



Annual Program Report 2012-13 Program Year

Early literacy for lifelong achievement

Raising A Reader MA (RAR MA) is an evidence-based early literacy organization that helps families of young children (newborn to age 5) develop, practice, and maintain habits of reading with their young children at home. Our core program model, which both increases access to books and offers families tools and supports for strengthening the culture of reading at home, is driven by 25 years of research that show the most significant factor impacting a child's academic success is being regularly read to by a parent or other primary adult caregiver before starting kindergarten.

Our dual intervention focuses on two key components to give families tools to incorporate this critical activity into their daily routines. First, red book bags filled with high quality children's books rotate through the families' homes. Second, Raising A Reader MA staff offer a series of parent educational workshops, each focusing on a discrete dialogic (interactive) reading strategy.

We deliver this intervention in two manners. Through our Direct Service Model, we work in Massachusetts Gateway Communities¹ where a Raising A Reader MA Regional Program Manager leads our efforts. This full-time staff person: builds and sustains relationships with partners such as public schools, centers of early education and care, home visiting programs, family child care providers, and adult education programs, all of which work directly with families with young children; trains and supports partner staff to rotate the red bags consistently and effectively; and delivers parent educational workshops at both program sites and in the community. With a goal of saturating the community with Raising A Reader, we launch the program when there are at least 500 children enrolled in eligible partners, and grow from there. This is our traditional model and remains the core of our services.

In 2012 we introduced a second delivery technique- our Indirect Service Model. Now, partners that are not in Gateway Communities or are in communities where there is not yet funding to serve at least 500 children can participate in a train-the-trainer orientation to implement the program themselves. After the initial two-day session, each partner participates in a quarterly check-in with Raising A Reader MA's Director of Program and Evaluation; has access to regular webinars and networking events; and receives an annual report of survey results.

In the 2012-13 Program Year, Raising A Reader MA served over 11,000 children via these two program delivery models. The following report explores these participants as well as our work to serve them by looking at a variety of data, including activity tracking, observational ratings, and constituent surveys.

¹ Governor Deval Patrick has designated a Gateway City as having a population greater than 35,000 and less than 250,000; a median household income below the state average; and a rate of educational attainment of a bachelor's degree or above below the state average. There are currently 26 Gateway Cities.

Direct Service Model

In the 2012-13 Program Year, Raising A Reader MA delivered our Direct Service Model in nine communities- Brockton, Chelsea, Everett, Lawrence, Lowell, Malden, Revere, and Springfield- to over 9,000 children ages birth-kindergarten (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Numbers by Community

Community	Number of Children	Number of Partner Programs
Boston	360	2
Brockton	1482	10
Chelsea/Revere	2751*	48**
Lawrence	1812	39**
Lowell	736	24**
Springfield	530	10
Tri-City (Malden and Everett)	1670	35**
Total	9341	165

* Include all Kindergarten students in Chelsea and Revere, funded by Raising A Reader National through the Innovative Approaches to Literacy grant.

**Includes Family Child Care Providers

Direct Service Model: Partner Staff

RAR MA Regional Program Managers provide annual training for all partners, such as teachers and home visitors (known in Raising A Reader MA as implementers), who will be managing the red bag rotations with their children and families. These meetings are a critical activity that set the stage for a successful year by giving new implementers the necessary information to rotate the bags and communicate with parents, and to learn about returning implementers' successes and challenges. In the 2012-13 year, we led 111 of these staff trainings for 835 staff.

In order to provide partner staff with ongoing support, we visit them over the course of the year to check their progress. These visits serve as an opportunity for us to assess the fidelity to our program model across sites as well as to provide coaching and technical assistance to implementers. Efficient bag rotations form a strong base for implementation fidelity and the implementers' engagement with the program and with families are other key indicators of success. With this in mind, at these visits we aim to answer three core questions:

- 1) What system does the implementer use to rotate the bags?
- 2) How engaged is the implementer with Raising A Reader?
- 3) What kind of communication does the implementer have about Raising A Reader with parents?

Based on our observations, our answers lead to a site rating at each visit. In the 2012-13 year we performed 660 site visits for 708 staff (some visits involved multiple staff). 92% were rated as implementing the bag rotation program with fidelity.



Annual Program Report 2012-13 Program Year

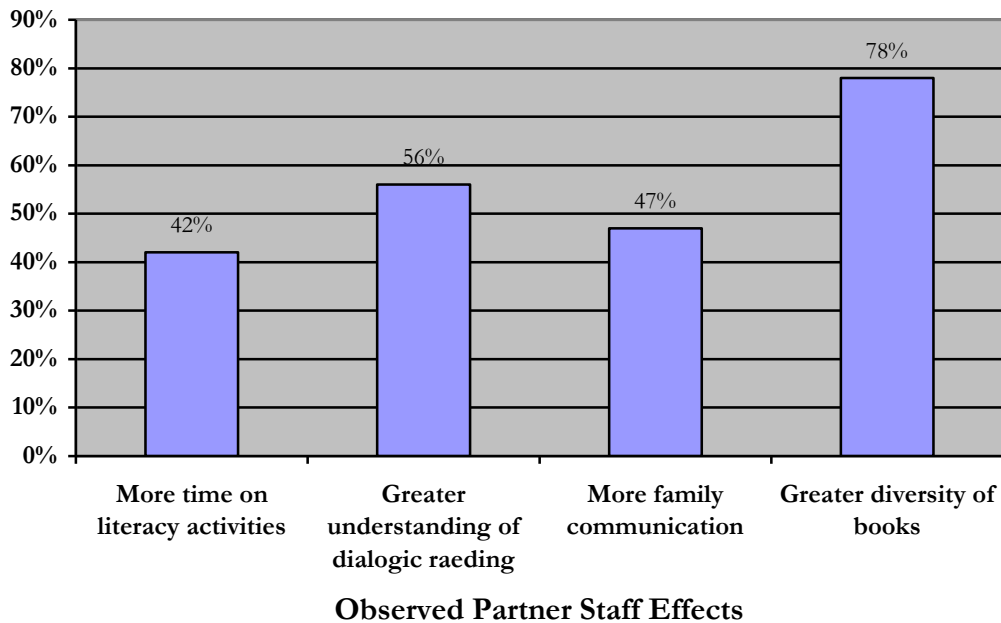
Early literacy for lifelong achievement

Each spring Implementers and partner administrators complete a survey that includes questions about the value of Raising A Reader activities. When asked to rate the staff trainings, 83% of directors (such as

principals and center directors) and 40% of implementers felt that these sessions were pretty good or excellent and 86% of directors and 46% of implementers felt that support from Raising A Reader MA in general was pretty good or excellent.

Implementers rated the value of some activities more highly than others. They ranked parent workshops and events as well as storytimes in their classrooms the highest, followed by bag rotation support, professional development, and support working with families. Their comments, overall, were very positive, often recognizing the importance of parents reading with their children and giving families more access to books. Many implementers indicated in their comments that any challenges they had stemmed from “the community” or from parents who did not consistently return the bags or did not want to participate. These survey results point to some implementers’ mixed feelings about the program. Related to this, directors felt that Raising A Reader MA had important impacts on their staff (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Director Report of Effects on Program Staff



These results bring to light some of the complications of the Raising A Reader MA model. Implementers, while recognizing the importance of family engagement in early literacy, also bear a great deal of responsibility for managing the program. It may be that more activities geared specifically toward them, such as professional development trainings and site visits, feel burdensome even as they struggle with communicating with families

about the bags and dialogic reading. Directors may have a broader view and identify these as areas of growth for their staff.

Direct Service Model: Parent Engagement

Raising A Reader MA implements a multi-session parent workshop curriculum based on research from the University of Texas. Each session focuses on a discreet dialogic reading strategy (such as asking good questions or expanding on a child's answer) with the goal of giving parents and other caregivers key skills for interactive book sharing. 190 workshops were offered over the course of the year; 29% of them had an attendance rate of 25% or more. Midway through the year we began tracking whether children were present because we thought this might have an effect on parent attendance. However, it did not. One third of those workshops with at least 25% attendance fell into each category- children present the entire time, children present part of the time, and children not present. We aim to give all parents the opportunity to attend 5 sessions; 18 partners offered this full course and 40 offered more than one workshop.

Overall, 1002 children had at least one parent attend at least one workshop, a 16% attendance rate for targeted parents. 16% of those parents who attended one session returned for at least one more. When we consider the parents who also received direct guidance from a home visitor or playgroup facilitator, we see that 32% of all children had a parent who received some sort of instruction on dialogic reading.

At many workshops, parents completed a short survey regarding their experience in the session. (n=419)

- 93% said the workshop was definitely easy to understand
- 91% definitely learned a new strategy
- 81% said the materials were definitely useful
- 87% felt their language and culture were definitely respected
- 92% said they would definitely try the new strategy
- 77% said they would definitely attend the next workshop, citing wanting more information as the primary reason for return
- 95% definitely enjoyed the workshop, with 79% reporting they enjoyed learning a new strategy, more than any other reason

While common practice tends to look to childcare, food, and other incentives to increase parent attendance, these results point to parents' desire for more education for themselves. This echoes Raising A Reader MA's core belief that all parents want the best for their children. With this in mind, one priority for the 2012-13 year was to refine our strategy to engage parents beyond the parent workshops. A part-time staff person conducted parent focus groups, prepared a literature review, and proposed a structure for parent leadership that includes multiple opportunities to volunteer for Raising A Reader MA. This plan is being executed in the 2013-14 year (details follow below).



Direct Service Model: Dialogic Reading Behaviors

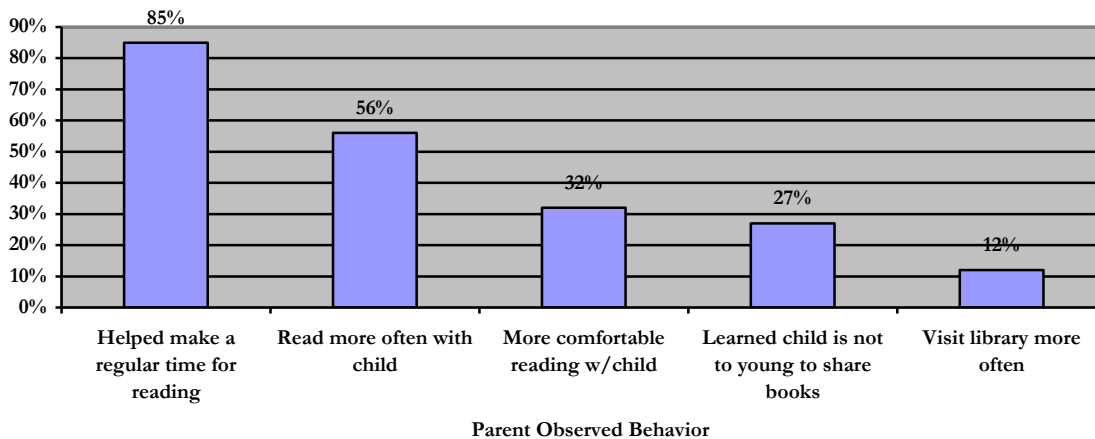
Ideally, the combination of access to books and to education about dialogic reading strategies combine to impact families' literacy behaviors. To learn more, our parent behavioral survey focuses on both the frequency and quality of these shared reading interactions.²

Overall, from partners that returned both pre- and post-surveys, 1294 parents responded to the pre-survey and 813 to the post. However, only 156 of these are matched pairs where we were able to link the pre- and post-survey to the same child (see below for details on an action plan to improve this rate).

Without looking at the matched pairs, we can make some basic observations about reading behaviors. 47% reported sharing books three or more times per week before Raising A Reader compared to 56% after, a 19% increase. It is difficult to determine whether these results are representative of the entire group since there are few matched pairs, but it is encouraging to see that on the pre-survey, those families who reported receiving the red book bags in the past reported already sharing books three or more times a week at a higher frequency than those who had not: 56% compared to 43%.

Some questions from the post-surveys also give us important information about programming. On the post-survey, 69% of respondents who reported attending a parent workshop reported sharing books three or more times a week compared to 58% who did not attend. In addition, parents were also asked to think about how Raising A Reader had effected their behaviors, showing a strong perceived impact of participation (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Parents perceived impact of Raising A Reader MA



The data from parent surveys becomes much more powerful when we look just at the matched pairs- those individuals who responded to both the pre- and post-surveys. Here, we see a more nuanced view of change in

² These survey results do not include the Chelsea and Revere kindergarten families. Those results will follow in an independently prepared report.

shared reading behaviors. 48% reported sharing books three or more times a week before Raising A Reader compared to 74% after, a 54% increase. These results are even more noteworthy when we look at various demographics (Figures 4-5).

Figure 4: Percent of Families Sharing Book 3+ Times per Week by Income

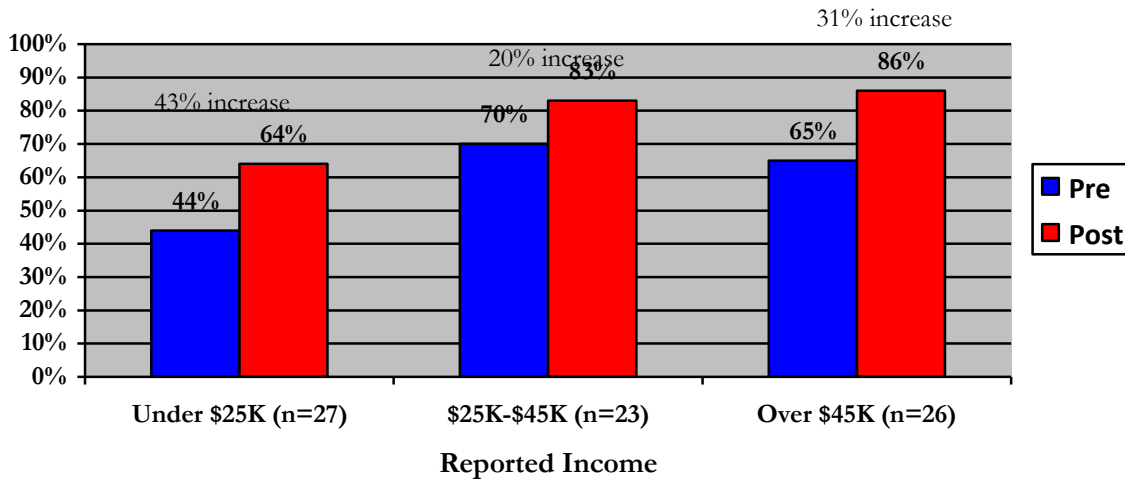
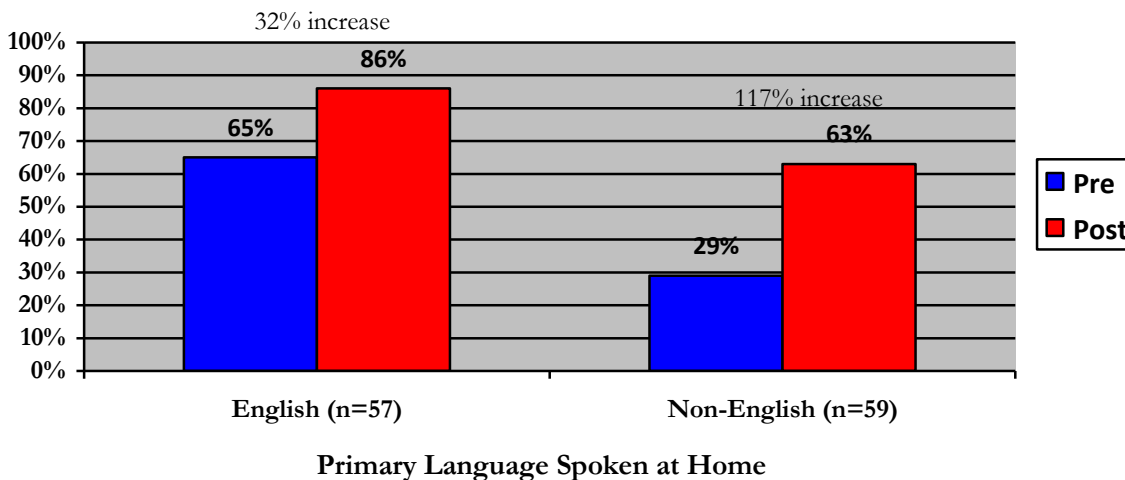


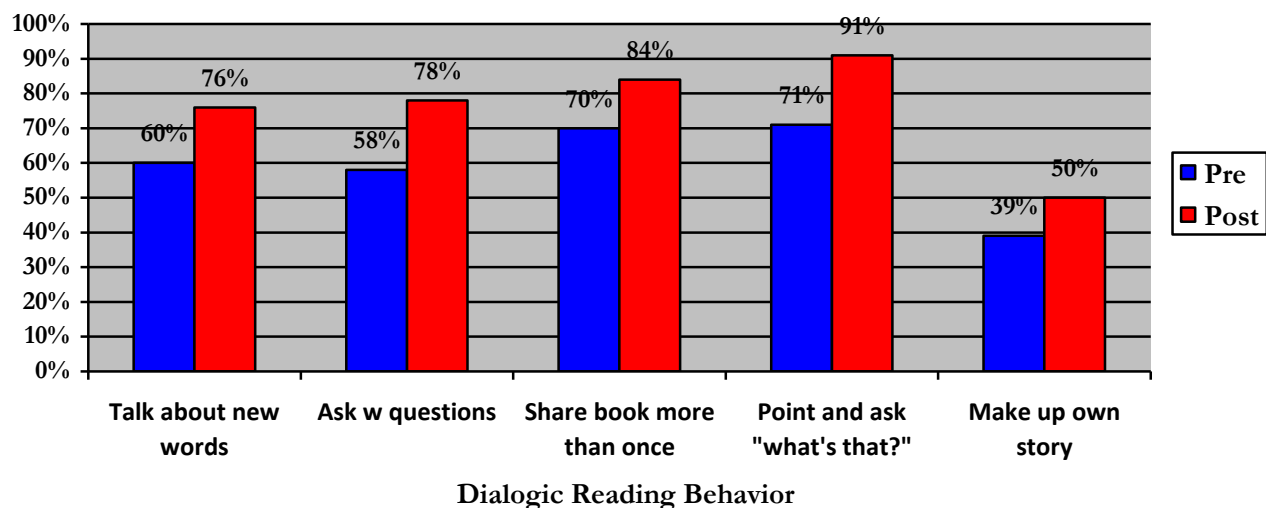
Figure 5: Percent of Families Sharing Book 3+ Times per Week by Language



As we've seen in our own program evaluation in the past as well as similar research done elsewhere, Raising A Reader has the greatest impact on families with certain factors that put their children, statistically, at academic risk. For example, the largest non-English language group surveyed was Spanish; the percent of those respondents sharing books three or more times a week doubled (from 36% to 73%) and the percent sharing books five or more times a week more than tripled (from 6% to 27%). Growth for English speakers was more moderate; sharing books three or more times per week increased from 65% to 86% and five or more times per week stayed steady at 35%. This confirms our commitment to growing among the Massachusetts Gateway Communities, where there are high numbers of English learners.

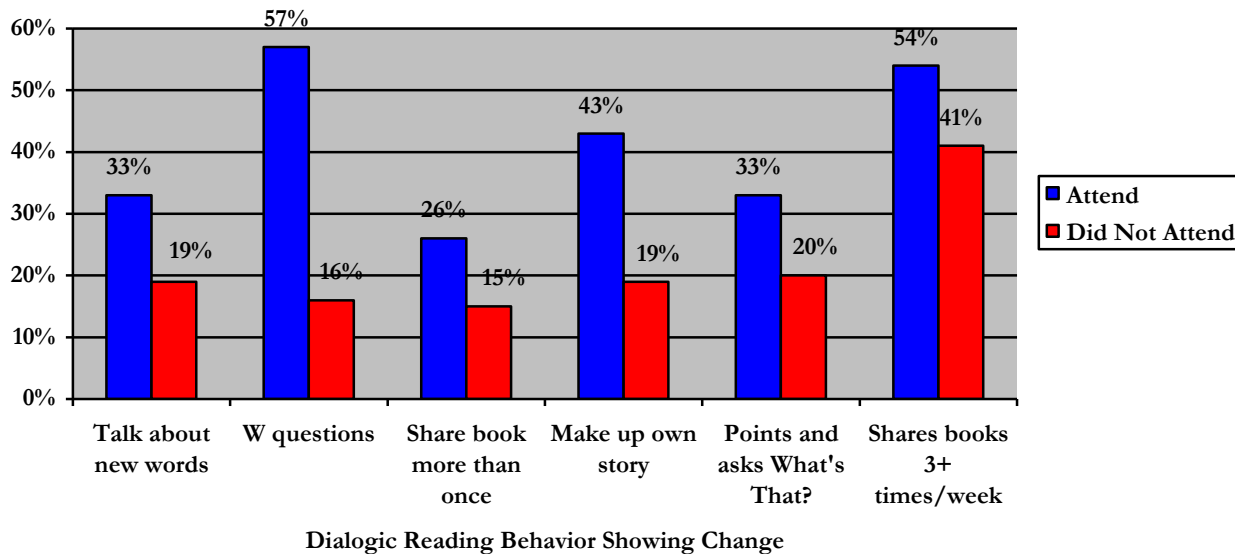
On the pre-survey, 64% of matched respondents reported regularly using three or more dialogic reading behaviors, such as asking open ended questions, talking about new words, and making up their own stories. 82% reported these behaviors on the post-survey. A closer look shows which behaviors in particular offer the most room for improvement. As Figure 6 shows, the frequency of pointing to pictures in the book and asking, “What’s that?” increased by the most percentage points. Asking “W” questions that start with “who,” “what,” “when,” and “where,” had a lower baseline and increased by the 35%, the most significant growth.

Figure 6: Change in Parent Dialogic Reading Behaviors



Perhaps more importantly both frequency and quality of shared reading were both much more likely to increase when a parent reported attending a Raising A Reader MA workshop (Figure 7). In nearly every area, all families reported the same average frequency of behaviors on the pre-survey. The only case where the baseline varied by more than three percentage points was reports of sharing a book more than once. 67% of those who did attend the workshop regularly shared a book more than once before Raising A Reader compared to 75% of those who did not; reports did evened out by the post-survey. Of particular note, parents’ tendency to ask “W” questions seems to be most affected by workshop attendance. Given that open-ended questions are at the crux of all Raising A Reader sessions, this points to effective training.

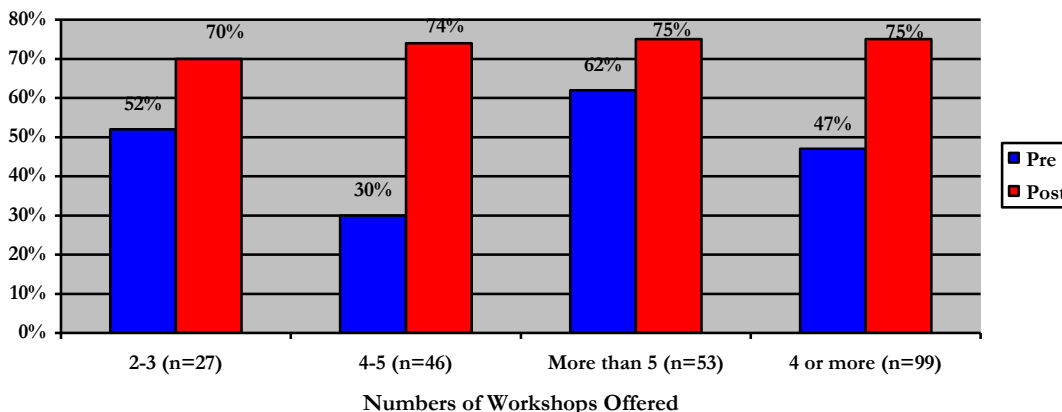
Figure 7: Percentage of Behavior Change by Workshop Attendance



Another indication of the workshops’ effectiveness is in the comments. 266 respondents included comments, and eleven of these were complaints about books in languages that the writer did not speak, often specifically stating, “we could only talk about the pictures and not read the book.” None of these respondents reported attending a workshop. This interactive storytelling - in essence, reading the pictures - is at the heart of dialogic reading. It is likely that attendees learned the benefits of talking about the pictures, regardless of the language, and came to see this as a positive, rather than negative, experience.

Preliminary results point to offering more workshops in order to improve outcomes; this is an area that warrants more exploration. Respondents whose program offered four to five workshops increased their reading frequency much more than those whose program offered two to three. Offering more than five did not show more impact, perhaps because these were likely repeated topics rather than additional ones. Offering four or more showed increased impact, perhaps pointing to four as the “tipping point” (Figure 8).

Figure 9: Percent of families sharing books 3+ times/week according to number of workshops offered



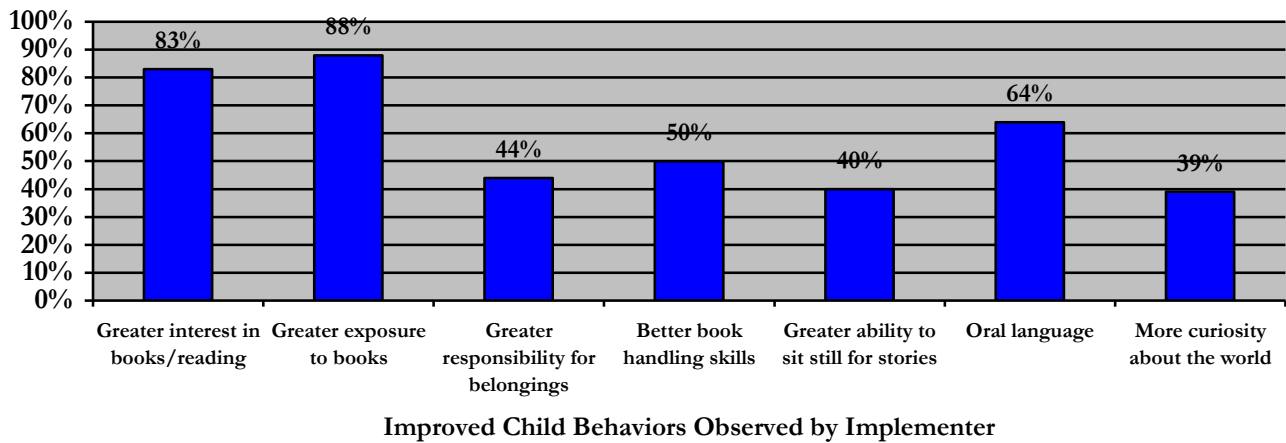


Annual Program Report 2012-13 Program Year

Early literacy for lifelong achievement

Staff surveys about parent behaviors support the parents' own reports, as well. 81% of implementers thought that Raising A Reader had at least some effect on how and how often parents shared books with their children. They also reported perceived effects of the program on the children themselves (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Implementer Reports of RAR MA Effect on Children's Pre-literacy Skills



Direct Service Model: Constituent Satisfaction

In addition to changing their behaviors, all constituents expressed satisfaction with the program. 73% of implementers, 85% of directors, and 88% of parents enjoyed participation “a good amount” or “a lot.” 87% of parents reported that their child got either “a good amount” or “a lot” excited about the red bags. These results are reflected in respondents' comments:

My kids love having new books. Since I can't afford to buy them all the time, this helps a lot.
-Lowell Parent

Since I started with [the] RAR red bag program, my child likes reading more and has become more curious.
-Brockton Parent

I like very much sharing reading new stories with my son. He asks me every week to have a new book. Although he doesn't know how to read, he does something big like looking at the drawings in the book, making up his own story or trying to remember a story. RAR is an excellent project.
-Brockton Parent

I have learned that even though I can't really understand reading but I showed my child the colors and pictures to my child and that way we would have an understanding of what was happening in the story.

- Chelsea Parent

My son's face lights up when he gets a red bag. And if he doesn't get one that week, he has asked me about it. He looks forward to the red bags and is more excited about reading in bed each night. I think it's a wonderful program. I hope it continues.

-Lowell Parent

I think its a wonderful reading program. I wish my children, who graduated from the Head Start program, had Raising A Reader red bags. The library comes home every week, how could it get any easier?

-Brockton Implementer

The students love it, my staff loves the program and I love the book bags and parent workshops. RAR is a quality program facilitated by quality professionals!

-Lowell Director

Students and families love it! Children are always so excited to go home w/ the red bags. Parents who attend, love the trainings.

-Chelsea Director

After having done this program for 3+ years with three of my teens (who had their babies when they were either in 9th or 10th grade). I can absolutely see that they have learned the importance of reading to their young children [who] have developed a LOVE of books, which is so nice to see!! This would not have happened, (I do not believe) without this program.

-Brockton Director

Indirect Service Model

The 2012-13 Program Year brought a large expansion to our Indirect Service partners who operate under the train-the-trainer model. The majority of these new partners focused on delivering Raising A Reader via parent-child playgroups and all of them received at least some funding through the local Coordinated Family and Community Engagement councils, groups that are charged with serving families with children ages 0-5 who are not enrolled in an early education program. Many of these councils also received funding via Race to the Top; Raising A Reader MA was named as one of five approved early literacy, parent engagement programs to which funding could be devoted. Children in child care centers, home visiting programs, playgroups, and public schools in the city of Somerville, formerly a Direct Service Community, also were served under this model.³ In total, 1691 children received Raising A Reader via the Indirect Service Model (Figure 10).

³ Somerville is no longer considered a Gateway Community and therefore we made the decision to transition their service. A part time staff person continued to provide support to partners in 2012-13 in a more limited way.



Annual Program Report 2012-13 Program Year

Early literacy for lifelong achievement

Figure 10: Children Served via Indirect Service Model

Indirect Service Model Provider	Number of Children Served
Newton Community Service Center (Newton, Waltham, Arlington)	76
West Springfield Coordinated Family and Community Engagement	20
Plymouth Family Network	144
South County Community Partnership (Oxford, Southbridge)	66
Cape Cod Children’s Place (Outer Cape)	32
Worcester Coordinated Family and Community Engagement	52
Lynn Coordinated Family and Community Engagement	33
Childcare of the Berkshires (North Adams, Adams)	30
Somerville (various agencies)	1,238

Staff from each Indirect Service partner attended a two day orientation to learn how to implement Raising A Reader’s book bag rotation program and parent education workshop, as well as received ongoing support regarding how to best incorporate these key components into their work. Because of the overwhelming playgroup nature of implementation, nearly all families did receive in person education about shared reading. This often may not have looked like a typical workshop, but rather integrated lessons into parent-child interactive activities.

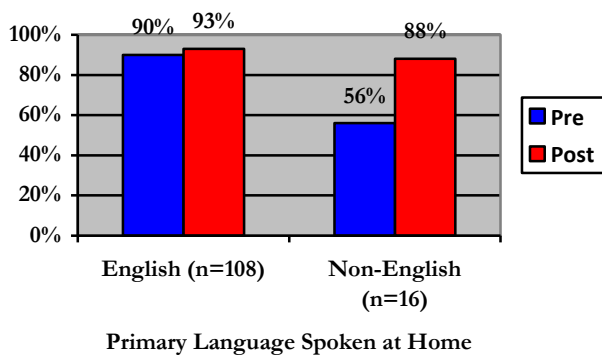
In order to determine whether this model is effective, we collected the parent behavioral survey from all programs (excluding Somerville). 230 pre-surveys and 160 post-surveys were collected for the program year. Because in playgroups there are more direct connections between Raising A Reader participants and implementers, a much higher proportion of surveys- 130 of the total- were matched. Unfortunately, one program with a large number of respondents used a prior version of the survey, limiting this discussion to shared reading frequency and not dialogic reading behaviors. Individual community reports will allow for more detailed analysis of these questions.

Of all respondents, 81% reported sharing books three or more times a week (66% five or more times) before Raising A Reader. This increased to 93% (84% five or more times) a 15% increase.

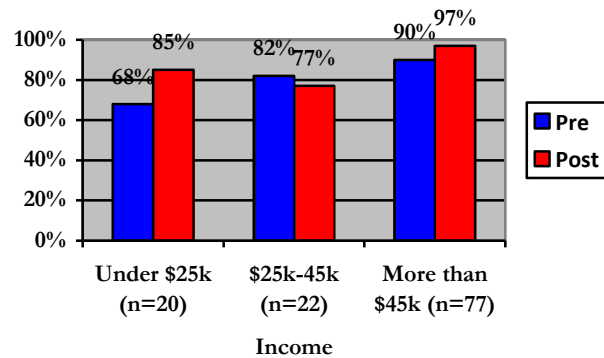
As reported earlier, looking just at the matched pairs allows for more meaningful findings. Here, again a large percent were already reading three or more times a week before Raising A Reader, 85%, compared to 92% after. Broken down by income and language, we see similar patterns as in Direct Service communities (Figures 11 and 12). It is difficult to explain the decrease in the middle income group; some respondents did not answer the post-survey question, and it is also a smaller n so a small number of answers would have a

larger effect on the group. Beyond that discrepancy, we see that the lower income and non-English speaking respondents' indicate behavior change more in line with our Direct Service Communities.

**Figure 11: Indirect Service Model
Percent of Families Sharing Books 3+
Times/Week by Language**



**Figure 12: Indirect Service Model
Percent of Families Sharing Books 3+
Times/Week by Income**



Families in Indirect Service programs indicated very positive experiences with Raising A Reader.

- 47% are more comfortable reading with their child
- 44% learned their child is not too young for shared reading
- 38% visit the library more often
- 67% enjoyed having more books
- 60% believe they read more often with their child
- 92% felt their child was either “a good amount” or “a lot” excited about the bags
- 98% enjoyed participating “a good amount” or “a lot”

They also learned a great deal through their participation; 74% learned either “a good amount” or “a lot” about how to share books with their child and 69% about why to share books.

Consistent with parents in other communities, many expressed positive feedback:

My youngest son often would lose interest reading books with me. Now he brings books from the shelf every day to read with him! My older son loved the bag every week!
-Plymouth Parent

RAR really was a wonderful opportunity for us to read more and different books. It has motivated me to go to the library to find more books by the authors or series. My kids want to look for specific book authors or titles! We explored more parts of the books. For example, we look for dedications about the author, and other books by the author.
- Newton Parent



Annual Program Report 2012-13 Program Year

Early literacy for lifelong achievement

It is interesting to note that many of these parents indicated in their comments that they enjoyed the program, but already had habits of reading in the home. While they enjoyed the books and groups, they felt less impact. This trend was much less common in the Direct Service surveys.

Conclusions

As a data driven organization, Raising A Reader MA is committed to using these results to shape our practices. Four priorities come time light.

1. **Parent Engagement:** Our results indicate that participating in Raising A Reader MA leads to increase dialogic reading behaviors between parent and child. Growth is even more likely when families attend workshops, and for those who have lower incomes and/or have a primary language other than English. Our challenge remains how to get more of the families in these key groups to attend workshops. As described above, 2012-13 was a planning year to understand better how we might engage families of all different backgrounds. Now, in all of our Direct Service Model communities, we are incorporating various parent leadership opportunities, ranging from performing outreach for workshops to actually facilitating themselves. We expect that parents will be more likely to attend workshops when they hear from their peers that the information is relevant and useful.
2. **Implementer Support:** It is important to note that implementers' perceptions of program participation were lower than their directors and parents. This is likely due to two factors: 1) administrators, rather than implementers, make the choice for a program to participate; and 2) implementers take on the greatest responsibility for ensuring the red bags go home regularly and effectively. While they see the value of Raising A Reader, it becomes yet another task. RAR MA Regional Program Managers can take this as a cue to ensure that site visits and trainings are not only engaging and informative, but also give opportunities for implementers to see the immediate benefits of participation. For example, a Regional Program Manager might work with a group of teachers on new strategies for communicating with parents not only about the red bags, but about other activities in the classroom. They can also work closely with directors to help pinpoint what areas of professional development might be most meaningful to include in Raising A Reader orientations and meetings.
3. **Indirect Service Models:** 2012-13 was the first year of major Indirect Service Model expansion. The program has demonstrated its effectiveness, particularly with the demographic groups most similar to those in our Direct Service communities. In the coming year, we will work with these new partners on how they, too, can engage more families who may be receptive to the program. In addition, we will focus on learning more about the playgroup model. Because parent engagement can be so challenging, playgroups present a unique opportunity to provide dialogic reading education to a "captive" audience. The current parent survey has been designed to look more easily at the manners in which parents learn about shared reading so that we can better assess this strategy in all of our program sites.

4. **Metrics Strategy:** Since our inception in 2006 we have employed parent behavioral surveys to assess the impact of our programming. Research shows that when parents share books dialogically with their children, children's own literacy outcomes improve. Two approaches will strengthen our ability to make this link. First, we are focusing on increasing the number of matched surveys we collect by communicating more with partners about respondents. We have added an optional field where parents include their child's name, and we can provide this list and/or child birthdays to our partners in order to focus post-survey collection on this group. This identifying information will be used just to collect surveys and will not be linked to actual answers.

Second, we have worked with Dr. Nonie Lesaux from the Harvard Graduate School of Education to identify a child outcome measure. This year, we will be using the PALS (Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening) subtest on Print and Word Awareness as one measure of children's pre-literacy skills. We hope that we will be able to incorporate this tool into our yearly measurement portfolio, adding a new dimension to the way we measure our program's success.