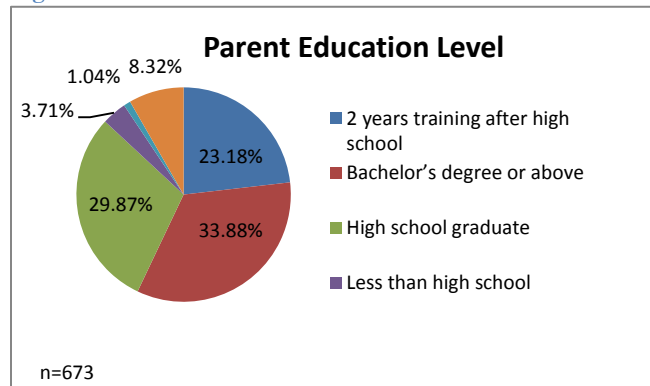


Figure 5: Family Income Level

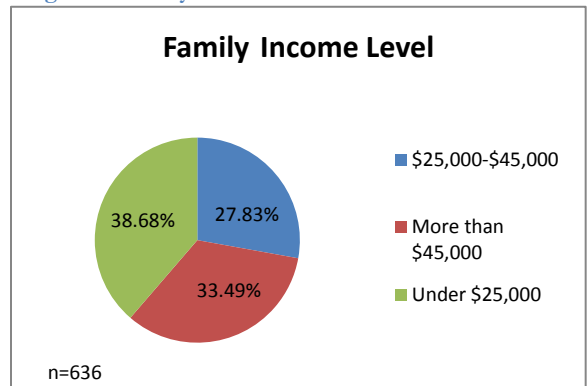
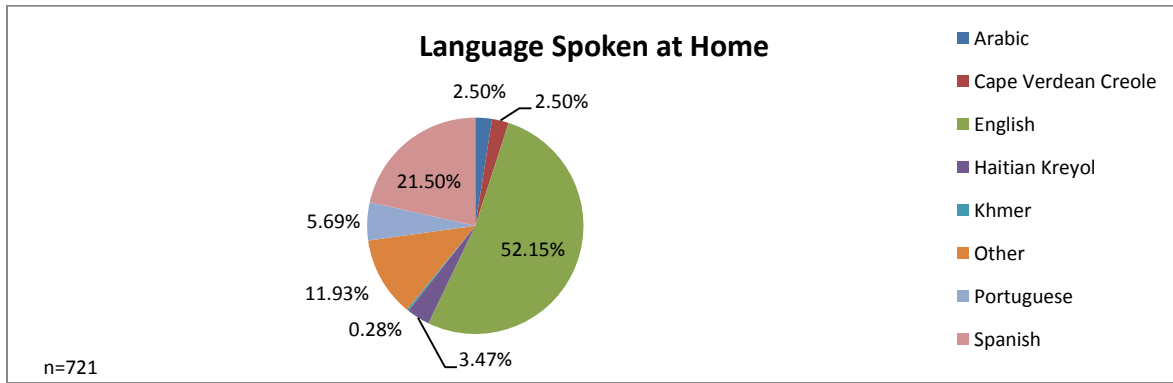


Figure 6: Language Spoke at Home



### Red Bag Rotations and Site Support

Our red bags lie at the heart of our program, and we depend on the commitment of over 500 partner implementers- teachers, home visitors, family child care providers, playgroup facilitators, and program administrators- to rotate the bags among the families’ homes. To ensure that these bag rotations happen successfully, Raising A Reader MA staff orient all implementers to the program and provide refresher trainings each year, as well as visit each of them multiple times to provide resources and share best practices. Our site rating rubric provides us with valuable ongoing information to determine how to best work with each implementer. In the 2011-12 program year, **95% of our partners were rotating the bags with fidelity**, providing families with the first step- the actual books- toward creating a culture of literacy in the home.

While our goal is to visit each implementer at least twice over the course of the year, we were not successful in meeting this standard (see figure 7). It is difficult to tell whether this is a reporting error or if all visits did not occur, and is likely a mix of both.

**Data Lesson:** In the 2012-13 year, it is a priority to ensure that all implementers receive appropriate support. We have modified our staffing model to better match the staff-to-implementer ratios found in Lawrence and Lowell, and have also updated our data management tools to ensure accurate tracking.

Figure 7: Site Visits and Rotation Fidelity

	Brockton	GB1	GB2	Lawrence	Lowell	Overall
# of visits	87	147	96	260	110	700
Average visits/implementer	1.33	1.18	.64	2.08	2.39	1.37
Percent of rated implementers rotating with fidelity	98%	89%	98%	95%	94%	95%

Site visits are just one strategy for supporting implementers. In a year-end survey, implementers indicated which activities were most important to them in the coming year. Their top one to two ratings were given at the following frequencies:

- 51%, parent trainings and events
- 35%, storytimes with children
- 33%, support for working with families
- 27%, professional development
- 19%, support on red bag rotation

**Data Lesson:** These priorities should help Raising A Reader MA staff determine how to use their resources in the 2012-13 program year. It is important to note that the group who returned the surveys may be those who are more successfully implementing the program and need less support around bag rotation and this element of site visits should not be ignored.

## Parent Educational Workshops

Parent engagement has always been key for Raising A Reader MA, and since 2006 we have offered overview workshops explaining the program and our interactive reading approach. “Dialogic Reading” has been proven to have statistically significant impact on young children’s pre-literacy skills.

Research on Raising A Reader at the University of Texas showed that when parents had the opportunity to attend multiple trainings, their children’s pre-literacy outcomes improved significantly. This research echoes other reports showing that multiple opportunities for engagement are critical for parents’ learning and practice. Taking this research as a cue, we’ve broken down the concept of Dialogic Reading into easily digestible chunks. At each workshop, parents learn a new, specific strategy, such as how to ask good questions, that they can start using immediately with their children.

In Winter 2011, with generous support from Bank New York Mellon, we piloted a five-parent parent educational workshop series at the John Silber Early Learning Center in Chelsea and we expanded these offerings to all of our partner programs beginning in Fall 2011 as a core part of our program. In the 2011-2012 Program Year, Raising A Reader MA offered 165 parent educational workshops across the state (see figure 8).

Our workshops were primarily focused on center and school based programs for a variety of reasons:

- We assume that home visitors integrate lessons of Dialogic Reading into their one-on-one visits with families.

- Our model with family child care providers concentrates on professional development for the providers themselves, rather than for the parents.
- We are revising our model of work with playgroups to better prepare facilitators to integrate the workshop strategies into their direct interactions with parents.

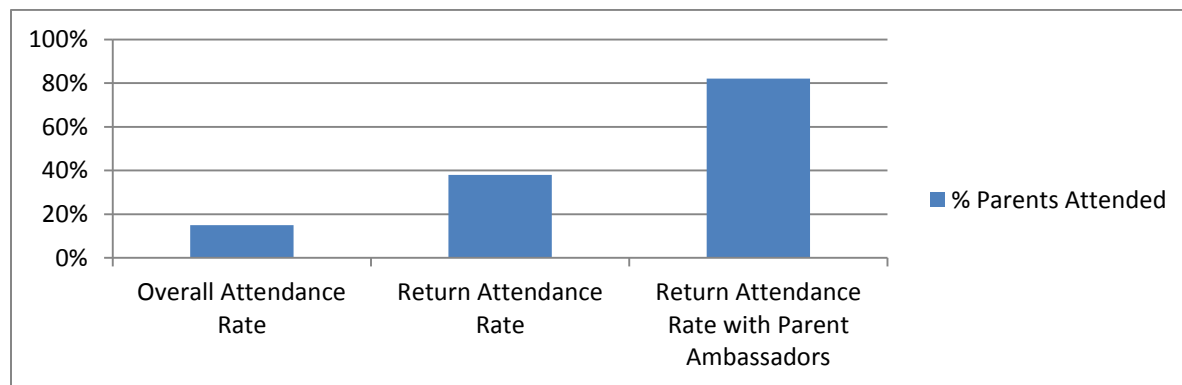
Among the targeted partners, we facilitated 154 workshops, reaching the parents of 901 children. We were not able to host all five sessions at all of our program partner locations because of, among other reasons, space limitations, weather restrictions, and lack of partner buy-in to the process. Twelve programs did offer all five workshops to their families over the course of the year.

Figure 8: Parent Workshops and Attendance Rates

	Brockton	GB1	GB2	Lawrence	Lowell	Overall
# of workshops offered	38	38	37	38	14	165
# of programs offering 5 part series	5	2	2	2	1	12
Duplicated # of parents trained	367	373	524	490	49	1803
# and % children at targeted programs who had a parent attend at least one training (unduplicated # trained)	153/ 17%	238/ 25%	219/ 13%	265/ 20%	26/ 9%	901/ 18%
% parents trained by RAR or home visitor	33%	49%	30%	34%	25%	36%
Average training attendance	33%	34%	22%	26%	12%	27%

Given the importance of multiple learning opportunities, the return rate is critical for families to actually integrate new strategies into their routines. In this respect, we have succeeded. In just our first year of facilitating the workshops in a series format, 38% of those who attended one workshop returned for at least a second time when given the opportunity. And, we are learning how to increase this return rate even more. At the John Silber Early Learning Center in Chelsea, where a pilot group of Parent Ambassadors performs outreach about Raising A Reader MA to their peers and even facilitates some of the workshops themselves, 82% of parents came back for at least a second workshop (see figure 9).

Figure 9: Parent Attendance Rates

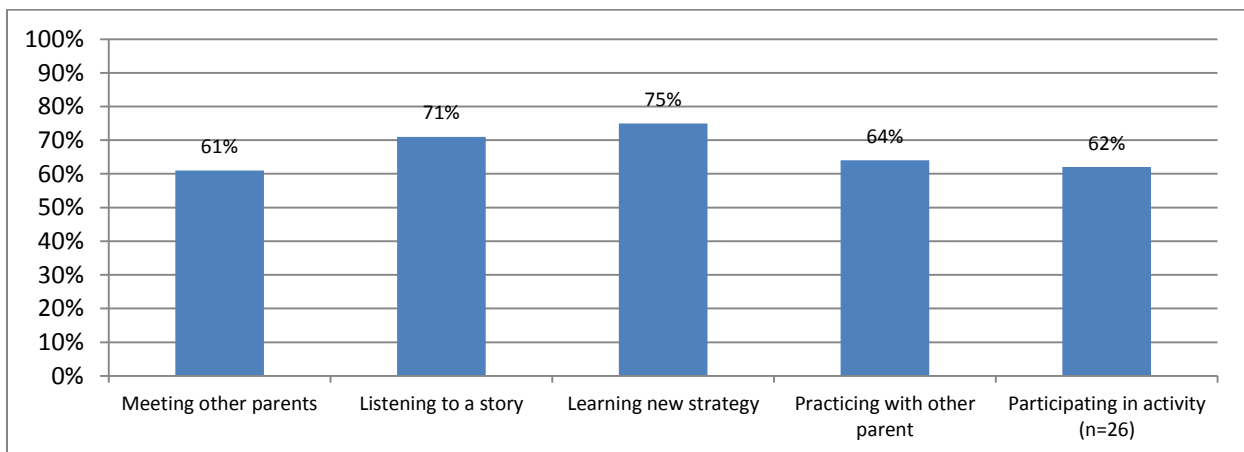


In order to learn more about parents' reactions to the parent workshops, we piloted a workshop evaluation. Forty-five parents at eight workshops completed a short survey at the end of the session. Overall, they were very pleased with the workshops. 98% thought that it was clear and easy to understand, enjoyed listening to the presenter, learned a new strategy for sharing books with their children, and understand what to do with the red bags when they rotate through their homes. 89% reported that they would definitely use the new strategy at home.

Interestingly, 80% reported they would definitely return to the next workshop, and 18% said that they might. We do not know from this data whether they actually did return or even had the opportunity to do so, but based on our other data points, it seems that even if parents intend to return their ability or motivation to do so decreases by the time the actual opportunity arises.

The workshop survey also asked parents to discuss what components they most enjoyed about the workshop (see figure 10). Listening to a story read aloud and learning a new shared reading strategy were the most popular responses, although for the most part parents did enjoy all of the activities. Fewer (n=26) parents actually had the opportunity to participate in an activity, but the majority did enjoy that component.

Figure 10: What did you enjoy about the workshop?

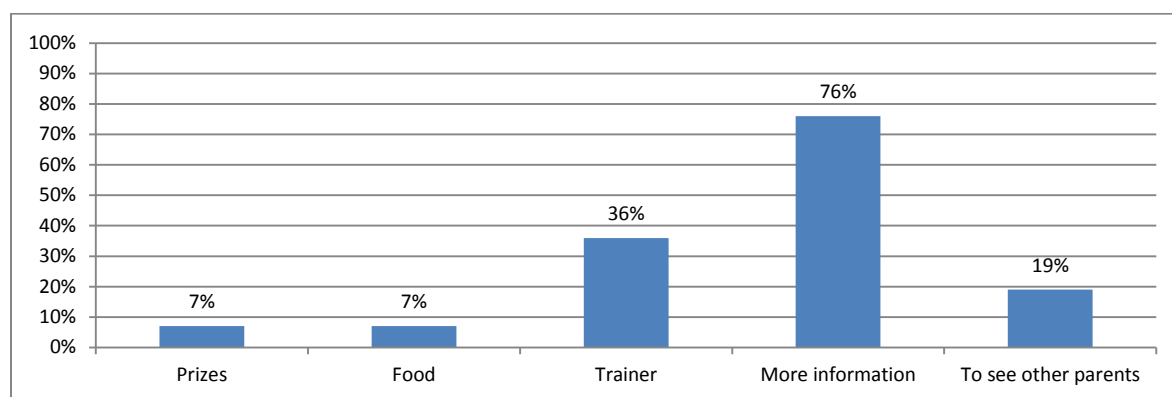


We also used the survey to try to understand what would encourage parents to return to another workshop (see figure 11). Relationships- both with the facilitator and with other parents- are somewhat important factors, but the opportunity to learn more information about sharing books with their children far outweighed all other reasons.

**Data Lesson:** Workshop planning should focus on the delivery of high quality information. Prizes and food may seem important, but are not the key drivers of parent attendance.



Figure 11: Why do you think you will attend another workshop?



In addition to parent workshop surveys, we conducted phone calls with 45 English and Portuguese speakers in March-April 2012 to learn more information about their experiences with Raising A Reader MA outreach and workshops. 53% of respondents spoke English and 47% Portuguese as their primary language. Of the total respondents 11 (24%) were bilingual. Overall, their responses match other findings regarding shared reading behaviors and workshop lessons, but these surveys are unique because parents also supplied information about how they learned about Raising A Reader. Fifteen (33%) respondents reported receiving some kind of informational flier about the Red Bag Program, only two of whom reported receiving fliers in Portuguese. The majority of parents (53%) had some sort of conversation with their child's teacher about RAR: 60% had communication about the schedule of books; 51% received information about the importance of the program; and 20% received information about workshops. While few parents heard about the workshops directly from their teacher, 32 respondents (71%) did hear of the workshops somehow. Approximately a third (29%) actually attended.

**Data Lesson:** Two approaches may be key in letting parents know about educational opportunities.

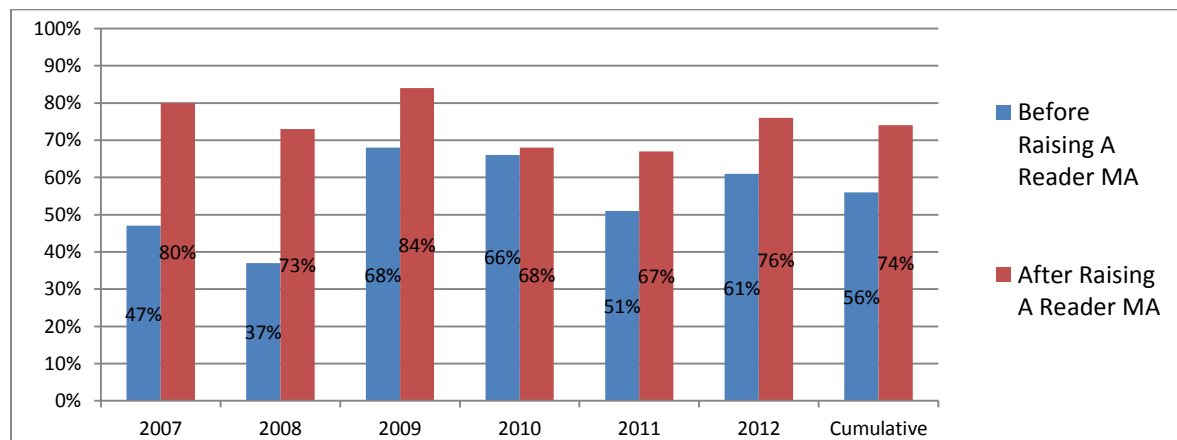
- 1) Making flyers and promotional materials available in multiple languages. This remains a challenge but is an area where Raising A Reader MA is focusing a great deal of attention.
- 2) Once the materials are translated, we must enhance our work with teachers around the ways they communicate with parents about the program. Rather than focusing on the logistics of the red bags, RAR MA staff can increase outreach to teachers with concrete tools they can use to let parents know about upcoming events.

## Family Reading Behavior

Raising A Reader MA strives to help families increase both their reading frequency as well as their use of Dialogic Reading strategies, and we have shown great accomplishments in both areas in the 2011-12 year.

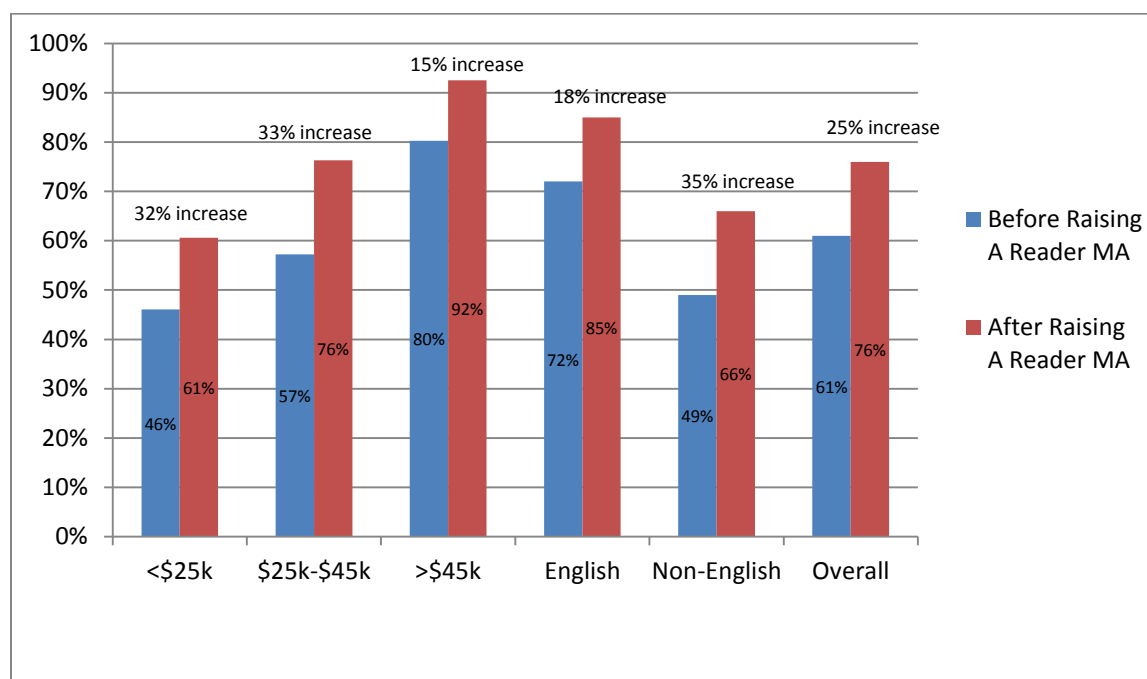
We rely on parent surveys to demonstrate these behavioral changes. 61% of parents reported sharing books three or more times a week before Raising A Reader MA, compared to 76% after participation, a 26% increase; this mirrors 6 years of successful impact (see figure 12). For the first time, we issued a retrospective survey, at the end of the year asking families to assess their activities both before and after Raising A Reader MA. This approach was initially intended to minimize the paperwork at the beginning of the year as we were also asking partners for increased responsibility through parent workshops; in the end it allowed us to collect nearly 750 surveys, much more than our typical 200-400. In addition, all responses are matched pairs, rather than slightly different groups responding to the pre- and post-surveys. This larger, more consistent sample indicates an even more accurate measure of our success than in years past. While research is mixed regarding the validity of retrospective surveys, the consistency of our data over time ensures us that it was a viable method.

Figure 12: Percent of Families Reporting Sharing Books 3+ Times/Week



What's more than our overall effects, Raising A Reader MA seems to have a greater impact on higher need children. While we do not have academic data on our participants, we do know that certain risk factors, such as lower income levels and being second language learners, make it more likely that children will fall behind in just their first years of life. Among these subgroups, however, Raising A Reader MA has the greatest effects as we close the gap between these children and their higher income or English speaking peers (see figure 13).

Figure 13: Families Reporting Sharing Books 3+ Times/Week by Income and Language

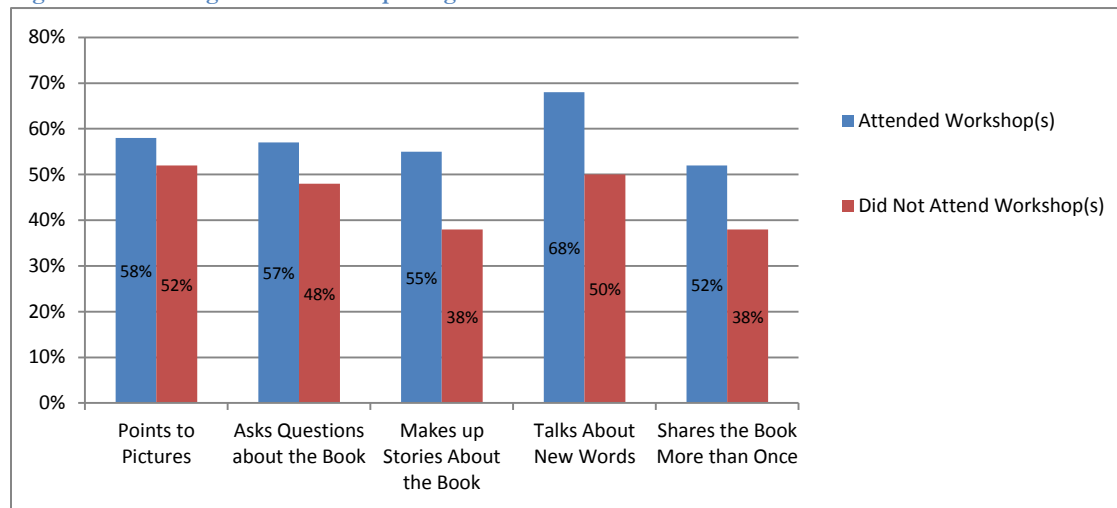


How often families read together is just one part of the puzzle; what happens during these interactions is at least as important. Dialogic Reading, when parent and child engage in a conversation about the story and pictures without necessarily reading the words on the page, is one of very few techniques proven by *Child Trends* to work for early literacy and language development<sup>1</sup>. Raising A Reader MA’s parent workshops and complementary Dialogic Reading DVD intend to raise parents’ awareness of and comfort practicing these strategies. Parents report that both they and their children have engaged in more interaction since starting Raising A Reader MA in every Dialogic Reading strategy assessed.

As Figure 14 represents, this increase is even more pronounced for those families who attended the parent educational workshops, with parents who attended workshops showing higher rates of increasing their consistent use of Dialogic Reading behaviors. For example, families who attended workshops increased their practice of talking about new words (ie. introducing new vocabulary) by 68%, compared to 50% of those who did not attend a workshop. This is perhaps our greatest accomplishment of the year; we now feel even more confident that when parents attend our workshops, they will be more likely to practice these key behaviors that are proven to enhance children’s pre-literacy skills early on.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child\\_Trends-2011\\_06\\_10\\_FS\\_WWLanguage.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2011_06_10_FS_WWLanguage.pdf)

Figure 14: Percentage Increase in Reporting Behavior as "Often"



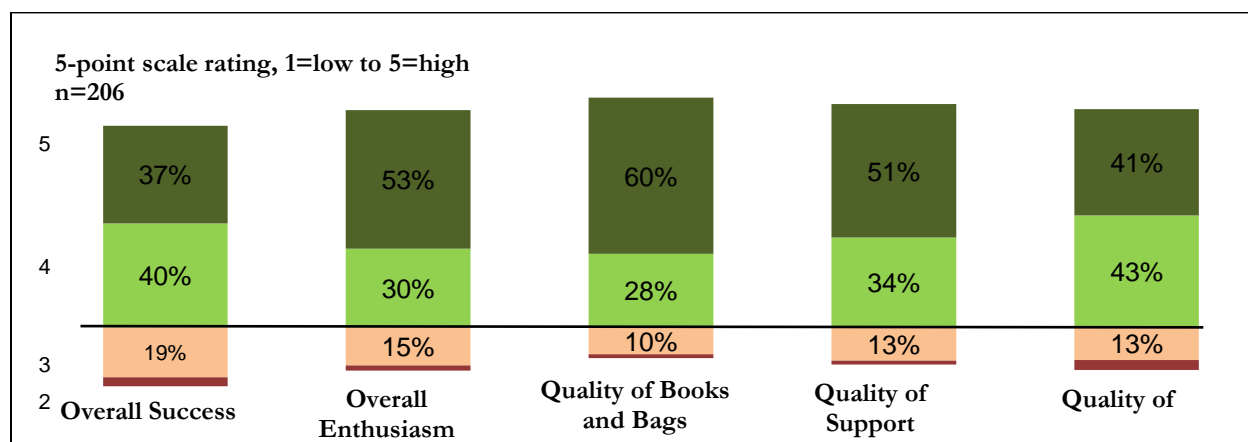
Implementer surveys also substantiate parent reports of their own behaviors. 71% of implementers perceived RAR MA as greatly influencing an increase in the frequency of families sharing books at home, and 69% perceived RAR MA greatly influencing the way in which families shared books at home by using Dialogic Reading techniques.

**Data Lesson:** Provide parents opportunities to learn more about Dialogic Reading via workshops, one-on-one interactions, and other creative approaches.

### Program Satisfaction

In addition to assessing the efficacy of Raising A Reader MA, we also look at our constituents' satisfaction with the program. In this respect, we were also highly successful. 98% of partner implementers reported average to very high enthusiasm for the program (see figure 15), and 95% of families reported that they enjoyed participating.

Figure 15: Total Implementer Perceived Success Rates



Implementers' reports of their own, children's, and parents' enthusiasm for Raising A Reader MA, as well as the quality of the support they received, were all highly correlated with their assessment of the overall success of the program. It is unclear whether being more enthusiastic makes the program more successful, or a more successful program leads to greater enthusiasm.

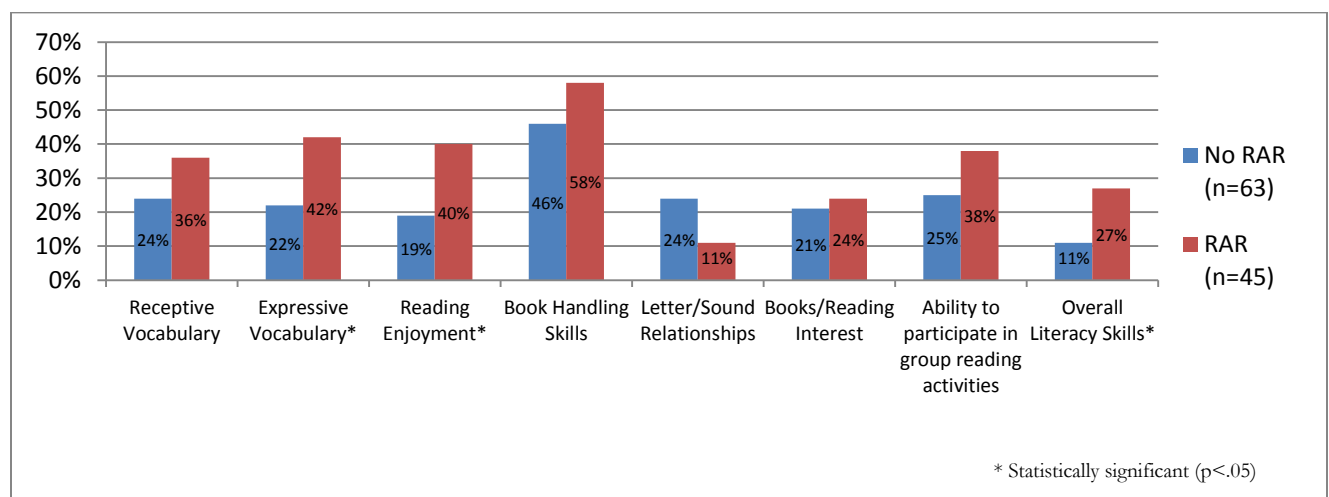
**Data Lesson:** Even without knowing the direction of correlation, devote attention to building general excitement about the Raising A Reader intervention.

## Outcomes Sustainability

We are confident that the combination of success within partner sites as well as in the family context will lead to immediate child outcomes, but how lasting are these effects? Multiple years of research in Chelsea indicate that they are sustained at least until Kindergarten entry. Kindergarten teachers at the John Silber Early Learning Center assessed their incoming students and rated them in a number of pre-literacy skills without knowing individuals' experience with Raising A Reader MA. Matching patterns from 2010-11, this year's data showed positive trends for children who had received Raising A Reader in nearly all the areas surveyed (see figure 16). Three of these areas also yielded statistically significant results ( $p < .05$ ): Expressive Vocabulary, Reading Enjoyment, and Overall Literacy Skills.

Kindergarten readiness matters. When children enter Kindergarten with the necessary skills to learn to read and write, they are more likely to be proficient in literacy in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (the first standardized checkpoint), which in turn leads to success in the later grades and ultimately to high school graduation. When children start behind, it is more likely that they will never catch up. This element of research is our first step in more continuous child outcomes studies.

Figure 12: Children Rated as Above Average



## Priorities Moving Forward

Raising A Reader MA is at a critical turning point in our growth as we approach serving 10,000 children across the Commonwealth. It is vital that we continue to learn from our experience, and strengthen both our activities and our understanding of impact. In these respects we look forward with five key priorities:

- 1) ***Expand access to our parent educational workshops*** As the data above demonstrates, when parents attend our events, they are more likely to increase their Dialogic Reading behaviors. In the coming program year, we will offer even more of these opportunities at times and locations that are convenient to parents. In addition, we have embarked on a yearlong process to make these workshops more culturally relevant, and therefore accessible, for the diverse groups of parents we serve. We are also exploring other settings (ex. one-on-one interactions with parent leaders) where parents can receive information.
- 2) ***Nurture parents as leaders among their peers*** Parents are more likely to attend multiple workshops when a Parent Ambassador is affiliated. After setting the groundwork in the 2011-2012 program year, we are now strengthening our Parent Ambassador program in all communities. We expect to systematize this component of our programming as well as replicate the strong work done in Chelsea in our other communities. Our attention this year will culminate in our first annual Statewide Raising A Reader MA Parent Leadership Conference in the Spring.
- 3) ***Maintain high quality site support*** Implementers are rotating the bags with fidelity, and value the variety of supports they receive from Raising A Reader MA staff. Our new team of Commonwealth Corps Members are primarily charged with ensuring that this component continues in the 2012-2013 program year.
- 4) ***Develop and maintain a sophisticated data measurement system*** In 2011-2012, we revamped our entire database and converted to an entirely customized system on the Salesforce platform. Salesforce will allow us to track our activities as well as outcomes, and make connections about our most effective actions. Reports will be generated in real time so staff can make data-driven decisions daily, leading to more effective and efficient work.
- 5) ***Measure child level outcomes*** Over a decade of national research about Raising A Reader shows us that site implementation and parent behaviors – both through attending workshops and sharing books dialogically at home – are strong indicators that child pre-literacy skills will improve in turn. Now that we have built our own strong foundation of this evidence, we will turn our attention to measuring child level outcomes directly. In the 2012-2013 program year, we look forward to collaborating with partners to collect assessment data directly from participating children to understand our impact even more clearly and make strategic decisions about future growth.