

Fathers Reading Every Day

<http://fcs.tamu.edu/families/parenting/fathering/fred/index.php>

Relevance

- Learning to read and write are skills that are essential to a child's success in school and later life.
- According to many experts, the single most important activity that parents can do to help their children acquire essential literacy skills is to read aloud to them on a frequent basis.
- Reading aloud to children is a simple, yet powerful, activity that has been shown to improve children's literacy development across a variety of domains, including vocabulary growth, print awareness, enjoyment of reading, and writing abilities.
- Children who are read to at least three times a week by a family member are almost twice as likely to score in the top 25 percent on tests of reading ability than children who are read to less frequently.
- Researchers have repeatedly shown that children who read well in the early grades are far more successful in later years; those who fall behind often stay behind when it comes to academic achievement.
- Children who are reading proficiently at an early age are more likely to perform better in school, and as a result, graduate from high school and/or pursue a post-secondary education.
- Only 32 percent of the nation's 4th graders perform at or above the proficient achievement level. In Texas, the percentage of 4th graders reading at the proficient level was 21 percent, well below the national average.
- According to recent statistics, 60 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds have a family member who reads to them daily.
- In a random survey conducted with 894 men and women across the nation, researchers discovered that 40.2 percent of fathers never read to their children. Statistics like these are unfortunate given what we now know about the importance of father involvement in the lives of children.
- It is well established that fathers play a critical role in their children's cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and moral development. Fathers who are consistently and positively involved in the daily routines of their children are more likely to raise children who are self-confident, get along well with their peers, and perform better academically than children who grow up without a positive father presence in their lives.
- Fathers who find time to read with their children are taking advantage of one of the best opportunities to care for, connect with, and contribute to their children's future.



Response

Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) is a family literacy program designed by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service to increase parental involvement in children's early literacy development, with a specific focus on fathers. During the FRED program, fathers and father-figures of children enrolled in Head Start, Even Start, elementary schools, and child care centers are presented with research-based information to help them begin daily reading activities with their children. The program is structured as follows:

- Fathers read to their children a minimum of 15 minutes a day for the first two weeks and

a minimum of 30 minutes a day for the last two weeks.

- Fathers receive a participant packet that contains an introduction to the program, reading log, tips for reading aloud to their children, and recommended book lists.
- Over the course of four weeks, fathers document the amount of time spent reading to their children and the number of books read.
- At the conclusion of FRED, fathers total up the number of books and the amount of time spent reading to their children.
- Fathers and their children are then invited to attend a party to celebrate their participation in FRED. At that time, they turn in their reading logs and complete an exit survey.

FRED programs are held at public libraries, school libraries, Head Start centers, Early Head Start centers, Even Start centers, elementary schools, churches, child care centers, and Extension centers. Collaborating with a public library encourages fathers to sign up for a library card, familiarizes them with the library, and provides fathers and children access to books without having to buy them. In addition, for those who prefer to read in non-English languages, many libraries have a selection of children's books in other languages.

Results

Since its inception in 2002, over 7,000 fathers and children in more than 77 Texas counties have participated in FRED. Recent figures from a 2008 evaluation study involving more than 770 FRED participants show:

- Fathers averaged 10 hours of reading time with their children and read over 42 books together.
- Statistically significant differences from pre to post were noted in a number of areas, including the amount of time fathers spent reading to their children, number of books read during a typical week, level of involvement in their children's education, amount and quality of time spent with their children, and level of satisfaction with the father-child relationship.

- The percentage of fathers reading to their children three or more times per week increased from 53 percent (pre-test) to 80 percent (post-test).
- Additionally, 57 percent of participating fathers reported an increase in the quality of time spent with their children; 59 percent reported an increase in their involvement in their children's education; 53 percent reported an improvement in their child's vocabulary; and 56 percent reported an improved father-child relationship.

Fathers were asked to share their experiences with the program, including any benefits that they or their children derived from participating in FRED. The following quotes are illustrative of the responses given by fathers:

- "[FRED] helped me realize how much me being here and reading to my son will mean to his future."
- "[The FRED program] increased the time I spent with my daughter and improved her vocabulary and reading."
- "[FRED] helped me realize how much more involved I need to be with my son's education."
- "Although we spend a lot of time together, it sometimes revolves around my schedule. 'FRED' time was all for them. No matter what was going on at 8:00 p.m., it was reading time. It brought us closer together because I would always have to stop what I was doing just for them."
- "[Reading together] challenged me to be more involved. It provided us with time alone, during which we grew closer together through reading a variety of stories/books that allowed us both to travel, explore, and go on adventures that expanded my child's vocabulary, imagination, and horizons."

In 2009, the FRED program received a Best Practices Award from the Texas Association of Parent Educators (TAPE).

References for this brief are available upon request.

Leadership provided by Dr. Stephen Green, Child Development Specialist—Family Development and Resource Management (2009). For more information: s-green@tamu.edu or 979.845.6468.