
READ WITH ME/LEA CONMIGO

Families In Schools

Los Angeles, California

Read With Me/Lea Conmigo, developed by Families In Schools (FIS) in partnership with the California Community Foundation and First 5 LA-Proposition 10 Commission, is a family involvement program designed to improve the early literacy skills of preschoolers and kindergartners from low-income and underserved areas of Los Angeles. The program was developed in 2001, and in just two years, has served over 23,000 students and their families from Los Angeles Unified School Local Districts, B, F, G, H, and Long Beach Unified School District.

The primary goal of Read With Me/Lea Conmigo is to increase children's early literacy skills and school readiness by developing regular family reading routines and introducing more print materials into the home. Read With Me/Lea Conmigo teachers rotate a class set of backpacks, which contain six age-appropriate books, to students and their families on a weekly basis. Participating children take the backpacks home and read with their parents. In addition, teachers organize a parent orientation and lead two family literacy events to teach parents how to read aloud to their children and how to support their children's learning at home. Each family receives a free book at the beginning and at the end of the program.

By increasing the number of parents

who read often and routinely with their children, Read With Me/Lea Conmigo hopes to instill within children a love for books that forms the foundation for a lifelong pursuit of learning. Specifically, FIS decided to implement a large-scale family literacy initiative such as this to a) provide low-income, non-English speaking homes greater access to high quality books; b) increase school readiness and standardized reading scores; c) get teachers to work with parents to increase children's early literacy skills; and d) get parents involved in their children's education at an early age by establishing regular reading routines. The communities that currently benefit from the program do not have access to large bookstores, nor do they regularly use public libraries.

The program Implementation Team consists of FIS staff and local district leaders. Families In Schools secures program funding, distributes program supplies, develops training materials, and trains participating teachers in early literacy strategies and family involvement. Local school district leaders locate program sites, assist with scheduling training sessions, monitor program implementation, and assist with the program evaluation. Participating sites provide teacher release time to attend the training sessions and participate in the program documentation and evaluation. Participating sites also integrate the program in their overall school improvement plan.

The yearly cost for Read With Me/Lea Conmigo is one million dollars. Eighteen thousand families and students from 118 different sites benefited from the program this past year. Funding for Read With Me/Lea Conmigo has been provided by public, corporate, and private sources.

Read With Me/Lea Conmigo was evaluated through a collaborative effort between an external evaluator and FIS. The external evaluation focused mainly on outcomes for students, parents, and teachers. The internal evaluation led by FIS assessed program implementation.

Students involved in the program showed significant gains in receptive and expressive language, vocabulary comprehension, and print familiarity based on individual assessments conducted in the child's primary language. Parents reported that their children have shown more interest in books and in being read to by family members. Fifty-seven percent of the families increased the number of days a week they read with their children, and 57% of the families increased the daily amount of time they spend reading with their children. The number of children's books increased in 41% of the homes.

As one parent said, "My preschooler had no interest in books before this program. Now, he begs me to read to him." A Spanish-speaking grandparent stated, "After my grandson started kindergarten, he stopped speaking Spanish, so he and I could not talk any more. Because the program has books in Spanish, I can read them to him and we are buddies again."

Teachers indicated that students' motivation to interact with books has markedly improved. Teachers also reported that the program has helped students gain early literacy skills. Eighty-six percent of teachers thought that the program helped improve student literacy skills. According to one teacher, "I have been teaching for this school district for 28 years, and this program is the best thing that has ever happened to me."

District leaders have expressed that the program is an excellent complement to their districts' efforts in early literacy and family involvement. "Read With Me/Lea Conmigo has made my teachers believers in parent involvement and the difference that it can make in student achievement," stated one district administrator. Schools and districts are now using their own funds to sustain the program in the continuing sites and to expand the program to new grade levels and sites.

Next year, FIS plans to scale up the program to serve an additional 10,000 students and families while maintaining the sites currently participating in the program.

Ruth Yoon, Executive Director
(213) 484-2870, ext. 236
ryoon@familiesinschools.org