

Children's Literacy Initiative

Problem

Many low-income children enter kindergarten with a significant learning gap compared to wealthier peers. By age three, a child from a low-income family would have heard 30 million fewer words in her home environment than a child from a wealthier family.¹ And research shows that it is difficult to make up that gap over the course of a child's education: 82% of low-income fourth graders fail to read proficiently at grade level, compared to 58% of U.S. fourth graders nationally.² Intervening early to improve literacy skills and literacy instruction in preschool or primary classrooms can help to close the achievement gap in reading.

Solution

Improve children's early literacy and grade-level reading skills through professional development of preschool and early elementary classroom teachers, and provide books and other learning materials that are age and reading stage appropriate.

High Impact Opportunity

Children's Literacy Initiative (CLI) has provided professional development for teachers in literacy instruction since 1988. To date, CLI has worked with teachers in nine states plus the District of Columbia. In 2010, CLI was selected from a highly competitive field of applicant organizations as a federal innovation (i3) grant recipient; the five-year grant includes an evaluation of program results in four cities (Newark, NJ; Chicago, IL; Philadelphia, PA; and Camden, NJ). As of 2013, CLI was working in 127 schools.

How it Works

CLI partners with both traditional and charter schools to train preschool through third grade teachers in effective literacy instructional techniques, and provides coaching to help teachers implement the strategies in their classrooms. Teachers participate in workshops, receive classroom book collections, and then work with a coach one-on-one to incorporate the techniques in their classroom. CLI also trains at least one teacher per grade level more intensively, to ensure each grade

has a teacher-leader who effectively models the approach and can provide immediate support to colleagues. The program also works with school administrators on how to leverage exceptional teachers and facilitate professional collaboration among teachers. CLI offers both a “Foundation” model in which they work with a school for one year, and a “Model School” approach in which they work with the school for a three-year period. In support of their face-to-face professional development, CLI also launched an online professional development platform (CLI Compass) in 2012.



What's the Impact?

Children receiving instruction from a CLI-trained teacher significantly outperform their peers on several measures of literacy skill.

For example, when CLI began its intervention program in White Plains, NY in 2004, only 49% of kindergartners were meeting the district's standardized literacy benchmarks by the end of kindergarten. By the 2007-2008 school year, 86% of kindergarten students met those benchmarks.³

CLI has also been the subject of several rigorous external evaluations assessing the impact of their teacher training:

- In a 1995 study of CLI's Philadelphia Kindergarten Literacy Intervention Project, students with CLI-trained teachers had a 10-point gain over a comparison group of students on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, an early literacy measure that assesses a student's vocabulary and is used commonly as a rough assessment of IQ.⁴

- Year 2 results from an ongoing random control study by the American Institute of Research (AIR) as part of the federal i3 grant found that kindergartners in CLI schools scored higher on standardized early reading tests (an 8 percentile gain) than students whose teachers were not exposed to CLI.⁵
- The same Year 2 AIR study found (based on researcher observation) that CLI had a large positive impact on the quality of teachers' literacy instruction in both kindergarten and first grade classrooms.

The expectation is that these early gains will carry over into better student mastery of reading by third grade, and there is some recent evidence that this is the case. For example, CLI began working with 10 Newark Public Schools in the 2010-11 school year as part of the i3 grant project. Over the past three years, New Jersey State test scores for third graders in these 10 schools have improved by nearly nine percentage points, which represents an important gain for low-income children most at risk to fail.⁶

Additional Social Impact

Improved literacy instruction and collaboration among teachers at partner schools: In a mid-year (2013-14) survey of teachers and administrators in the 127 schools receiving CLI services:⁷

- 96.4% of responding teachers said that CLI had helped them feel better prepared to implement effective literacy practices.
- 97.2% of responding teachers said that CLI has helped to improve their literacy instructional practice.
- 72.7% of responding teachers reported an increase in grade level collaboration with peers that they attributed to CLI.
- 87.3% of responding teachers said that CLI was helping prepare them to address the new Common Core standards for reading

What Does it Cost to Implement?

As of 2013, CLI's one-year Foundation program had a per-school cost of \$45,000, with a cost per teacher of \$3,214 and a cost per student of \$150. The three-year Model School program had a cost of \$450,000 per school, \$32,142 per teacher, and \$900 per student.⁸ CLI is funded through a combination of contracts with school districts and individual schools, as well as by philanthropic donations.

Cost per Impact

Based on current cost structure and impact results from studies of the three-year model, we estimate that the program costs about \$500 per incremental kindergartner meeting literacy benchmarks.

For more information on the Center's approach to calculating cost per impact, click [here](#).

Take Action

Use this [online mapping tool](#) to locate CLI programs and their local implementing partners. Click [here](#) for suggestions of other programs that prepare kids to be strong readers.

SNAPSHOT

CORE PRACTICE: Professional development and coaching in literacy instruction for teachers of preschool through 3rd grade.

TARGETED BENEFICIARIES: Teachers and students in preschool through third grade.

IMPACT ACHIEVED: Of every 100 students taught by teachers who participate in the program, the practice enables an additional 37 students to meet literacy benchmarks.

COST/IMPACT OR COST-BENEFIT: About \$500 per additional student meeting literacy benchmarks.

- ¹ Rosenberg, T. The Power of Talking to Your Baby. The New York Times, April 10, 2013. Retrieved from: <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/10/the-power-of-talking-to-your-baby/>
- ² Fiester, L. (2013). Early Warning Confirmed: A research update on grade level reading. Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore. Data from 2011 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).
- ³ CLI grant proposal for i(3) program. Accessed February 20th, 2014 at: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/innovation/2010/narratives/u396b100030.pdf>
- ⁴ Barnett, W.S., & Lamy, C.E. (n.d.). Estimated impacts of number of years of preschool attendance on vocabulary, literacy and math skills at kindergarten entry. NIEER Working Paper. Retrieved Feb. 8, 2014, from <http://nieer.org/resources/research/EstimatedImpacts.pdf>
- ⁵ American Institutes for Research (2014) I3 Children's Literacy Initiative Model Classroom Program Impact Evaluation Year 2 Results. Unpublished.
- ⁶ Direct communication with Jen Weikert, CLI, February 20th, 2014
- ⁷ Direct communication with Jen Weikert, CLI, February 20th, 2014
- ⁸ Assuming 12 teachers and 2 administrators per school and 25 children per classroom. Direct communication with Kelly Hunter, CLI, 8/20/13



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