



“Creating a City of Readers and Lifelong Learners”:



EVALUATION OF THE READY TO READ (RTR) PROGRAM OF THE MILWAUKEE PUBLIC LIBRARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“I would just like to thank everyone involved in the Ready to Read program for taking the time and patience to have my classroom as a part of their agenda. I didn’t know anything about the program until my director told me about it. The media should know about this program statewide. I may be in a shell, I don’t get out much, but I love everything about what I have learned and still use it every day in my curriculum and daily routine.”

– READY TO READ CHILD CARE CENTER TEACHER

“The learning experience was great for all that were involved. The [RTR Educator] ... built positive relationships with the children and teachers. The books and activities always excited the children. The Ready to Read Program experience taught me many ways to explore and teach reading experiences to my children.”

– READY TO READ CHILD CARE CENTER TEACHER

“The activities that are the easiest, cheapest, and most fun to do—such as singing, playing games, reading, storytelling, and just talking and listening—are also the best for child development.”

– JEROME SINGER

“For a small child there is no division between playing and learning; between the things he or she does ‘just for fun’ and things that are ‘educational.’ The child learns while living and any part of living that is enjoyable is also play.”

– PENELOPE LEACH

OVERVIEW

The Ready to Read (RTR) program of the Milwaukee Public Library (MPL) offers an array of services at Milwaukee-area child care centers. Services are designed to support early literacy and build on past library efforts to serve young children; they are consistent with the library's primary goal of creating an environment that fosters lifelong learning at every stage of life. Evaluation of program services is included as a central part of the RTR program model, consistent with MPL's commitment to being a "learning organization."

The cornerstone of RTR is its intensive outreach services to child care providers, where RTR Educators model and coach at no charge how to develop social-emotional and early literacy skills in the children in providers' care. The program targets group centers that have at least three stars on Wisconsin's YoungStar¹ system of quality. RTR Educators provide intensive outreach services to selected child care centers, under the direction of the MPL Program Manager. Infant, toddler and pre-school classrooms are visited for 60 minutes per week for 16 weeks. Currently, the RTR program has the capacity to serve 48 child care classrooms in a 12-month cycle.

Based on a wide range of qualitative and quantitative evaluation measures, the RTR program has been very successful in its first two years of operation: RTR is established as a comprehensive model that aligns with the library's strategic plan and with research findings about effective, evidence-based programs. The program has reached its targeted goals. Over the two-year span, RTR Educators worked with 70 lead teachers and 68 additional child care teachers, reaching a total of 839 children during their service.

By all measures, the program delivered its full array of services to the centers who participated; child care center directors and teachers gave the program consistently high marks for the quality and dosage of services provided by the RTR Educators, for the program model, and for the impact of the program on teachers, classrooms and centers. The RTR model offers rich opportunities for expansion and for replication. Challenges cited by participants in the evaluation pertained to the necessity of addressing

¹<http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/>. Accessed February 24, 2017.



the always present issue of frequent staff turnover in the centers, scaling up the program, maintaining the personal quality of services as the program grows, and sustaining the program over time.

The Ready to Read Program Model

The Ready to Read program strengthens early literacy, builds on an existing program model called Books2Go, and meshes with the library's primary goal of creating an environment that fosters lifelong learning at every stage of life. The program model draws on best practices, as identified in the early childhood literature. As the program materials sent to new centers state:

"Research shows that healthy attachment, the basis for all future learning, and critical gains in early literacy happen in the first 3 years of life. We have reworked our original model of story time service so that the youngest in your care can be Ready to Read and ready to learn when they enter Head Start or 4K programs."

Ready to Read is a program of intensive outreach service to child care providers, where RTR Educators model and coach at no charge how to develop social-emotional and early literacy skills in the children in their care from birth through age 4. The program targets group licensed centers in the City of Milwaukee that have at least three stars on Wisconsin's YoungStar system of quality. The centers that RTR selects are located within the city of Milwaukee and serve at-risk populations. Child care centers rated with three stars are more likely to have the necessary level of administrative support so that child care teachers can be fully engaged and the RTR Educators can successfully deliver the program. The RTR program has four educators who provide outreach services. Infant, toddler and preschool classrooms are visited for 60 minutes per week for 16 weeks. The RTR program currently has

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the capacity to serve 48 child care classrooms in a 12-month cycle. RTR Educators visit the centers and:

- enroll participants with a Books2Go library card,
- discuss the five practices (talk, sing, read, play, write) of early literacy development (Daily High Five),
- share information about early brain development with child care providers,
- introduce providers to the use of sign language,
- provide high quality books, toys and other resources,
- utilize portions of the Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS) and the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) for participating teachers to perform self-assessment and create awareness of quality and intention in their lessons,
- introduce staff to the use of the CDC's Developmental Checklists to create individuality in their planned activities, and
- award up to 14 continuing education hours to the child care teachers who meet program guidelines

Evaluation of the Ready to Read Program

In keeping with its strategic plan, which affirms that “data and evidence-based approaches are the primary basis for decision-making and evaluation in all service and operation functions,” the Milwaukee Public Library sought to evaluate the Ready to Read Program based on overall program design; quantitative data; implementation at participating child care centers; and assessments by program leaders, participating center directors and teachers and RTR Educators. As the program model became more teacher-focused, the evaluation also changed to focus more on staff, classroom and center-wide changes that resulted from Ready to Read. Components of the evaluation included:

- Ongoing technical assistance in evaluation;
- Development and refinement of a logic model;
- Analysis of available quantitative program data and materials;

- Qualitative evaluation efforts, including:
 - Observations at participating child care centers.
 - Focus groups and surveys conducted with center directors.
 - Focus groups and surveys conducted with child care center teachers.
 - Interviews conducted with RTR Educators and program leaders.

Program Participation

RTR targets group licensed centers that have at least three stars on Wisconsin's YoungStar system of quality. The centers that RTR selects are located within the city of Milwaukee and serve at-risk populations. From January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2016, the Ready to Read Program offered outreach services at 22 centers in 10 different zip codes.

As shown in Table 1 on Page 4, the RTR program more than doubled from six to 16 child care

centers from its initial program year in 2015 to its second year of operation in 2016. The number of classrooms doubled from 23 to 46. The number of lead child care teachers coached by the RTR program nearly doubled from 24 to 46 and additional child care teachers in the classroom receiving RTR support expanded from 23 in 2015 to 45 child care teachers in 2016. The program nearly tripled the continuing education hours awarded to lead child care teachers from 167 hours in 2015 to 471 hours in 2016. Above all, RTR served 226 children in 2015 and expanded to 603 children by 2016, the next year.

“Oftentimes we believe that kindergarten is where the learning starts. To have something as organized as RTR at a very young age has put more emphasis on what parents and teachers can do with literacy and learning.”

– CHILD CARE CENTER DIRECTOR



TABLE 1. RTR PROGRAM OUTPUTS: 2015 AND 2016

Program Output	2015	2016
Number child care centers served	6	16
Number classrooms served	23	46
Number lead child care teachers coached	24	46
Number additional classroom child care teachers receiving some form of RTR support	23	45
Number hours coached, all providers	353	912
Number of continuing education hours awarded to lead child care teachers	167	471
Number of children impacted by RTR service (unduplicated)	226	603

The RTR Program had targeted 48 lead child care teachers and 32 additional child care teachers to receive coaching sessions, support and training in the five practices of early literacy development. Child care centers served by the program included the following:

TABLE 2. CHILD CARE CENTERS SERVED BY RTR PROGRAM 2015 AND 2016 (N=22 CHILD CARE CENTERS)

Year	Name	Number classrooms	Number lead child care teachers coached	Number additional classroom child care teachers	Number hours coached	Number of continuing education hours	Number of children impacted by RTR
2015	A Joyful Noise Child Care Center	4	4	4	77	37	48
	Adams Learning and Development Center	4	4	3	37	1	31
	Hadley II Child Care and Learning Center	3	3	3	50	34	33
	Lit'l Scholars Day Care	4	5	4	76	50	37
	Outreach Advancement Center	4	4	5	54	27	39
	Pristine Child Care Center	4	4	4	59	18	38
	Total RTR 2015 Program Year	23	24	23	353	167	226
2016	All Walks of Life Child Care Center	3	3	3	60	39	38
	Ashley's Multicultural Child Care Center	3	3	2	47	38	28
	Aunt Fe Fe's Child Development Center	2	2	1	24	9	17
	Children's World	4	4	2	64	42	65
	COA Burke Early Education Center (May - Aug)	2	2	4	70	17	29
	COA Burke Early Education Center (Sep - Dec) ²	4	4	11	123	42	49
	Falling Into Loving Arms Child Care Center	2	2	2	41	27	28
	Four Seasons Early Learning Center	2	2	1	24	-	18
	Grisby's Child Development Center	4	4	4	98	88	68
	Hilltop Christian Academy Child Care	2	2	3	45	23	28
	Kids Land Learning Center	4	4	6	87	30	66
	L & M Links II Child Development Center	1	1	1	20	14	13
	Lil Dinks and Bubbles Learning Center ³	2	-	-	-	-	-
	Mount Zion Child Development Center	3	3	2	66	14	29
	New Horizon Daycare Center	4	4	3	63	21	66
	Rainbow Academy	4	4	-	48	40	39
Tina-N-Tots Children Academy	2	2	-	32	27	22	
Total RTR 2016 Program Year	46	46	45	912	471	603	

² COA Burke Early Education Center is counted separately as a program site for the May to August module and the September to December module. Each lead teacher is unique even though they are at the same location.

³ Service to the center was suspended after four weeks due to lack of enrollment and continuity. The site is not included in aggregate totals.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Key Accomplishments

- 1. A viable, innovative program was established, continued and expanded.** Ready to Read was able to create and implement a strong program that had a positive impact on child care teachers, making a difference in their knowledge, skills and practice in providing quality care to their students, specifically in the areas of social-emotional and literacy development.
- 2. RTR is established as a comprehensive model that aligns with the library's strategic plan and with research findings about effective, evidence-based programs.**
- 3. The program reached its targeted goals.** A total of six child care centers with 24 lead teachers and 23 additional teachers participated in RTR in 2015; this number increased to 16 sites with 46 lead teachers and 45 additional teachers in 2016. The program reached an unduplicated count of 829 0-4 year olds, 226 in 2015 and 603 in 2016.
- 4. Based on observations, surveys, interviews and focus groups, RTR had strong and appropriate leadership and RTR Educators, able to provide quality, highly valued services.** With regard to the quality of service delivery, several recurring themes related to the strengths of program leaders and RTR Educators were identified:

- Key strengths identified through surveys and interviews conducted as part of the evaluation were the high quality and the depth of the relationships established between RTR Educators and child care center



- teachers and the high level of commitment of leadership and RTR Educators to the Center directors, teachers, and children.
- In observations and interviews, program leadership and RTR Educators demonstrated a high

level of knowledge of topics related to early childhood literacy.

- As a corollary, RTR leadership and RTR Educators provided a wide range of early childhood information and services to center directors and teachers through conversations, visits, books and other materials.

“What we do is exciting in the sense that we get to support teachers....Being able to go in there and be a partner with them and support early childhood in general and make it seem like an educational profession instead of babysitting. This is a profession and these are professional people.”

– RTR EDUCATOR

- 5. Throughout the evaluation process, directors and teachers indicated that the program has had an impact on participating teachers, on the classroom and on the center as a whole.** Common themes included the materials that RTR Educators left for the classrooms, more structure, more robust lesson plans, greater knowledge and increased use of sign language, and broader use of the books.
- 6. The program was able to effectively reach teachers in several different ways—by coaching them in the classroom, offering one-on-one sessions to review materials and classroom experiences, and making available continuing education workshops. As a result of the Ready to Read program, some participating teachers have more of a desire to pursue other educational opportunities.**
- 7. Because of the Ready to Read program, MPL has been successful in expanding its role in the community with regard to early childhood education and increasingly is being recognized as an educational partner. RTR has strengthened its collaborations with other organizations working in the field.**
- 8. Over the course of the evaluation, library administrators and RTR staff demonstrated their ongoing commitment to evaluation, to being a learning organization, and to constantly work to improve programming.**

Key Challenges

Key challenges identified by participants in the evaluation process and through observations are summarized below:

1. Bringing the program to scale, while ensuring that the quality of personal interaction so integral to the program is preserved.
2. As a corollary, ensuring that ties with other community organizations addressing child care needs in the Milwaukee community are strengthened through carefully developed and defined collaborations.
3. Addressing issues of turnover, either of staff or of children, that are so characteristic of the child care field.
4. Getting ongoing buy in and commitment of time from the directors and owners; ensuring that communication between the program and directors occurs on a regular basis.
5. Being able to meet the needs of a wide range of child center teachers, including those who are new to the field and others who have been in their centers for 10 years or more. Teachers also may differ in the extent of formal education they have had.
6. Meeting the bilingual needs of the community through staffing and program materials.
7. Mitigating the impact of the center's environment, such as noise level and lack of resources, which may make it difficult to work in the classroom.
8. Addressing the need to create a family component so that the lessons imparted at the center are reinforced in the home setting.
9. Making sure that teachers attend the required continuing education training.
10. Ensuring that developmentally appropriate resources are made available to all levels of center classrooms—infant, toddler and pre-school.

“The teachers are more vocal with the kids. I hear them asking the kids more open ended questions. The teachers are also more engaged in the children's activities.”

— CHILD CARE CENTER DIRECTOR

11. Finding ways to make certain that lessons learned through the program are reinforced through refresher visits or other means.
12. Ensuring that the program is aligning with the YoungStar program and Wisconsin Department of Children and Families regulations.



Recommendations

The recommendations included below are drawn from the array of qualitative and quantitative data collected during this evaluation. They reflect the viewpoints of those involved in the evaluation process. These recommendations are designed to build on a successful program model and implementation through continuation of current program components, coupled with program growth and further innovations. Key recommendations are summarized below:

1. Continue the current program model with modifications, as described in these recommendations; it is consistent with MPL's strategic plan and with current literature on early childhood education and is highly valued by directors, teachers and others who took part in the evaluation.
2. Through a formal process that involves library administrators, RTR staff, and community representatives, carefully develop a plan to bring the program to scale, so that it can significantly increase its role in the development of high quality child care in the Milwaukee community.
3. As a basic element of RTR, find ways to promote collaboration among child care centers and throughout the community in order to create a “continuum of learning” in the Milwaukee area with the Ready to Read program model as its cornerstone.

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4. Target specific zip codes to increase neighborhood impact, in collaboration with existing resources.
5. Consider ways to incorporate a family component in Ready to Read, so that parent engagement becomes a key part of the program model.
6. As part of efforts to expand the program, ensure that bilingual needs of the community are met through the hiring of staff and the development of program materials in Spanish and other languages.
7. Find ways to continue connections with centers that have participated in the program to ensure that knowledge gained by staff is reinforced. Have RTR Educators return for follow up sessions and offer other opportunities to meet as a group.
8. Strengthen ties with directors; offer one-on-one sessions and more resources targeted to directors and owners. Ask them what services they would like.
9. As one way to reinforce knowledge, bring teachers together periodically to talk about the program and to share ideas.
10. Over time, expand the program to family child care centers.
11. As the program continues to grow, develop a structured recruitment protocol that would include recruitment criteria. As a corollary, develop a more formalized introduction to the program so that

directors, owners and teachers have a clear understanding of the program model and mutual expectations.

12. Continue to offer onsite training.⁴
13. As the program evolves, find ways to develop additional continuing education classes.
14. Continue to build program capacity by:
 - Developing an Access database system that includes current data collected and possible additional information, to meet the program's needs as it grows;
 - As a corollary, investing in the training of the RTR Program Manager and Educators in the use of Access;
 - Developing a pre-test and post-test as the next step in a formal outcome evaluation;
 - Developing a model for disseminating evaluation findings as the program grows and matures;
 - Creating opportunities for replication of program components, either in part or as a whole in Milwaukee and other geographic areas.

⁴ Onsite trainings are currently available if the center can guarantee at least 15 participants will be in attendance. However, most of the participating centers do not have that many employees.



