Imagination Library:

Relations Between Child Participation and Performance on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS)

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Goals of This Report

The Great Start Collaborative (GSC) of Jackson County is part of the statewide Great Start System, dedicated to supporting young children's development by providing a network of community resources and services for children and their families. One component of delivering quality services to families is assessing how effective existing programs are in supporting children's development.

This report examines one specific program delivered through GSC, the Imagination Library program. Imagination Library provides free, high-quality, age-appropriate children's books to participating Jackson County children every month until they turn five years old. This report describes the Imagination Library program over the previous three school years, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015, and examines the relations between children's participation in Imagination Library and their literacy skills at the beginning of kindergarten.

Specifically, this report addresses the following goals:

- Describe the goals of Great Start Collaborative of Jackson County.
- Describe the background of the Imagination Library program, along with the existing research that links Imagination Library with positive outcomes.
- Describe local community conditions in Jackson County relevant to children and their families.
- Describe school readiness, in terms of early literacy skills, for kindergartners in Jackson County since 2012.
- Describe what types of literacy activities that Imagination Library families report that they engage in at home with their young children.
- Describe Imagination Library and its participants over the last three years.
- Examine what factors (i.e., socioeconomic status, gender, etc.) are associated with whether or not a family chooses to participate in Imagination Library, as well as how long they are enrolled in the program.
- Analyze how participation in Imagination Library relates to children's early literacy scores, as measured by the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) at kindergarten entry.

Executive Summary

The Great Start Collaborative (GSC) of Jackson County is part of the statewide Great Start system. The purpose of the Great Start system is to assure a coordinated system of community resources and supports to assist all Michigan families in providing a great start for their children from birth to age eight. The GSC is dedicated to supporting young children's early learning and development, especially as it relates to school readiness. One of the goals of the GSC set by the Office of Great Start is children are prepared to succeed in fourth grade and beyond by reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

One of the ways the GSC is able to support early literacy development is through the Imagination Library program, which provides free children's books to participating children under age five, which are age-appropriate, high-quality, and provided on a monthly basis. Additionally, the Jackson County Intermediate School District, in partnership with the GSC, assesses the early literacy skills of every beginning kindergartner in the county, using the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) assessment. The PALS assesses five core early literacy skills, including: Individual Rhyme, Individual Beginning Sound; Lower-case Alphabet; Letter Sounds, and Spelling, yielding individual scores in each area, as well as an overall composite literacy score.

This report describes the Imagination Library program and its participants, including the home literacy activities that participating families engage in, and discusses the associations between Imagination Library and children's early literacy skills. This report analyzes data from the previous three school years, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015. Overall, findings indicate that participation in the Imagination Library program is associated with higher early literacy skills, as measured by the PALS assessment. These findings are in line with earlier findings from a 2012 report on Imagination Library and children's literacy skills in Jackson County (Brophy-Herb & Lee, 2012).

A summary of key findings are as follows:

Imagination Library Families and Home Literacy Activities

- Most participating families indicate that their child enjoys reading books.
- The majority of parents and children (over 85%) indicate that they like the books that Imagination Library provides to them.
- Nearly 70% of families report that they read more since they have been involved in Imagination Library.

Describing Imagination Library and its Participants

- Between the school years 2012-2013 and 2014-2015, over 2,400 beginning kindergartners had participated in the Imagination Library program.
- The average length of children's participation in the Imagination Library program was 38.4 months in 2014-2015, which has increased over the past three years, up from 29.5 months in 2012-2014 and 35.8 months in 2013-2014.
- The total number of books distributed by GSC Imagination Library program has increased nearly every year since 2008, with over 47,000 books distributed in 2014 alone.
- Free lunch status was negatively related to whether or not a child participated in Imagination Library (r = -.07), and was also negatively related to the length of time participating children were enrolled in the program (r = -.16), though the association was small. This suggests that children who are lower income are less likely to be enrolled in Imagination Library, and, when they are enrolled in Imagination Library, they are enrolled for a lower length of time.
- Being enrolled in preschool had small, positive correlations with participating in Imagination Library (r = .15) and for being enrolled in the program longer (r = .04).

Imagination Library and Relations with Children's Early Literacy Scores

- On average, children who were enrolled in Imagination Library performed better than children who were not enrolled in Imagination Library on the PALS overall composite, and all of the individual literacy subtests. The effect size of being enrolled in Imagination Library vs. non-Imagination Library was d = .07 for the overall PALS composite score, which is a considered a small, but significant, effect size.
- Even when controlling for other important demographic characteristics such as free lunch status, gender, and preschool experience, participating in Imagination Library was a significant and positive predictor of children's literacy scores.
- Length of time participating in Imagination Library was also a significant predictor of children's literacy scores, even when considering other demographics factors. Children who were in Imagination Library longer had higher literacy scores. Specifically, the effect size between those children who participated in IL for 48-60 months and those who participated in Imagination Library for 0-20 months was d = .23, which is considered a small effect size.

Great Start Collaborative of Jackson County Goals

The Great Start Collaborative of Jackson County (GSC) is the local organization of the statewide Great Start System, an initiative aimed at fostering school readiness and future success for young children. The GSC is dedicated to supporting young children's early learning and development, especially as it relates to school readiness.

The Office of Great Start has established four goals for the GSC:

1. Children are born healthy
2. Children are healthy, thriving and developmentally on track birth to third grade
3. Children are developmentally ready to succeed in school at their time of school entry
4. Children are prepared to succeed in fourth grade and beyond by reading proficiently by the end of third grade

To target the goal of children are prepared to succeed in fourth grade and beyond by reading proficiently by the end of third grade throughout Jackson County, GSC of Jackson County has been providing support to families via the Imagination Library program since 2008. The implementation of this program was made possible by a start-up grant awarded to GSC by Consumer's Energy, and the program continues today due to the generous support of individuals and businesses in the Jackson area. Through this program, GSC is able to provide a free, age-appropriate book each month to all participating children and families in Jackson County, from age birth until age five. At the start of kindergarten, these children and their families will have had the opportunity to build a library that contains up to 60 high-quality children's books.

Background of Imagination Library Program

Young children are developing early literacy skills long before they are able to formally read, and these early skills help to provide the foundation for future reading and academic success through high school and even beyond (Alexander & Entwisle, 2005), which is why literacy is considered a core component of school readiness. Because of the importance of early literacy development, the GSC of Jackson County, is dedicated to supporting young children's growth in the area of literacy. Research indicates that the most fruitful path to do doing so involves supporting parents to engage in literacy activities with their children in the home setting (Mol & Bus, 2011), and simply having access to books in the home can be an important catalyst to supporting early literacy learning (Evans et al., 2010).

The Imagination Library Program does just this, by providing children and their families with one age-appropriate, high-quality storybook per month, from birth through age five. The Imagination Library program was founded by Dolly Parton in 1995, with the goal of fostering a love of reading in young children from a variety of backgrounds, while also removing any potential barriers that may come with not having access to high quality children's books. Local agencies, like GSC of Jackson County, elect to implement the program for families in their area by securing funding from a variety of local businesses and individuals.

Since GSC of Jackson County began the Imagination Library program in 2008, over 10,000 children and their families from the Jackson area have received free books in their home, for a total distribution of over 291,000 books to date. The GSC has also been committed to evaluating the effectiveness of the program, and has conducted data-driven analyses of the associations between Imagination Library participation and children's early literacy development, with results demonstrating that participation in the Imagination Library program is linked to higher scores in a variety of literacy outcomes when children start kindergarten (Brophy-Herb & Lee, 2012). Recently, the GSC also added measures of parent-child home literacy activities to their data collection, to better understand how participating in Imagination Library may influence what parents and children are doing at home when it comes to book reading and other literacy activities.

Overall, research suggests that families' participation in Imagination Library, and other similar programs that provide high-quality books to young children and their families, is associated with more frequent and higher level literacy activities that take place in the home (Ridzi et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2015; Weitzman et al., 2004). For instance, participating in Imagination Library helped refugee families, who come from more oral traditions and are not as familiar with parent-child reading, to become more familiar with books and begin to use them with their children (Singh et al., 2015). The longer families

are enrolled in the Imagination Library program, the more frequently child-directed reading happens in the home, and the more parents discussed the story with their children (Ridzi et al., 2014). Being a part of a similar book distribution program, Reach Out and Read, was linked with parents providing more literacy opportunities for their young children at home (Weitzman et al., 2004). Overall, evidence from the GSC of Jackson County and beyond supports Imagination Library as a viable intervention to support families and children in fostering early literacy skills.

Jackson County:
Information on Community Conditions

The economic and social community in which families and children live can have an impact on a variety of developmental outcomes, especially as they relate to poverty status. Below is a summary of the community conditions in Jackson County that are relevant to child development and overall family functioning.

Table 1. Economic Conditions in Jackson County

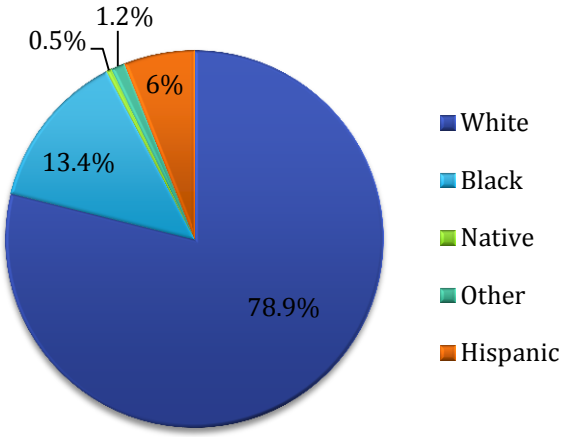
	Jackson	Michigan
Unemployment	8.8%	8.8%
Children ages 0-17 living in poverty	30.0%	24.7%
Children ages 0-5 living in poverty (2011)	27.4%	22.7%
Median household income (2012)	$43,827	$46,793
Children receiving Food Assistance Program	28.3%	27.8%
Children receiving Family Independence Program	3.1%	2.8%
Children ages 0-18 receiving Medicaid	43.1%	40.8%
Students eligible for free/reduced lunch	53.1%	48.6%

Number of children ages 0-5:

10,979

Average cost of full-time childcare per month: $472 vs. $545 for Michigan

Figure 1. Race/Ethnicity in Jackson County



References:
Michigan League for Public Policy. (2015). Kids Count in Michigan Data Profile 2015.

Student Achievement:
School Readiness in Jackson County 2013-2015

The skills that children bring with them at the start of kindergarten, especially in early literacy, can help set them on a course for success throughout the rest of their schooling. Beginning in 2008, the Jackson County Intermediate School District, along with the Great Start Collaborative of Jackson County, began collecting information on the literacy skills of all incoming kindergartners in the county. In the fall of the school year, a team of trained assessors works one on one with each kindergarten student in each public, private, parochial and charter school to conduct the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), which gives a look at children's abilities in a variety of early literacy skills.

The PALS assesses the following areas:

- Individual Rhyme Awareness
- Individual Beginning Sound Awareness
- Lower-case Alphabet Knowledge
- Letter-Sound Knowledge
- Spelling

Each area, and the overall composite of all areas combined, has a nationally normed benchmark. These benchmarks are consistent with the foundational literacy skills that a student should have in the start of their kindergarten year. If a child meets or exceeds a benchmark, then it can be expected that they have the foundational abilities that are required for that particular skill area.

For the most recent year of data collected, 2014-2015, 66% of kindergartners could be described as meeting or exceeding the benchmarks set for the overall composite early literacy skills. The percentage of children meeting or exceeding each of the individual five early literacy skills ranged from 61% to 70%. These percentages are similar to the previous two years. See Figures 2a and 3 for patterns of PALS outcomes over the last three years. A higher percentage of children enrolled in Imagination Library met or or exceeded the benchmarks for all of the PALS subtests as well as the composite score as compared to their peers who were not enrolled in Imagination Library (see Figure 2b).

Figure 2a: Percent of Students Met or Exceeded PALS Benchmark Assessment in Jackson County Kindergarten

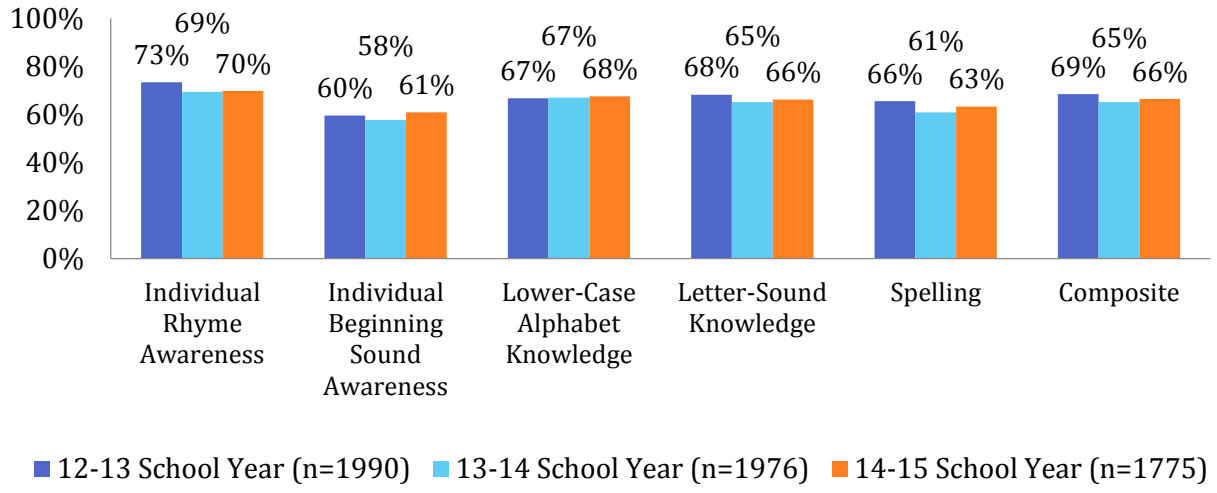


Figure 2b: Percent of Students Enrolled or Not Enrolled in Imagination Library Met or Exceeded PALS Benchmark Assessment in Jackson County Kindergarten from 2012-2015

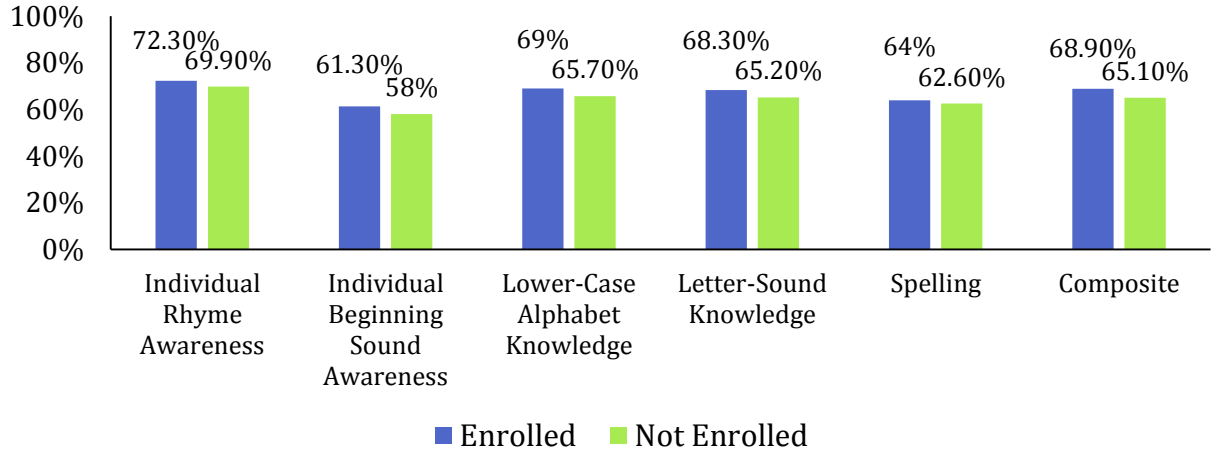
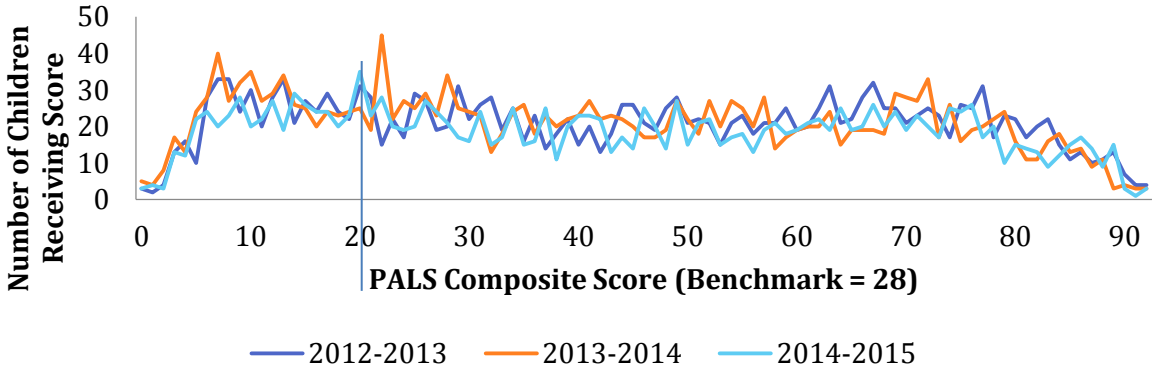


Figure 3. Average Composite Scores of PALS Benchmark Assessment in Jackson County Kindergarten



Imagination Library Families: What types of literacy activities do they engage in at home?

Providing literacy-related opportunities and activities in the home setting is one of the most important ways that parents can help to support their children's early literacy skills. In 2014, the GSC received a grant from the Jackson Community Foundation, which allowed them to collect an in-home survey directly from families about their home environments and the types of literacy activities that take place there. By doing so, GSC can begin to learn about children's early experiences at home, and start to understand how participating in Imagination Library may influence these home activities, and, subsequently, children's outcomes.

The GSC was able to collect information from 161 families who participate in Imagination Library. These families, mostly mothers, provided information on a variety of literacy-related items, including children's enjoyment of books and family reading habits. Results from the survey are summarized below:

- Participating children spend their days in a combination of at home with parents (66%), with a babysitter (18%), at preschool (33%), in Head Start or Early Head Start (63%), or in kindergarten (28%).
- In this sample, the length of time that children have been receiving books varies between less than one year up to four years or more.
- Over 86% of participating families report that their **child enjoys reading** books.
- Several different caregivers, from parents to siblings, to teachers, read books to Imagination Library children (see Figure 5).
- Most families (69%) feel that **their family reads more** since they have been involved in Imagination Library.
- The majority of both parents and children (over 85% for both) indicate that **they like the books** that Imagination Library sends to their families; no families indicated that they do not like the books.
- Families report they receive books from a variety of places, but Imagination Library is their primary source. (See Figure 6).
- Nearly all (96%) of parents report that they themselves spending time reading, and they read a variety of different media (See Figures7 and 8).
- See Table 2 for demographic information on families who participated in the survey.

Figure 4: Imagination Library Family Literacy Activities: Question 1

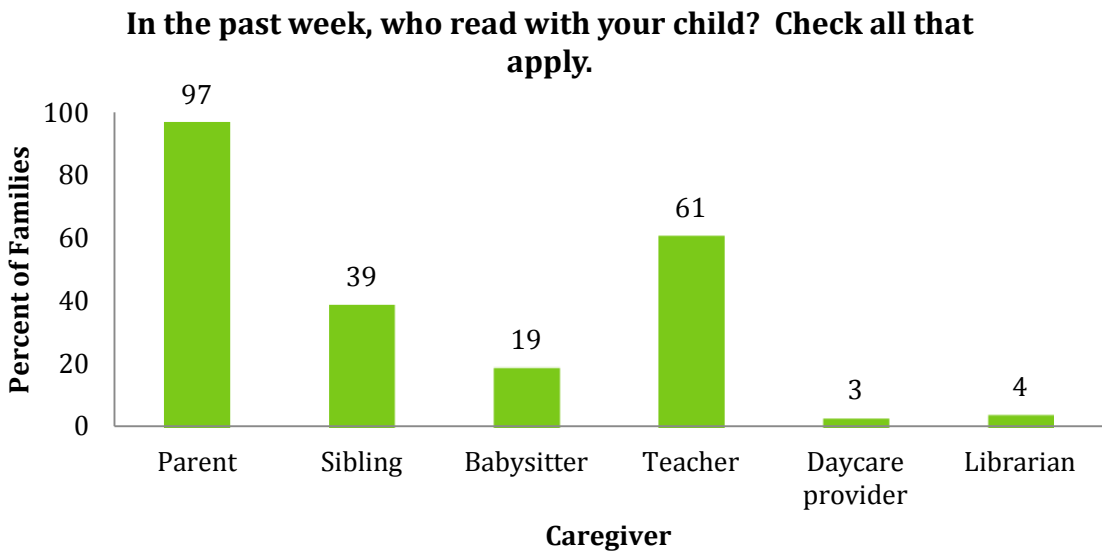


Figure 5: Imagination Library Family Literacy Activities: Question 2

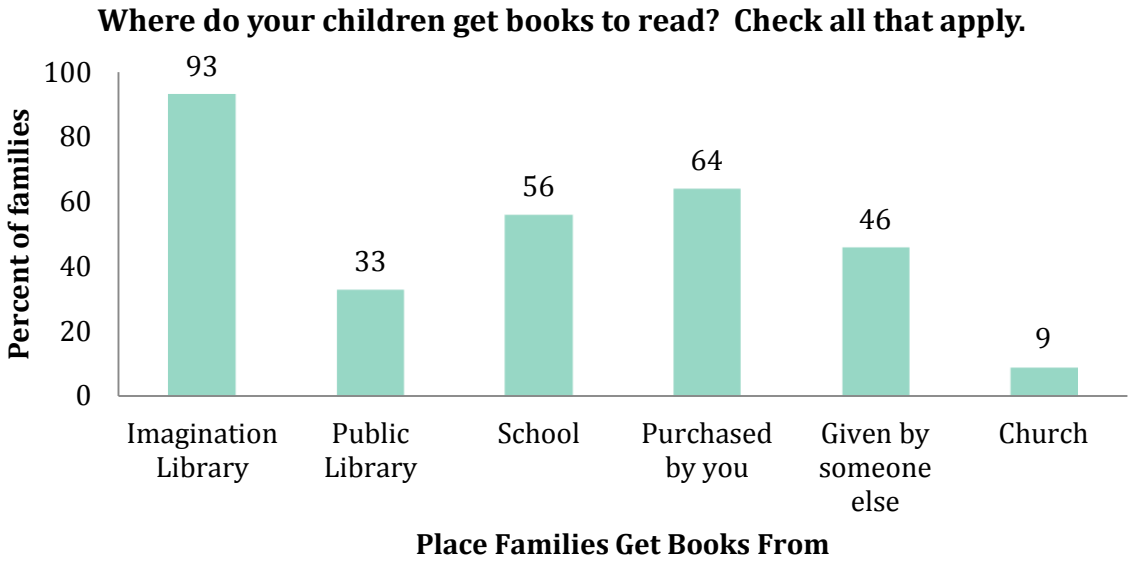


Figure 6: Imagination Library Family Literacy Activities: Question 3

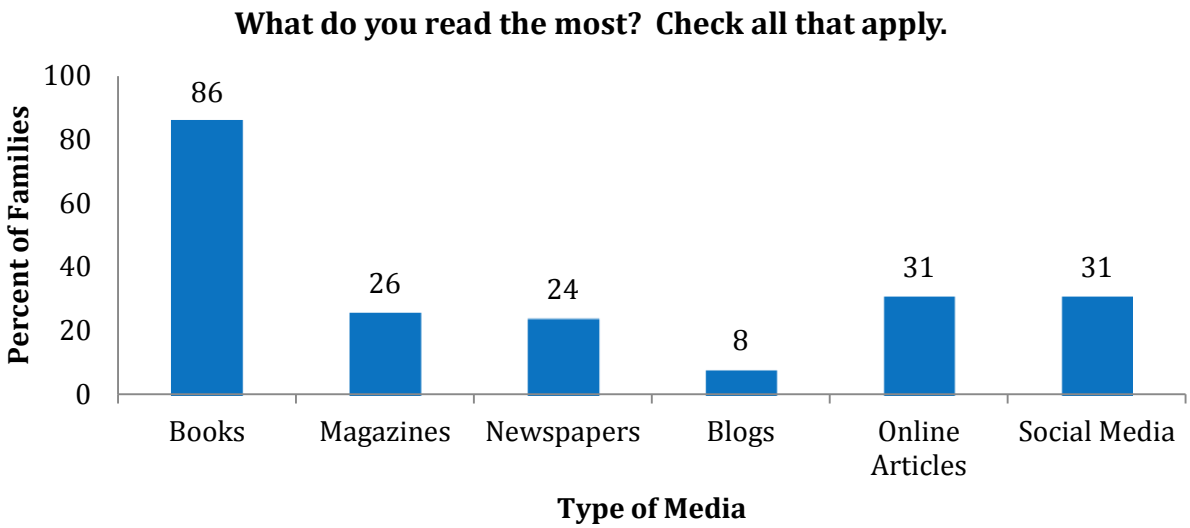


Figure 7: Imagination Library Family Literacy Activities: Question 4

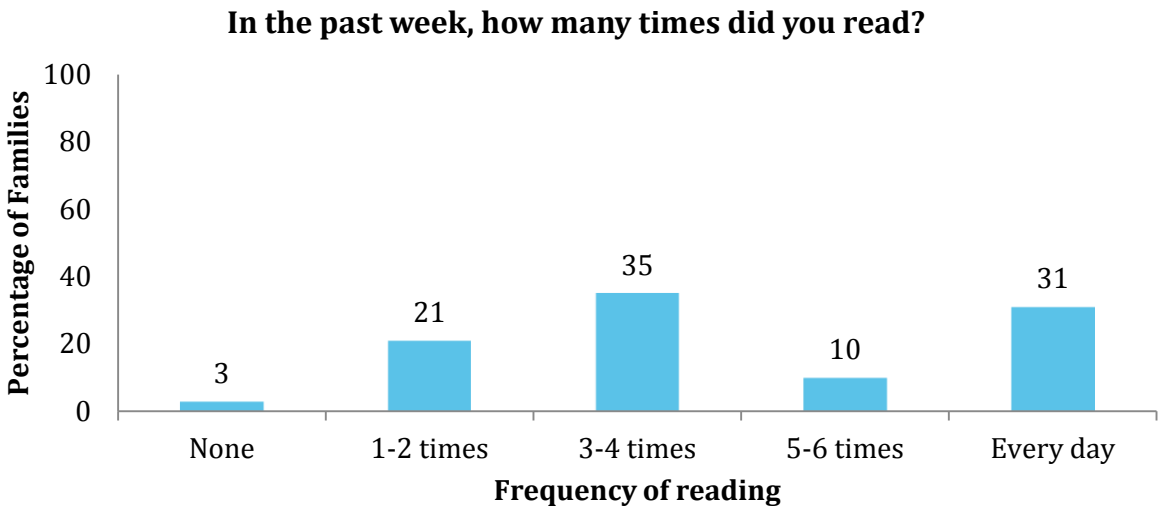


Table 2. Demographic Information of Imagination Library Survey Participants

Characteristic	%	Characteristic	%
What is your current age?		Are you currently employed?	
Younger than 18	1.3	Yes	56.6
18-29	68.4	No	43.4
30-39	26.0	How many hours do you work each week?	
40-49	4.4	Less than 10	3.3
50 or older	0.0	10-25 hours	17.8
What is your current marital status?		26-40 hours	55.6
Single	44.7	40+ hours	24.4
Single, living with partner	15.1	How often is your family income enough to pay your monthly bills?	
Married	31.5	Always enough	32.9
Separated	3.1	Almost always enough	20.9
Divorced	5.1	Sometimes enough	27.2
Widowed	0.6	Almost never enough	13.3
What is the highest level of education you have completed?		Never enough	5.7
8th grade or less	0.6	I don't know	1.9
Some high school	12.6		
High school diploma or GED	36.5		
Some college or trade school	42.8		
Four years+ of college or trade school	7.6		

Describing Imagination Library and Its Participants

Describing Jackson County Imagination Library

- In 2012-2013, 853 kindergartners were **enrolled in Imagination Library in Jackson County**, which is 42.9% of the total number of kindergartners in Jackson County who took the PALS assessment that year. The number of children enrolled in 2013-2014 was 905 (45.0%) and in 2014-2015 was 670 (37.7%)
- The **average number of books** Imagination Library children received by the time they entered kindergarten, which corresponds with the number of months enrolled in the program, increased from 29.5 in 2012-2013 to 35.8 in 2013-2014 and 38.4 in 2014-2015 (see Figure 7).
- Considering all children enrolled in Imagination Library in Jackson County each year (i.e., not just Kindergartners, but all children ages 0-5), Figure 8 demonstrates the number of books Jackson County's Imagination Library program mails to children each year. **In 2014 alone, they distributed 47,247 books.**

Figure 8. Average Number of Books Per Child Enrolled in Imagination Library

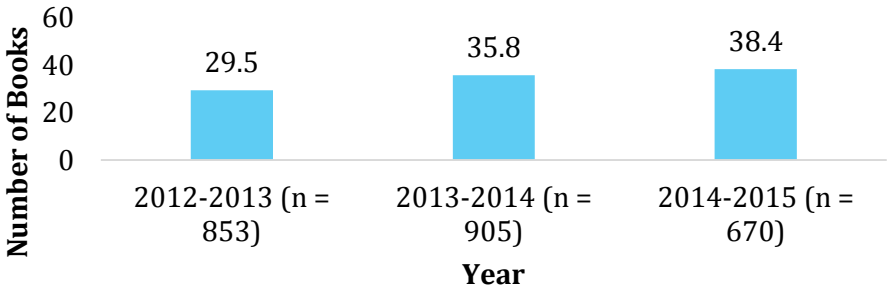
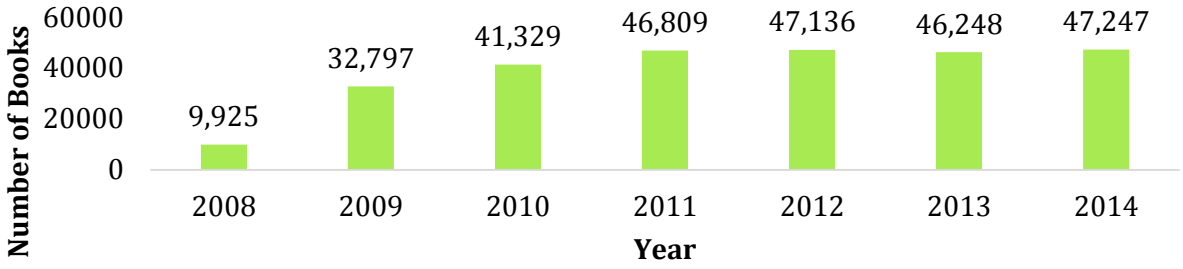


Figure 9. Number of Books Mailed Per Year to Imagination Library Participants



Describing Children in Jackson County and in Imagination Library from 2012-2015

1) The **first goal** of the following analyses was to describe the demographic characteristics of all kindergarten children who took the PALS in Jackson County in the years 2012-2015.
2) The **second goal** was to describe these same characteristics for only the children who were enrolled in Imagination Library.
3) The **final goal** was to examine which demographic characteristics are associated with children's participation in Imagination Library.

1) Demographics of All Kindergartners in Jackson County from 2012 through 2015

The following graphs (see below) explore the demographic characteristics of ***all*** children in Jackson County who took the PALS assessments from 2012-2015. These graphs demonstrate that:

- Across all years, approximately half of children were males (see Figure 10).
- In 2012-2013, nearly half of all children (47.7%) received free lunch, while in 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 this number decreased to approximately one-third of children (36.9% and 33.7%, respectively; see Figure 11).
- Across all years, most children (over 77%) were White, followed by Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian; less than 5% were categorized as part of 'Other' ethnicities.
- Across all years, approximately half of children had previously been enrolled in preschool (see Figure 12).
- Across all years, 4.7-6.4% of children had been retained in kindergarten from the previous year (see Figure 13).
- Across all years, 3.0-9.7% of children were enrolled in developmental kindergarten (see Figure 14).

Figure 10: Jackson County: Child Gender

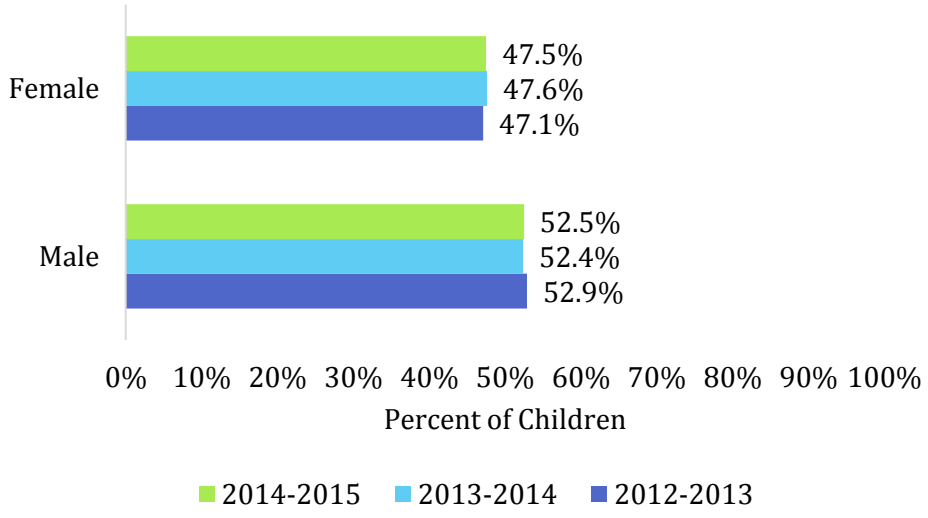


Figure 11. Jackson County: Child Receives Free Lunch

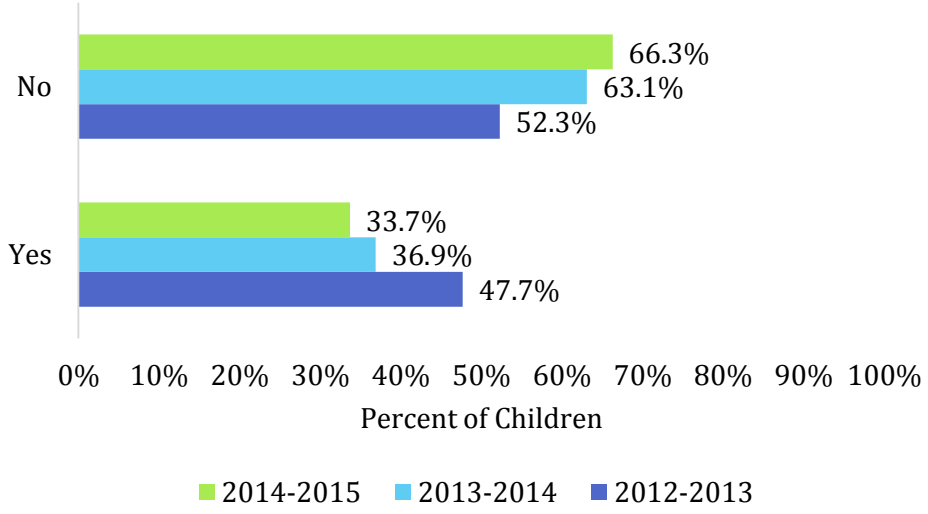


Figure 12. Jackson County: Child Was Enrolled in Preschool

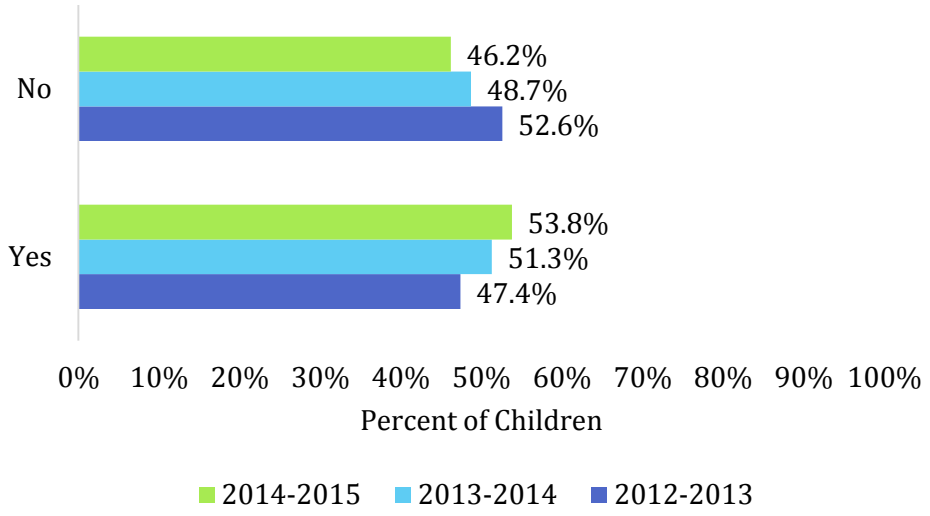


Figure 13. Jackson County: Child Retained in Kindergarten

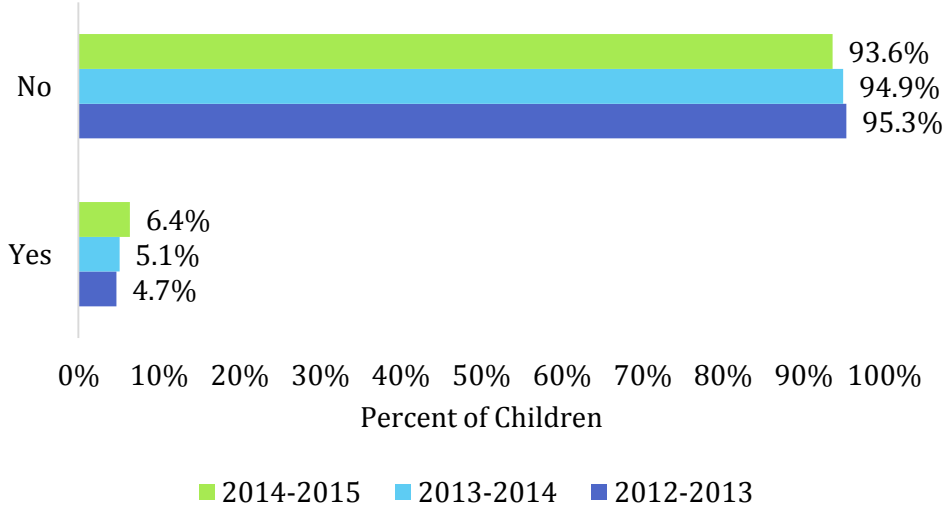
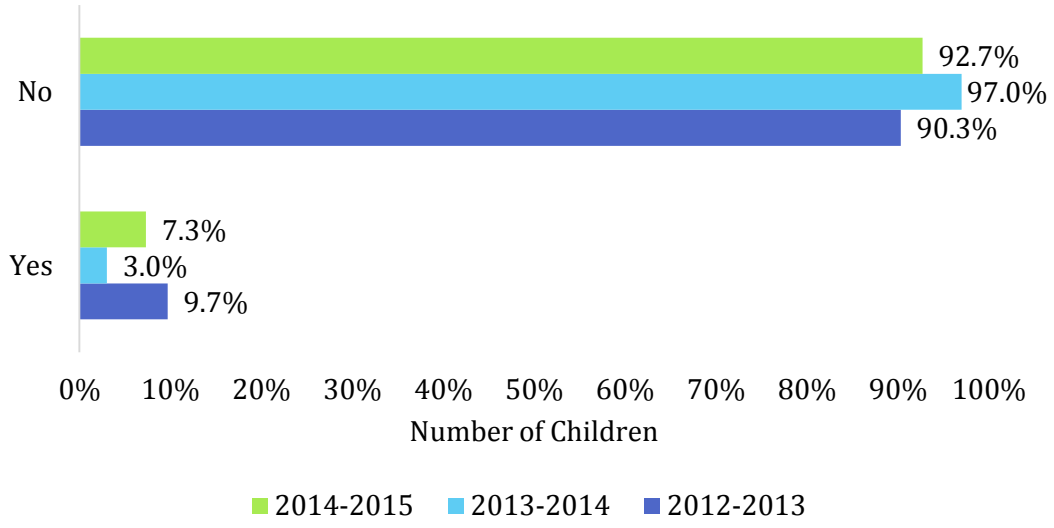


Figure 14. Jackson County: Child Enrolled in Developmental Kindergarten



2) Demographics of Kindergartners Enrolled in Imagination Library from 2012-2015

The following graphs (see below) explore the demographic characteristics of only those children who were ***enrolled in Imagination Library*** from 2012-2015. These graphs demonstrate that:

- Across all years, approximately half of children were males (see Figure 15).
- In 2012-2013, 45.0% of children received free lunch, while in 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 this number decreased (see Figure 16).
- Across all years, most children (75.8-78.6%) were White, followed by Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian; 2.0-5.0% reported that they were part of 'Other' ethnicities.
- In 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, nearly half of children had previously been enrolled in preschool. This number increased to nearly three-fourths of children in 2014-2015 (see Figure 17).
- Across all years, 0.4-4.9% of children had been retained in kindergarten from the previous year (see Figure 18).
- Across all years, 2.2-10.1% of children were enrolled in developmental kindergarten (see Figure 19).

Figure 15. Imagination Library: Child Gender

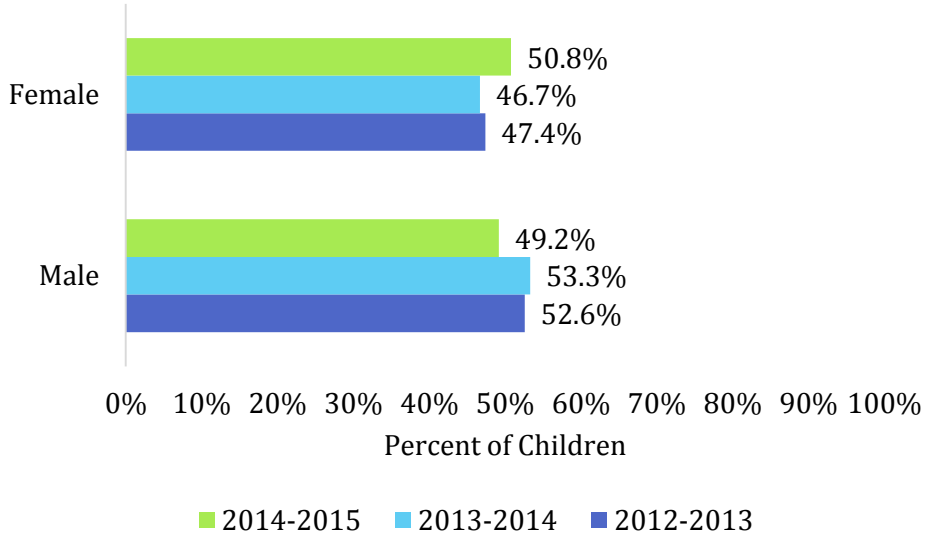


Figure 16. Imagination Library: Child Receives Free Lunch

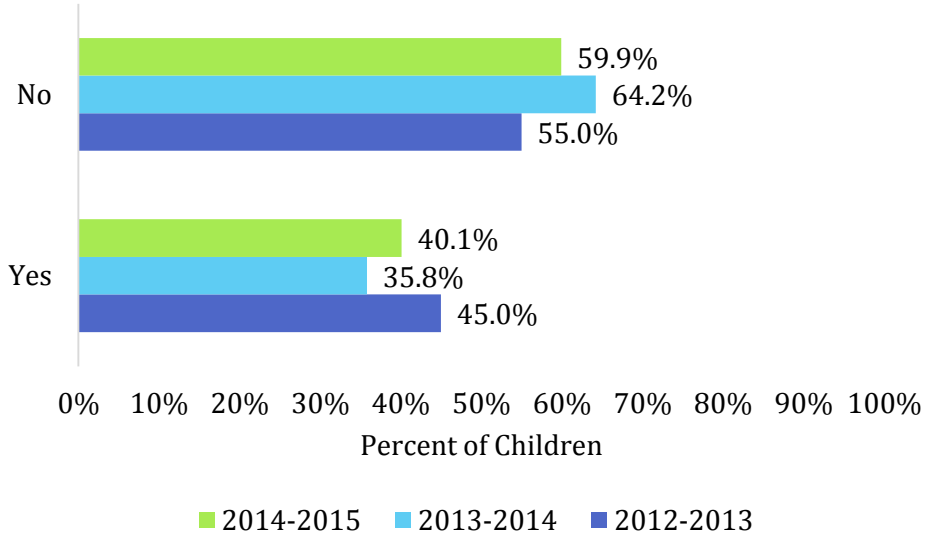


Figure 17. Imagination Library: Child was Enrolled in Preschool

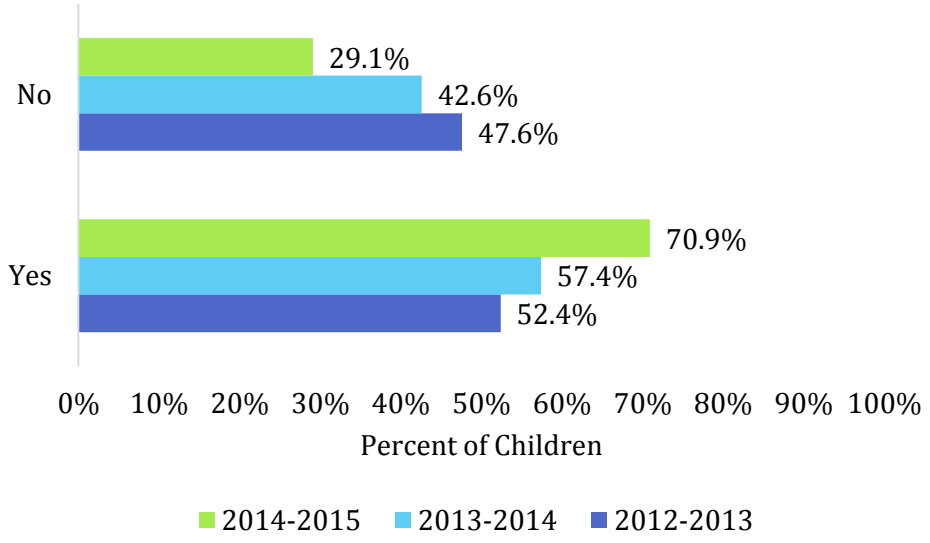


Figure 18. Imagination Library: Child was Retained in Kindergarten

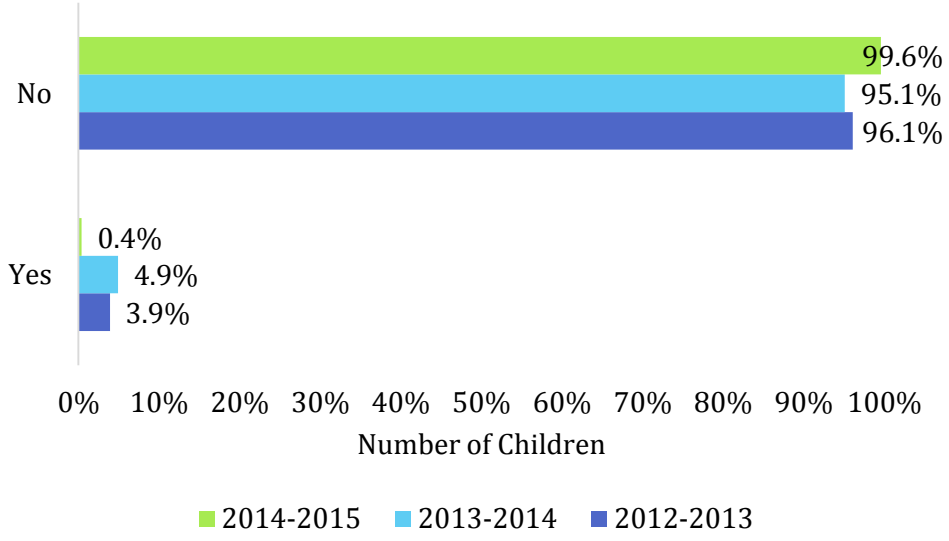
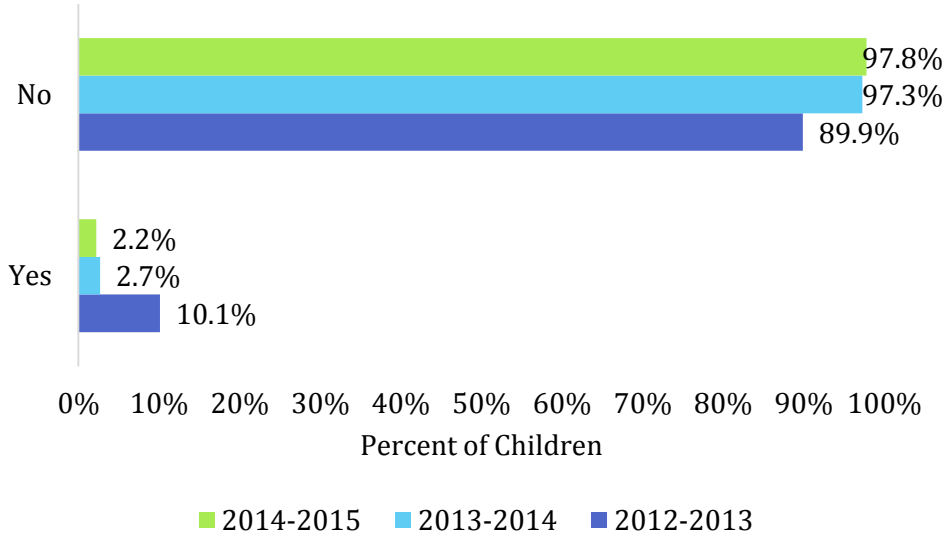


Figure 19. Imagination Library: Child Enrolled in Developmental Kindergarten



3) Demographic Characteristics that are Associated with Imagination Library Participation

The following demographic characteristics were associated with children's **participation in Imagination Library**:

- Children who were enrolled in Imagination Library were **more likely to have previously been enrolled in preschool** ($r = .15$, $p < .001$).
- Children who were enrolled in Imagination Library were **less likely to be enrolled in developmental kindergarten** ($r = -.05$, $p < .001$).
- Children who were enrolled in Imagination Library were **less likely to receive free lunch** ($r = -.07$, $p < .001$).
- Males and females were equally likely to be enrolled in Imagination Library.

The following demographic characteristics were associated with children's **length of time enrolled** in Imagination Library:

- Children who were enrolled in Imagination Library longer were **more likely to have previously been enrolled in preschool** ($r = .04$, $p < .05$)
- Children who were enrolled in Imagination Library longer were **less likely to be enrolled in developmental kindergarten** ($r = -.06$, $p < .01$)
- Children who were enrolled in Imagination Library longer were **less likely to receive free lunch** ($r = -.16$, $p < .001$).
- There was no relationship between child gender and the length of time a child was enrolled in IL.

Imagination Library: How Does Participation Relate to Children's Early Literacy Scores?

The purpose of the following analyses was to examine differences in children's PALS literacy scores between children who were and were not enrolled in Imagination Library in Jackson County from 2012-2015. A summary of findings is as follows:

- On average, children who were enrolled in Imagination Library **performed better** than children who were not enrolled in Imagination Library on the PALS composite and all of the PALS subtests (see Figure 20and Table 3). The effect size between these two groups is *d* = .07, considered a small effect size.

Finally, analyses were conducted to see if Imagination Library participation and dosage (length of time in the program) was associated with children's PALS scores, even after accounting for other important factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, etc. A summary of findings is as follows:

- Even when controlling for other factors such as gender, preschool experience, and family SES, **participation in the Imagination Library program was associated with higher scores PALS scores** (See Table 4).
- Children who participated in Imagination Library **longer had significantly higher PALS scores**, even when accounting for other important demographic factors (See Table 5 and Figure 21). The effect size between the group enrolled from 0-20 months and the group enrolled from 48-60 months was *d* = .23, considered a small effect size.

Figure 20. Mean PALS Scores for Children Enrolled and Not Enrolled in Imagination Library in 2012-2015 (Total *N* = 5631)

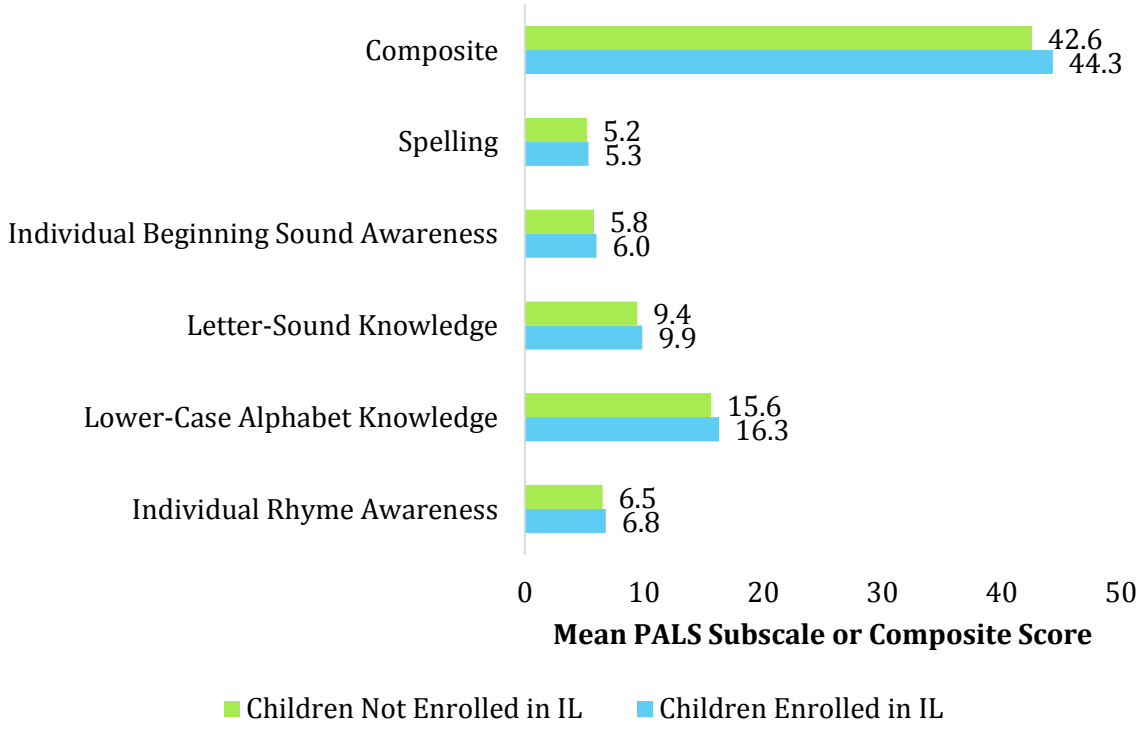


Table 3. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range of PALS Scores for Children Enrolled and Not Enrolled in Imagination Library in 2012-2015 (Total *N* = 5631)

	Children Not Enrolled in IL			Children Enrolled in IL		
	M	*SD*	*Range*	*M*	*SD*	*Range*
Rhyme Awareness	6.53	2.99	0-14	6.8	2.94	0-10
Lower-Case Alphabet Knowledge	15.62	8.65	0-26	16.29	8.34	0-26
Letter-Sound Knowledge	9.42	8.03	0-26	9.86	7.89	0-26
Beginning Sound Awareness	5.79	3.58	0-19	6.01	3.59	0-20
Spelling	5.21	5.72	0-20	5.34	5.63	0-20
Composite	42.55	25.13	0-92	44.28	24.49	0-92

Note. Data are for all kindergarten children enrolled and not enrolled in Imagination Library in Jackson County during years 2012-2015.

Imagination Library Enrollment as a Predictor of PALS Scores

To test the contribution of Imagination Library participation to children's overall composite score on the PALS, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted.

The results demonstrate that even after controlling for child gender, ethnicity, free lunch status, preschool experience, and enrollment in developmental kindergarten and special education, children who are enrolled in Imagination Library receive better PALS composite scores than their non-Imagination Library peers ($\beta = .04$, $p < .01$). Enrollment in Imagination Library, together with other variables, accounts for 8% of the variance in children's PALS composite scores ($R^2 = .08$).

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression for Imagination Library (IL) Predicting PALS Composite Scores

		B	*SEB*	*B*
Step 1				
	Gender	-2.33	0.68	-0.05**
	Ethnicity	-8.32	0.83	-0.14***
	Free Lunch	-5.00	0.69	-0.10***
Step 2				
	Preschool	0.35	0.69	0.01
	Dev. Kindergarten	20.02	1.33	0.21***
	Special Ed.	-8.16	1.52	-0.07***
Step 3				
	Enrolled in IL	1.79	0.68	0.04**
	Adjusted R^2	.08		
	F for change in R^2	62.68***		

Note. *p< .05, ** p < .01, ***p < .001.
Ethnicity variable: White = 1, all other = 2.

Imagination Library (IL) Length of Enrollment as a Predictor of PALS Scores

To test the contribution of the length of time a child is enrolled in Imagination Library to children's overall composite score on the PALS, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted.

As with the analyses that examine whether or not a child participates in Imagination Library, these results also demonstrate that even after controlling for other important demographic factors, the longer children are enrolled in Imagination Library, the better

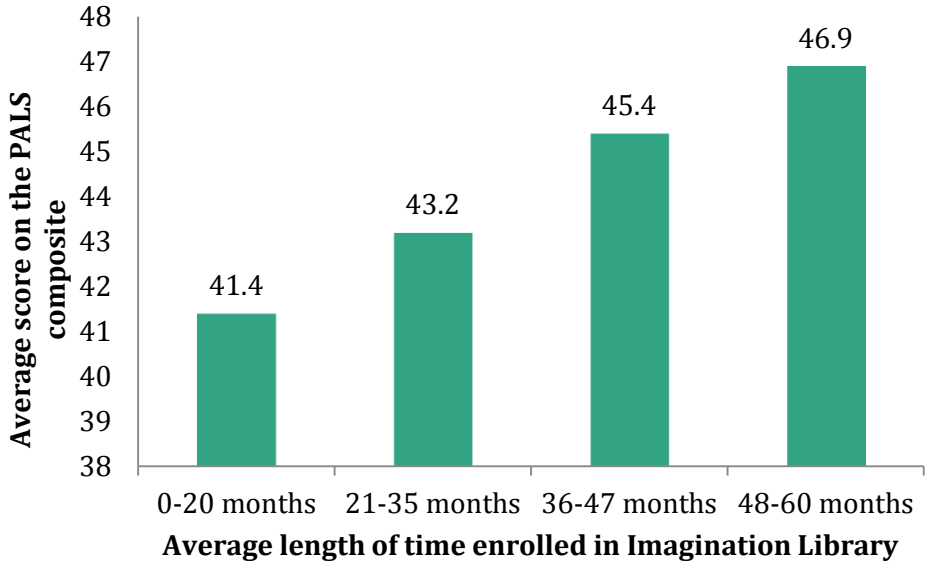
their PALS composite scores (β = .07, p <.001). Length of time enrolled in Imagination Library, combined with the other variables, accounts for 9% of the variance in children's PALS composite scores (R^2 = .09).

Table 5. Hierarchical Regression for Length of Time in Imagination Library Predicting PALS Composite Scores

		B	*SEB*	*B*
Step 1				
	Gender	-3.48	1.01	-0.07***
	Ethnicity	-6.26	1.21	-0.11***
	Free Lunch	-6.28	1.05	-0.13***
Step 2				
	Preschool	-0.92	1.06	-.02
	Dev. Kindergarten	19.64	2.29	0.18***
	Special Ed.	-14.22	2.39	-0.12***
Step 3				
	Number Months in IL	.10	0.03	0.07***
	Adjusted R^2	.09		
	F for change in R^2	30.99***		

Note. *p< .05, ** p < .01, ***p < .001

Figure 21. Average Score on PALS by Length of Time Enrolled in Imagination Library



Conclusions and Next Steps

Overall, findings from this study suggest that participation in Imagination Library is positively linked with children's early literacy skills. These associations were evident even when considering other important factors such as child gender, preschool experience, and free lunch status, a proxy for family socioeconomic status. Further, for children who participate in Imagination Library, the longer they are enrolled, the better their literacy outcomes. Again, these associations held true even when considering other important child and family characteristics. These findings are in line with an earlier report done on Imagination Library and associations with children's early literacy skills in Jackson County (Brophy-Herb & Lee, 2012), and the wider body of research that suggests that Imagination Library and similar programs are beneficial for children and families.

Children who are eligible for free lunch, which can be considered a proxy for lower socioeconomic status, are less likely to be enrolled in Imagination Library, and, if they are enrolled, they are enrolled for less time than their peers who do not receive free lunch. The negative relationship between lower income and participation in Imagination Library was also found in earlier analyses of the program. Boys and girls were equally likely to participate in the program and participated in the program for similar amounts of time.

For the first time since Imagination Library was launched in 2008, the Great Start Collaborative of Jackson County has been able to gather information from families about their perspectives on the program, and the types of literacy activities that take place in the home. Results suggest that participating families enjoy the books they receive, and they report reading more frequently as a result of the program.

Imagination Library participation has a significant, positive association with children's early literacy skills at the beginning of kindergarten. While the effect sizes of this program are generally considered to be small, there is evidence that even small differences early on in school can grow over time and make a substantial impact on children's academic success throughout their schooling. Therefore, Imagination Library continues to show promise as a relatively simple, family focused intervention that can positively impact children's development of early literacy skills.

Recommendations for future directs are as follows:

- Children who are lower income are at increased risk for school difficulties compared to their peers who are higher income. However, these children are less likely to be enrolled in Imagination Library, and, if they do participate, they are enrolled for less time. Understanding barriers to participation that are associated with income status, as well as targeting outreach of the program to families who are lower income, would likely benefit these children who are more at risk.

- The longer that a child participates in Imagination Library, the better their early literacy outcomes. Recruiting children and families earlier, and keeping them in the program as long as possible, should be a priority for future implementation of the Imagination Library program.

- The addition of home activities into the data collection is very useful in understanding the experiences of families involved in the program. Future work should continue to incorporate home variables, with particular emphasis on the following:

    - What are home and family factors that influence whether or not families participate in Imagination Library? And, what influences how long families participate in Imagination Library?
    - How does participation in Imagination Library influence the home literacy activities that are most relevant to children's literacy development – such as frequency of parent-child book reading?
    - How does participation in Imagination Library influence child factors, such as the frequency that children ask to be read to, and children's motivation and interest in reading?
    - Collecting home data from both Imagination Library families and non-Imagination Library families can help to understand how participation in Imagination Library can make a difference for children and families. Important variables to consider include how families are recruited, why they choose to participate, and how participation influences parent-child activities at home.
    - Collecting data about home practices and parent beliefs both before and after participation in Imagination Library can help to provide understanding as to how being involved in the program can influence families over time.

Imagination Library Report

For

Great Start Collaborative of Jackson County

2012 - 2015

For additional information on the results of this study, please contact:

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