

One of the most important investments we can make in our early childhood system is an investment in the development of literate families. To be successful, an early childhood system that strives to support the physical and emotional well-being of children, provide them with a sense of dignity and the skills necessary to thrive must be integrated with efforts to help their parents (adult learners) be literate and effective workers, family members and citizens. Dr. Todd Risley and Dr. Betty Hart, co-authors of "Making Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children," conducted research with families that demonstrated that the more parents talked with their children, the faster the children's vocabularies grew and the higher the children's IQ test scores at age three and later. The research showed that children of well educated, talkative parents who engaged their children in more esoteric discussions heard more than 48 million words addressed to them by the time they were four years of age. Children from low-income less verbal parents heard only 13 million words by the time they were four. If we do not build the literacy skills of parents, children will continue to enter school with huge deficits in language and literacy.

Common sense tells us that children do not determine the economic status of the households in which they live; their parents do. Without literate parents who are effective in their primary roles as workers, family members, and citizens, our children will continue to live in poverty. The health care of children is also dependent on parents who can understand instructions from doctors, follow directions, identify unhealthy behaviors, and advocate for appropriate health care for their children. And finally, a parent or primary caregiver who values education enough to participate him/herself is the best role model a child can have. Research has proven that the educational aspirations of a child are directly proportionate to the educational attainment of the parents. Literate families are critical to Maine's economic and social survival.