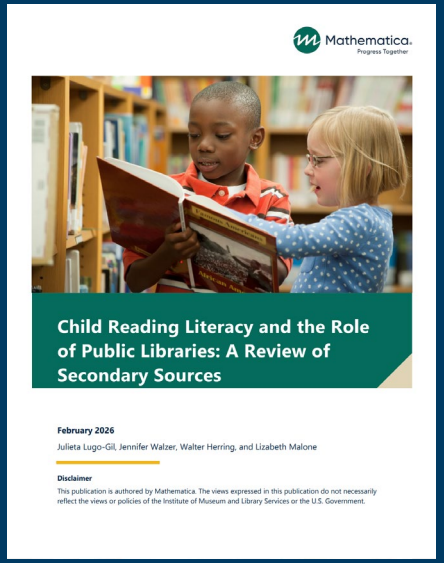
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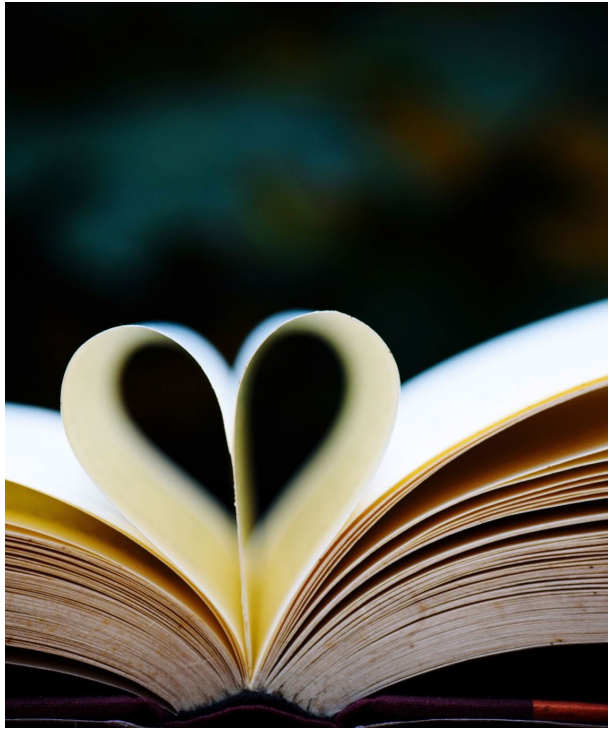


Public Libraries and Children's Reading: Findings from a Recent Study

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2026

Agenda



- What did we study, why, and how?
- What is reading engagement?
- How do libraries foster engagement?
- How can libraries foster engagement in their communities?

What did we study, and why?

We studied:

- Reading engagement and outcomes
- Library practices and investments
- How children and caregivers engage with the library
- Digital change and community context
- Libraries' role and future research needed

You can check out the paper by visiting the study page on IMLS's website.

The study goals were:

- **Improve understanding of:**
  - The role and contributions of public libraries to reading engagement.
  - The system of support for children's engagement in reading.
- **Help focus and improve IMLS grant-making by:**
  - Identifying activities that support professional development, investments, and partnerships around children's reading engagement.

How did we conduct the study?



Reviewed existing studies



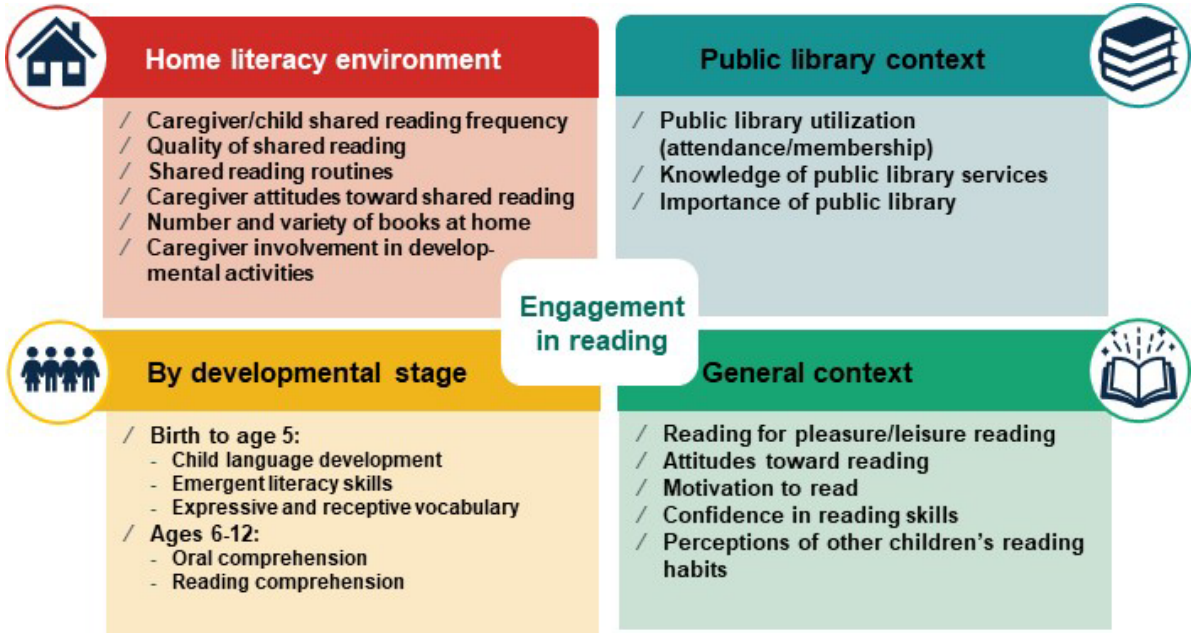
Reviewed IMLS documents and conducted IMLS staff interviews



Analyzed IMLS grant data

What is reading engagement?

Reading engagement is multidimensional



Measuring reading engagement

Engagement is not just reading ability

It includes:

- Motivation, enjoyment, habits
- Home environment
- Caregiver interaction

Libraries often measure participation instead of engagement



"We are encouraged to have a lot of conversations with participants to talk about their personal experience with the program…**or anything they've seen that has been successful with their child** – we had a lot of conversations with storytime parents and caregivers that have seen a lot of growth with their children."

-Youth services librarian



Considerations

- What dimensions of reading engagement does your library focus on? For example, motivation, enjoyment, habits, caregiver interactions?
- What signals—besides attendance—tell you that a program is working? Do you measure any of these systematically (with data)?

How do libraries foster engagement?

Libraries foster engagement through:



Zooming in on caregiver support

- **Libraries support caregivers on:**
  - Choosing appropriate reading material for children
  - Understanding what to expect about their children's literacy development
  - Participating in programming that helps children develop literacy skills
  - Teaching and modeling reading activities that can be used at home
- **Caregivers may face several obstacles to accessing public library services, such as time constraints and competing needs like food or childcare**



Spotlight on Storytime

Storytime is an important **foundation for children's feelings about books**, their attitudes towards reading, their idea of themselves as a reader, their connection to a community of readers...it is this **awesome intersection of what our community wants and what we can provide**.
-Library leader

Storytime isn't just about the baby or toddler**, it's for the adult.... Librarians are demonstrating to parents how to read a story and keep a child engaged** and...how to engage with a book, how do you utilize the book as a whole instrument.
-IMLS Staff



Considerations

- Thinking of the programs you offer—what drives reading engagement?
- If resources were not a constraint, what would you offer to support caregivers that you don't offer now?

Reminder: Reading engagement includes children's interest or love of reading, which can include developing early literacy skills, reading for pleasure, and positive attitudes towards books and reading.

How can libraries foster engagement in their communities?

How does a community promote reading engagement?



- Promotes awareness of how literacy develops
- Emphasizes the importance of early reading
- Provides caregivers with the resources they need to support children's engagement in reading
- Views reading as important to lifelong learning
- Understand and addresses barriers to accessing resources

Libraries play three roles in the community

Service provider

Community convener

Resource hub

Considerations

- **Does your library tend to emphasize one of the roles?**
  - Direct services provider = programs and services
  - Community convener = public libraries convene, collaborate with, or provide resources to community organizations
  - Resource hub = libraries house resources like books, multimedia materials, and physical space
- **What role would you like to see your library expand? What specifically would you like to do?**



Thank you!

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