



Home > Children's > Industry News

# American Academy of Pediatrics Backs Reading Aloud from Infancy

By Shannon Maughan | Jun 24, 2014

Though children's advocates in all arenas have long beat the drum about the importance of early literacy, today the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) makes it official. The Academy is releasing a new policy statement that recommends pediatricians and policy makers promote reading aloud to children daily, beginning in infancy.



The release of the policy statement is linked to today's broader announcement by Hillary Rodham Clinton of a new early literacy partnership of Too Small to Fail, the AAP, Scholastic, and Reach Out and Read. Clinton is speaking on the topic from the Clinton Global Initiative meeting in Denver, Colo. (Too Small to Fail is a joint initiative between the Clinton Foundation and Next Generation focused on helping parents and businesses to take action to improve the health and well-being of children up to age five.)

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This new partnership signals a coming together of several like-minded organizations with common goals that frequently collaborate or share resources and information. "Too Small to Fail facilitated the partnership between the AAP, Reach Out and Read and Scholastic to lift up the AAP's new recommendations about early literacy with the goal of getting the information out far and wide to parents," Patti Miller, director of Too Small to Fail, told *PW*. "Together, we will be working to ensure that pediatricians and parents have the information and tools they need to promote reading out loud to children every day starting in infancy."

Each of the initiative partners plays a key role. The AAP is developing a toolkit with Too Small to Fail that will contain concrete tips and information about early language and development that emphasize talking, reading, and singing to children. The kits will be made available to parents by the more than 62,000 AAP doctors nationwide.

For its part, Scholastic is giving the new initiative a boost by donating 500,000 new, age-appropriate books to Reach Out and Read, the organization that works with more than 20,000 pediatric providers to advise parents about early literacy and provide them with books.

Dr. Pamela High, who is director of Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics at Hasbro Children's Hospital in Providence, R.I., and a professor at Brown University, is the lead author of the AAP policy; Dr. Perri Klass, national medical director for Reach Out and Read, and professor of journalism and pediatrics at New York University, is contributing author. "It's important to make this statement because we have quite a lot of national data that says even though many people know about the importance of reading with their children, many aren't doing it regularly," says High. "Some [people] don't have the tools, some don't have the knowledge – and this new partnership addresses both. It puts the science into action and it's a strong, positive PSA."

According to High, it took more than five years for the statement to be finalized, as they worked through drafts and revisions with the AAP's Council on Early Childhood. Dr. Elaine Donoghue, co-chair of the Council, says of her colleague, High, "She's been working on this for a long time. It has been very thoroughly vetted, and throughout the process, reviews and comments from the committee members and other experts have been incorporated. The statement highlights something that pediatricians know, but it's nice to have it all in one place and have it be official. We hope that spotlighting it will have a greater impact."

The statement is also a call for further partnership and support at all levels, including recommending federal and state funding for children's books to be provided at pediatric visits, and that language and literacy development be integrated into pediatric medical education. "We all need to be more aware, to get out of our silos and work together as a community with librarians, teachers, childcare providers and other children's advocates," Donoghue says.

Greg Worrell, president of Scholastic Classroom and Community Group, notes that his company's long-established commitment to early childhood education and literacy made it a natural fit for the new partnership. "At Scholastic we have always held the belief that reading is the birthright of every child and that it is the door-opener to a successful and fulfilling life. It often takes an initiative like this to highlight the importance of this very basic practice. The availability of reading material is essential. In all too many families, especially low-income families, there is not a single children's book in the home."

Relieved that the hard work of crafting the policy statement is over, High says she is excited to see it finally unveiled – and on such a big stage. "We hope this will be a consciousness-raising, that people will recognize that those 15-20 minutes spent reading with a child can be the best part of the day," she says. "It's a joyful way to build child-parent relationships and set a child on the pathway to developing early literacy skills."