



Encouraging Early Literacy in Alaska: An Evaluation of the Imagination Library Program

The Imagination Library program provides age-appropriate books by mail each month to children from birth to age 5 in 112 different Alaska communities. The program is supported statewide by Best Beginnings, an Anchorage-based public-private partnership. Best Beginnings provides training and financial assistance to local organizations that manage the program in their own communities. Best Beginnings also administers Anchorage Imagination Library, the largest program in the state. The Dollywood Foundation in Tennessee selects and sends books directly to the homes of enrolled children.

The program has three main goals: supporting improvements in children's home literacy environments, strengthening parent-child bonds, and increasing academic outcomes through early literacy and family engagement efforts. Program funding comes from state, local, and private sources, and individuals.

Imagination Library communities in 2018



This brief summarizes results from a recent evaluation of Imagination Library. The evaluation examined program data from 2010 to 2019 and estimated the relationship of program participation to child outcomes in the early elementary grades.

Participation in Imagination Library nearly doubled from 2010 to 2018

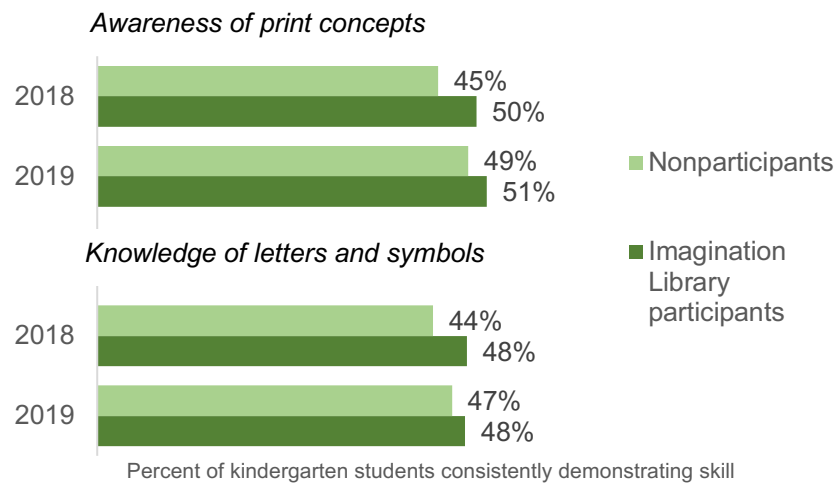
From 2010 to 2018, the number of children served increased by 67 percent and the number of books sent increased by 87 percent. In 2018, 24,586 children across the state received 204,828 books.

Participation in Imagination Library is associated with increased kindergarten readiness

Children who participated in Imagination Library had higher rates of kindergarten readiness than similar children who did not participate. Readiness is defined as consistently demonstrating the skills or behaviors for 11 of 13 Alaska Developmental Profile kindergarten entry assessment indicators. This finding was consistent across student groups, including English language learner students, Alaska Native students, and economically disadvantaged students. For example, among incoming kindergarten students in 2016 across the state, 30 percent of Imagination Library participants were kindergarten ready compared to 25 percent of similar students who did not participate.

Participation in Imagination Library is associated with higher literacy skills

Imagination Library participants had higher rates of demonstrating literacy skills on the Alaska Developmental Profile, particularly in awareness of print concepts and knowledge of letters and symbols. For example, among entering kindergarteners in 2018, 48 percent of Imagination Library participants consistently demonstrated knowledge of letters and symbols compared to 44 percent of similar nonparticipants.



Participation in Imagination Library is associated with higher reading and math achievement in grade 3

Imagination Library participation was associated with higher levels of grade 3 reading achievement and higher levels of grade 3 math achievement in certain years. This association was stronger for children who had participated for a longer amount of time in Imagination Library.

Promising evaluation results demonstrate a need for further research

These results from the first large-scale quantitative evaluation of the Imagination Library program in Alaska show promising connections between program participation and early elementary student outcomes. More research is needed to explore how participation is connected to other outcomes, such as student test performance in grades 1 and 2, and how the influence of participation on student outcomes varies based on the number of years a child receives books through the program.

For more information about Imagination Library and this evaluation, please contact:

Abbe Hensley, Best Beginnings executive director, ahensley@bestbeginningsalaska.org.