

Family Routines and Positive Parenting Practices Help to Support Kindergarten Readiness

Pathways to Success Partnership | Shelby County Schools | The Urban Child Institute

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Three years ago Shelby County Schools (SCS) joined with The Urban Child Institute (UCI) to identify pathways through early childhood that lead to kindergarten readiness and early school success. These studies are designed to identify ways that families, neighborhoods and community groups in Memphis and Shelby County can work together to support the academic achievement of our youngest students.

In a recent analysis, the Shelby County Schools (SCS) and The Urban Child Institute (UCI) study group looked at the ways family routines and other positive parenting practices support the readiness of new kindergarten students.

Research tells us that family routines, like regular bedtime or mealtime routines, help children develop self-control and self-confidence. Family routines also help strengthen children's early language and literacy skills.¹

When it comes to these routines, it seems that more is better.

When families have a range of daily routines that involve both parents and children, those children are more likely to develop strong social and emotional skills, and reach school with more powerful language, academic, and social skills.

Last fall, we asked parents of incoming kindergarteners to tell us about their family routines.

Parents were asked how often they engaged in different types of routines with their pre-schoolers, like getting ready in the morning, getting ready for bedtime, or at mealtimes. Parents were also asked about a range of other positive parenting practices, like reading with their children, singing the alphabet, and playing counting and sorting games.

Parents' responses were then compared to their children's kindergarten readiness scores. Each fall, incoming kindergarteners in Shelby County are given a measure of reading readiness called the *Istation Early Reading* assessment,² which helps the district see if a student is performing at grade level, moderately below grade level, or severely below grade level.

For this study, we compared the *Istation Early Reading* scores of 354 new kindergarteners with information on family routines collected from their parents.

The results are telling.

When families establish and try to keep to regular routines – particularly around getting ready in the morning or getting ready for bed – their children are sig-

nificantly more likely to reach kindergarten on grade level for *Istation Early Reading*.³

This association between a bedtime routine and reading readiness is consistent with previous research that finds that a bedtime routine supports healthy physical, behavioral, and cognitive development.⁴ This research also identifies other ways that parents can support their children's school readiness.

In particular, when parents read with their children, when they talk about books with their children, and when they tell their children stories, their children are more likely to be reading ready on the *Istation* assessment.⁵

In short, language and reading development starts long before children reach school, and those families who encourage an early love of reading and stories in their infants and toddlers are setting those children on a pathway to school readiness.

These findings are good news for parents because they offer small ways that we can all support our children's school readiness.

Making a bedtime story part of a regular bedtime routine, for example, is not only fun, but it also proves to be a great way to strengthen early childhood development and kindergarten readiness.⁶

1. Boyce et al., 1983; Evans & Rogers, 2008; Flores, Tomany-Korman, & Olson, 2005; Spagnola & Fiese, 2007; Wildenger et al., 2008 | 2. Istation, 2014; Sell, Imig, & Samiei, 2014 | 3. Morning routine is significant at the $p = .001$ level. Bedtime routine is significant at the $p = .025$ level. | 4. Hale, Berger, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009 | 5. For those children who scored at grade level, parents, overall, indicated greater frequency of reading a children's book with the child ($p = .043$), greater frequency of talking about a book after reading it with his/her child, ($p = .031$), and greater frequency of telling their child stories without using books ($p = .005$). | 6. Spagnola & Fiese, 2007; Rosenkoetter & Barton, 2002



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