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Book Access

Book access, more broadly known as access to print materials to include newspapers and magazines, refers to access to quality literacy resources in schools and at home.

Increasing book access is one of Calgary Reads' four key strategies to improve early literacy outcomes (along with changing values, increasing capacity, and increasing engagement).

A complementary aspect to access to books is the access to a safe, comfortable, quiet, and personal space to read them in (including a lamp for reading after dark). Outside the home, this would aptly describe most libraries. Inside the home, a designated reading place or story corner can enhance the joy of reading. All you need to create your own reading place is "a book and a light and me and you!"

Why is it important to have books at home and in school?

"When kids own books, they get this sense, 'I'm a reader.'"—Rebecca Constantino, Researcher at UC Irvine

According to Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), the largest early literacy organization in the U.S.:

"Children's book lending and ownership programs were shown to have positive behavioral, educational, and psychological outcomes."

In addition, RIF states that access to print materials:

- **Improves children's reading performance.** Findings from the rigorous studies suggest that providing children with print materials helps them read better. Among the studies reviewed, kindergarten students showed the biggest increase in reading performance.
- **Proves instrumental in helping children learn the basics of reading.** Providing children with reading materials allows them to develop basic reading skills such as letter and word identification, phonemic awareness, and completion of sentences.
- **Causes children to read more and for longer lengths of time.** Giving children print materials leads to more shared reading between parents and children. Children receiving books also read more frequently and for longer periods of time.
- **Produces improved attitudes toward reading and learning among children.** Children with greater access to books and other print materials—through either borrowing books or receiving books to own—express more enjoyment of books, reading, and academics.

The Scholastic Teacher Research Compendium repeats the points above even more emphatically:

"The most successful way to improve the reading achievement of low-income children is to increase their access to print. Communities ranking high in achievement tests have several factors in common: an abundance of books in public libraries, easy access to books in the community at large, and a large number of textbooks per student (Newman et al., 2000).

The only behavior measure that correlates significantly with reading scores is the number of books in the home.

An analysis of a national data set of nearly 100,000 United States school children found that access to printed materials—and not poverty—is the 'critical variable affecting reading acquisition' (McQuillan, 1998)."

A 20-year study published by Evans, Kelley, Sikorac, and Treimand in 2010 of 70,000 participants across 27 countries found that the "mere presence of books" profoundly impacts a child's academic achievement.

How many books do children need?

Jim Trelease, author of the *Read-Aloud Handbook*, concurs that the mere presence of books can often be enough. He writes, "Not 200 of them or even 50, but a dozen to call your own, with enough pages to occupy a child's imagination on winter nights or rainy days." That being said, there is a clear correlation between the number of books in a child's home and the child's interest in books, as well as the number of years of schooling that child will undertake.

	High Interest in Books	Low Interest in Books	Number of Books in the Home	Number of Additional Years Spent in School
Number of Books in the Home	80.6 books	31.7 books	None or few	0
			25	2
			500	3

(The Read-Aloud Handbook, 7th Ed.)

(Scholastic)

The Evans study found that "growing up in a household with 500 or more books is 'as great an advantage as having university-educated rather than unschooled parents, and twice the advantage of having a professional rather than an unskilled father.'"

Scholastic's *Kids and Family Reading Report, 2015* shows that children whose parents report 150 or more print books in the home are 82% more likely to be frequent readers (51% against 28%).

However, the number of books at home doesn't tell the full story. For children aged 6-17, frequent readers average 205 books in the home; infrequent readers average 192, not a significant difference.

For children growing up in poverty, books are particularly scarce. Children in low-income neighborhoods often don't have access to books at home. Transportation to public libraries isn't always safe or reliable (or affordable).

Research from First Book Canada, a nonprofit that has delivered over 100 million books to first graders in Canada, many of whom say it's the first books they've ever owned, states:

- A very high percentage of the pre-schools and after school programs serving children in need do not have a single book for the children they serve.
- In some of the lowest-income neighborhoods in the country there is only one book available for every 300 children.

The Print "Desert" vs. the Print "Rain Forest"

Trelease uses this analogy to describe the difference in print climate and library open hours between poor neighbourhoods and middle class ones. Which one would see lush, faster growing readers?

What do we know about book access in Canada?

Many children lack books at home and in school. According to First Book Canada:

"More than 29 million children across Canada and the United States live in low-income households. Most of these children have no age-appropriate books at home, and the classrooms and programs they attend are woefully under-resourced. Approximately two-thirds of these schools and programs cannot afford to buy books at retail prices."

Funding for books in schools has declined. According to the website for retailer Indigo's "Love of Reading" program:

- "The school book budget for one child in the 1970s must stretch to cover nine children today."
- "The crisis is so great that in 2001 teachers and principals spent \$143 million of their own money to buy books and learning materials for their students."

Canadian data is limited but we know that in the U.S., 61% of children do not have *any* books in their home.

E-books vs. Paper books

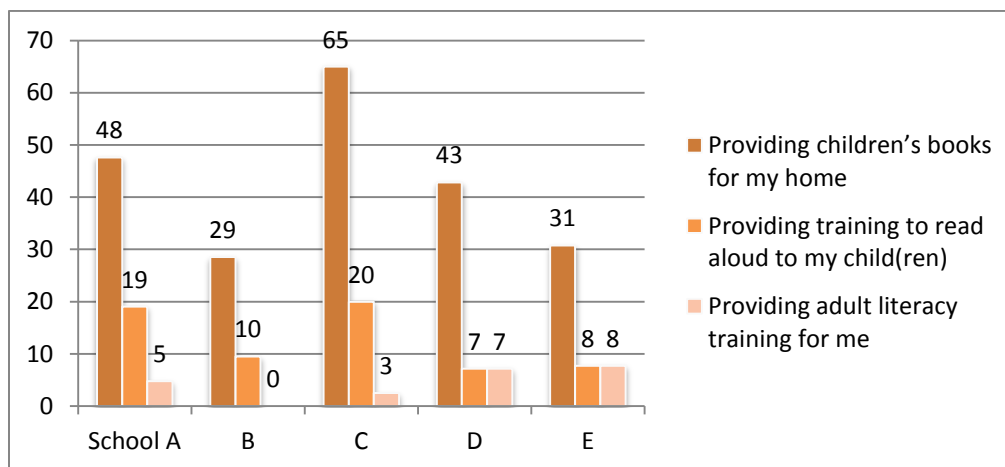
Despite an increase in e-book reading, nearly two-thirds of children agree that they'll always want to read books in print even though there are e-books available. Nearly half of parents of younger children prefer them to read physical books.

While e-books have the potential for affordable mass distribution, retail prices are so far not significantly—if at all—below those of print books. More importantly, the impact of a bookshelf full of books in all colours and sizes is lost on a child.

What Calgary Reads is hearing locally

Through baseline data collected from Calgary Reads' five Reading Place schools, we know that parents identified having quality children's books at home as their biggest need. This is despite 100% of the parents in two of the schools, and 90% in the other three reporting that they have children's books at home.

What parents identified as their greatest needs



One straightforward fix would be to encourage parents to increase their use of public libraries. In three of the schools above, 36-50% of parents never take their children to the library. A further 19-45% visit libraries with their children on average once every three months.

What Calgary Reads is doing to increase book access

As mentioned previously, increasing access to quality literacy resources in schools and homes is one of Calgary Reads' key strategies. Here are some of the ways Calgary Reads gets new and gently used children's books into the little hands of children:

- **Reading Rallies:** Calgary Reads donates two brand new books to each child in Kindergarten and/or Grade 1 when schools host these reading celebrations. In 2014, we gave away 708 books in four schools.
- **Read to Me:** Calgary Reads is supplying 1,500 age-appropriate board books to family physicians and health clinics to give to parents during health check-ups for babies as they promote the importance of reading aloud to the child.

- **Food for Thought:** Providing free book bags at the Calgary Food Bank because we know that families who cannot afford to buy food are not buying books. The CFB served 130,000 families in 2014.
- **Book Nook:** Through our corporate partner EVRAZ, we were able to secure funding for nearly 800 books at Buchanan School and a dedicated reading space called a Book Nook.



- **Little Free Libraries:** Calgary Reads has helped 54 of these artistic little book exchange boxes take up residence in schools and neighbourhoods across the city.
- **Good Book Box:** Calgary Reads provided a box of 10 professional resources to each of our Reading Place schools to build teacher capacity. Schools also received enough copies of one title of their choice for a staff book club.
- **Big Book Sale:** And of course, the CBC / Calgary Reads Big Book Sale has been a cost-effective and terrific resource to stock up on books for the entire year. Nearly 50,000 unsold books from last year's sale were shipped to the Republic of Chad thanks to our friends at United Hydrocarbon. Save the dates: **this year's Book Sale is on May 22 and 23 at the Calgary Curling Club!**

How can parents access books for their children (and themselves!)?

- **Public libraries:** As of 2015, Calgary Public Library has eliminated library card registration fees for all ages and is the single best resource for any Calgarian in need of reading or research materials. In addition to physical books, audiobooks, newspapers and magazines, a library card provides free access to digital resources too.
- **Kijiji, Craigslist, classifieds, and garage sales:** When people move house or have grown children who have flown the nest, books are often the first things to make way to clear up space.
- **Book fairs, book sales, and book exchanges** are environmentally-friendly sources of inexpensive books.

Resources

[First Book Canada:](#) Access to new books for children in need.

[Giving Children Access to Print Materials Improves Reading Performance:](#) In an unprecedented, near-exhaustive search uncovering 11,000 reports and analyzing 108 of the most relevant studies, children's book lending and ownership programs were shown to have positive behavioral, educational, and psychological outcomes.

[Access to Books, Chapter 3, Scholastic Teacher Research Compendium](#)

[Scholastic Kids and Family Reading Report, 5th Edition:](#) A biennial U.S. study of the state of children and reading. Packed with content presented in easy-to-read charts.

[The Read-Aloud Handbook, 7th Edition:](#) Chapter 6 is titled "The Print Climate in the Home, School, and Library."

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