



Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Wayne and Holmes Counties Impact Report

Final Report



United Way of Wayne
and Holmes Counties



Produced by:

AMRE Associates

Faiyaz K. Hasan

Kyoka Oyama

Ryann Taylor

Advisors

Joan E. Furey, Ph.D.

Michelle Johnson, Ph.D.

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Introducing children to books before school age could impact their future social and academic achievements (e.g., Funge et al., 2017; Neyer et al., 2021; Waldron, 2018). However, books may not be readily available to all families with young children – due to the cost or limited access to public libraries. Book gifting programs, such as Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library (DPIL), could help these families reap the benefits of reading with their children.

Dolly Parton’s father was illiterate throughout his life, and he suffered many consequences because of it (Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library [DPIL], n.d.). After learning about the low literacy rates in her hometown and to commemorate her late father, Parton developed this program in 1995 so that children could be introduced to reading during their formative years.

Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library is now an international program that relies on community partners, such as United Way of Wayne and Holmes Counties (UWWH), to make it available to families in their region. Any child can sign up to receive one free book each month from birth until they turn 5 years old. A child who is enrolled at birth would receive 60 books from the Imagination Library. A panel of early literacy experts selects the books children receive (DPIL, n.d.).

This report is organized into several key sections. First, we will explain the purpose of this study. Next, we will highlight contextual literature for this investigation. Following that, we will provide a brief history of the program in Wayne and Holmes Counties. Then, we will describe the methods we used to collect data. Finally, we will present an analysis and interpretation of the data.

Purpose

The broad purpose of this research was to explore the impact of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Wayne and Holmes Counties. Our goal was to explore a variety of outcomes to obtain a greater understanding of the value of DPIL in these counties beyond measuring success as a function of the number of children who are enrolled. Much of the extant literature is focused on kindergarten readiness outcomes for DPIL participants (e.g., Samiei et al., 2015; Szumlas et al., 2021). While these are valuable outcomes, they are not available until the child has aged out of the program. By contrast, we framed the current research to include a wide range of items (e.g., enjoyment of reading, changes in reading behaviors). A secondary purpose was to develop a "Tool Kit" that other comparably-sized organizations could use to measure the impact of DPIL in their communities.

Literature Review

The upcoming sections will explore past literature on book gifting programs, socioeconomic status's impact on language development, shared book reading practices, and the effects of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. Finally, it will discuss DPIL in Wayne and Holmes Counties.

Book Gifting Programs

There are two well-studied, book gifting programs designed to enhance children's early literacy experiences: DPIL (DPIL, n.d.) and Reach Out and Read (Reach Out and Read, n.d.). A key distinction between these two programs is that the child's medical provider distributes the books in ROR and educates the parents about best practices. As such, the results from ROR investigations are not directly applicable to the current

investigation and will not be reviewed in this report. However, an interested reader could refer to Uthirasamy et al. (2022). Given that the foundation for the development of literate language is oral language, we want to provide a brief overview of how socioeconomic status impacts language development, with a focus on vocabulary development.

Socioeconomic Status and Language Development

The literature is replete with examples of differences in language development as a function of socioeconomic status (SES). These differences are important because, as Tough (1982) argued, language “is the major means through which most other objectives for the child’s education will be reached” (p. 13). Rather than describing this research in detail, we want to describe one pattern briefly. For more information, an interested reader could refer to Kelly’s (2010) review of the literature on this topic.

Researchers have consistently documented a pattern of reduced vocabulary development for children from low-income families relative to their peers from more affluent families (e.g., Arriaga et al., 1998; Furey, 2011; Hart & Risley, 1995; Smith et al., 1995; Whitehurst, 1997). In what is arguably the most cited of these investigations, Hart and Risley (1995) discovered two important patterns in the vocabularies of children from different SES levels (i.e., welfare, working-class, and professional). First, they calculated the children’s cumulative vocabulary exposure, and found “an average child in a professional family would have accumulated experience with almost 45 million words, an average child in a working-class family would have accumulated experience with 26 million words, and an average child in a welfare family would have accumulated experience with 13 million words” (p. 198). This discrepancy between the highest and

lowest SES levels is the “30 million word gap.” In addition to exposure differences, they reported that by 36 months of age, children in professional families and children in welfare families had spoken vocabularies of approximately 1100 and 500 words, respectively.

In an effort to explore whether the vocabulary production differences that Hart and Risley (1995) documented persisted into elementary school, Walker et al. (1994) administered several standardized language measures to the children. The relationship between 36-month productive vocabulary and 1st grade performance on a receptive vocabulary measure (i.e., *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test - Revised*, Dunn & Dunn, 1981) was strong (i.e., $r = .74$). By 3rd grade, the relationship between these two measures became moderate (i.e., $r = .48$). The researchers also reported significant correlations between 36-month vocabulary and performance on the *Test of Language Development – 2: Intermediate* (Hammill & Newcomer, 1988) in 1st and 3rd grades ($r = .64$ and $r = .72$, respectively). Given the persistence of these vocabulary differences, it is worth exploring how books may contribute to the development of both children’s vocabularies and other skills that serve as the foundation for later literacy development (i.e., emergent literacy skills).

Shared Book Reading

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends “reading books to children from birth” (Pediatrics, 2014, as cited in Horowitz-Kraus et al., 2024). Shared book reading can be used to foster a variety of emergent literacy skills (van Kleeck, 2006a). These include: phonological awareness (Price & Ruscher, 2006); print awareness (McGinty et al., 2006); letter knowledge (van Kleeck, 2006c); early language (Huebner,

2006); inferential language (van Kleeck, 2006b); narrative and grammatical skills (Finestack et al., 2006); and vocabulary (Hindman & Wasik, 2006).

Logan and colleagues (2019) explored the impact of reading books to children on the numbers of words that they hear. Their calculations revealed that children who are read to infrequently hear “only 4662 words through book reading by kindergarten entry compared with 296,660 words if read 1 book each day and 1.5 million words if read multiple books per day” (p. 385).

Shared book reading has been the focus of several investigations (e.g., Hutton et al., 2022; Kucirkova & Grover, 2024). In addition, researchers have examined varied outcomes from students who participated in DPIL. These investigations can be broadly classified into those which include school-age outcome measures, and those which target other aspects of the program. We will review these topics in the sections that follow.

DPIL and School-Age Outcomes

Ridzi and colleagues (2017) explored the relationship between children’s participation in DPIL and kindergarten readiness. They found that 61% of children who had been enrolled in DPIL for three or more years were “ready for kindergarten” as evidenced by their performance on a “letter naming fluency task” compared to 47% of children who had not participated.

Harvey (2018) compared the kindergarten, first, and second grade *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (DIBELS, Good & Kaminski, 2002) performance of 20 students who had been enrolled in DPIL to that of 20 students who had not been enrolled in DPIL. Enrolled students outperformed the non-enrolled students on the

Nonsense Word Fluency subtest of the DIBELS at three points: midyear in kindergarten, and both at the beginning and middle of first grade. As Harvey (2018) explained, “the IL participants were better able to apply phonics rules significantly better than nonparticipants” (p. 37).

Skibbe and Foster (2019) compared the *Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening – Kindergarten* (PALS-K, Invernizzi et al., 2004/2005) scores of children who had been enrolled in DPIL to those of their peers who had not been enrolled in DPIL. The DPIL children scored significantly higher on five of the subtasks, including: “composite, rhyme awareness, lower-case alphabet knowledge, letter-sound knowledge, and beginning sound awareness” (p. 357). By contrast, Thompson et al. (2017) found that students who had participated “in IL did not differ from non-IL matched students on PALS-K emergent literacy scores” (p. 33) or “on teacher-rated social-emotional school readiness constructs” (p. 33).

Other DPIL Effects

There are research teams studying the impact of DPIL where it is available across the world. We did not feel that the results from our U.S. sample would readily compare to data gathered in international contexts. Therefore, we elected not to review research conducted in Australia (e.g., Galea et al., 2024) or the UK (e.g., Tura et al., 2023).

Funge et al. (2017) explored 100 parents' perceptions of the DPIL program using a 42-question survey instrument. The mean parent ratings for seven items that measured “how their child had responded to reading (e.g., interest, enthusiasm, and comprehension)” (p. 606) all exceeded 4 (i.e., “Agree”) on a 5-point Likert scale. In

addition, “parents reported a significant increase in their time spent reading together and visiting the public library with their child as a result of their child’s participation in the DPIL program” (p. 609).

Neyer and colleagues (2021) explored the “social and emotional benefits of home literacy activities” (p. 65) through interviews of 17 families enrolled in DPIL. Four themes emerged from interviews they conducted: “benefits extend beyond the enrolled child; pride in ownership of books; families connect books with learning; and DPIL books build family routines” (p. 66).

Ridzi et al. (2014) distributed a 12-item survey instrument to DPIL participants when the program had been running in that community for 10 months. The authors divided their sample into two groups at the four-month mark, which enabled them to explore whether or not responses varied as a function of their length of program enrollment. There were significant differences between the two groups in response to reporting daily reading and “How often do you talk about the story and ask your child questions about the story?” For both items, participants who had been enrolled for a longer duration reported engaging in these behaviors significantly more than participants who had been enrolled for up to four months.

Prahl (2023) also used survey methodology to explore a variety of DPIL effects. Eighty five percent of their sample ($N = 149$) reported that they were “very satisfied” with the IL program. Most participants (72%) reported an increase in the “child’s level of excitement about books or reading ... since enrolling in IL” (p. 904), and that they read more frequently following IL enrollment (71%). Almost half of their participants (47%) reported “I didn’t know about the reading tips.”

As part of a longitudinal investigation of DPIL participation outcomes, Anderson and colleagues reported baseline data (2018) and year one outcome data (2019). They found significant differences from baseline for four variables in year one: “read every day in past week”; “child asks to be read to”; “asked about words or letters on the page”; and “asked child to read along” (p. 95). Interestingly, the final two items reflect shared book reading behaviors that may align with the “parent book flap suggestions” (2019, p. 97). However, “24% of parents reported not knowing about the parent suggestions in the back of the book, and another 19% indicated that they did not use them” (2019, p. 97).

We considered the aforementioned research as we developed this investigation. Before describing our methodology, we will provide a brief overview of the local history of DPIL.

DPIL in Wayne and Holmes Counties

Locally, DPIL was available in Orrville, Ohio beginning in 2009 (Orville Area United Way, n.d.). This program served the residents of Orrville for more than a decade. When Katie Kogelman became the CEO of UWWH, one of her goals was to expand access to the program. The program started in Holmes County in the fall of 2019. Shortly after acquiring the Orrville program in early 2020, UWWH was able to make the program available to all eligible residents in Wayne County, as well. At the time of this report, the cost to provide one child with books for a year was approximately \$26 in Wayne and Holmes Counties. There were approximately 5,550 children enrolled in the program locally.

Although one United Way organization serves both counties, Wayne and Holmes counties are not directly comparable (Data USA, n.d.-a; Data USA, n.d.-b). The population of Holmes County is 40% smaller than that of Wayne County. Both counties have comparable poverty rates of 9%. One substantial difference between the two counties is the large Amish population in Holmes County. Holmes has the highest density of Amish in the world (“Holmes County, Ohio,” 2024). Lancaster, PA has more Amish people, but they make up about 10% of the population while the Amish in Holmes County account for almost half of the population (Wesner, 2020). Most Amish communities end formal schooling after the eighth grade, and many do not use the internet due to their religious beliefs.

Methodology

In the two sections that follow, we explain the methodology we used in this project. The first section describes how we conducted the focus groups, and the second section explains the development of the survey instrument.

Focus Groups

As a first step in carrying out this study, we completed two focus groups with parents who had children enrolled in the DPIL program. Our focus-group questions pertained to the most common themes we had identified in the literature. The two primary themes were that of enjoyment and use of DPIL, and our questions addressed book delivery day habits, reading habits, child’s vocabulary development, and the child’s book collection.

Prior to conducting the actual focus groups, we ran one 30-minute practice focus group. Our faculty advisors recruited four participants who had a connection to the DPIL

program. Three of these participants were mothers, and one was a grandmother. After completing the practice focus group, participants provided us with feedback on both the questions and procedures. In response to that feedback, we modified the question sequence and generated 3-4 follow-up questions for each of the primary questions. The complete set of questions (initial and potential follow-up ideas) is provided in Appendix A.

We obtained approval from the Human Subjects Research Committee (HSRC) at The College of Wooster prior to conducting the actual focus groups at the UWWH office. UWWH recruited participants via email (see Appendix B for the recruitment message). UWWH selected nine caregivers who participated in one of two hour-long focus groups. At the start of each focus group, we gave each participant two copies of the consent form (see Appendix C) and explained the components included in it. We gave them time to read through it, and then we collected the signed copy of the consent form before we began to audio record the focus groups. We initially transcribed the recordings using Open AI software, namely Otter.ai. Then we went through the transcripts ourselves to ensure that there were no grammatical, spelling, or formatting errors. We then read through the transcripts to identify quotes from the participants that could be used as testimonials.

The first focus group consisted of five mothers, each of whom had at least one child currently enrolled in the program. The facilitators posed the questions and after hearing initial responses, they asked for specific examples. We then repeated the same questions for the second focus group, which included two fathers and two mothers.

They also had at least one child currently enrolled in the program. We described the participants' responses in the Results section pertaining to focus groups.

We used the data we collected from these focus groups to both develop new survey questions (e.g., *Participating in the Imagination Library program exposes my child/children to books that we might not have selected (e.g., borrowed from library or purchased)*) and modify the language within the draft survey (e.g., we edited response options). In the section that follows, we will describe the development of the survey instrument.

Surveys

We constructed the survey using research on DPIL and book gifting programs, DPIL impact reports from Cuyahoga and Lorain Counties, and the focus groups we conducted. The final survey instrument included 38 items that measured: program perception, enjoyment of books/reading, reading habits, learning from books, access to books, and demographics (see Appendix D).

The program perception section included five items. For example, we asked the respondents to indicate their overall level of satisfaction with DPIL. In the enjoyment section, there were four statements pertaining to the enjoyment of books and reading for different household members. An example of one statement is, *"I enjoy reading and looking at Imagination Library books."* The reading habits section included six items. We asked about the frequency of reading in the household by asking questions such as, *In the last 7 days, how many times have you or another adult read to your child?* The learning from books section included five questions, such as *"Imagination Library books spark conversations that would not have happened without these books."* The access to

books section of the survey included statements ranging from their use of the public library or bookmobile to how enrolling in DPIL has shaped their home library. For example, *It is important that my child/children interact with physical books.*

The survey also included demographic questions that we presented in two blocks. The first block of demographic items ($n = 7$) was at the beginning of the survey to establish important information about where the participants resided and who was enrolled in the program. For example, they reported the size of their household and where they learned about DPIL. A second block of more sensitive demographic items ($n = 4$) appeared at the end of the survey. These questions included education level, employment status, qualifications for federal assistance, and household income.

Given that we adapted questions from a variety of sources, we included a complete survey instrument in Appendix E that uses superscript numbers to indicate sources. It is important to note that this copy of the survey does not include the consent block, which was the first question on the electronic survey (see Appendix F) or a separate form in the paper survey (see Appendix G).

Prior to distributing the survey instrument to DPIL enrollees in Wayne and Holmes Counties, the Human Subjects Research Committee at The College of Wooster approved the protocol. UWWH mailed 322 paper surveys on June 4, 2024, with a letter inviting them to participate (see Appendix H), a consent document (see Appendix G), the survey instrument (see Appendix D), and a UWWH-addressed, stamped envelope for ease of return. We received 37 completed paper surveys by June 17, 2024, for a response rate of 11.5%. Two days later, UWWH sent a recruitment message via email including a link to the survey to 2,726 families (see Appendix I). Approximately one

week later, the UWWH sent a follow-up message reminding participants that the survey link was still active. As of midday on June 17, 2024, we had 326 completed electronic surveys for a response rate of 11.9%.

Results and Discussion

In the following sections, we will report and discuss the results we obtained from our study. First, the focus group results are presented followed by a discussion on how we used survey responses to make income categories. Then, we provide descriptive and inferential statistics for the survey data. Finally, a synthesis of the open-ended responses from the survey provided.

Focus Group Results

Nine caregivers (five mothers and two fathers) provided responses to the questions we posed during two focus groups. We transcribed both hour-long focus groups and we identified four main themes in their answers: Book delivery day, Reading habits, Child(ren)'s vocabulary, and DPIL book collection. We have described each of the themes with examples from the transcripts in the paragraphs that follow.

For book delivery day, most of the responses revolved around excitement and ownership. The participants mentioned how excited their child(ren) is for the books. They also mentioned the importance of having the books mailed to the child(ren) as it gives the child(ren) a sense of ownership and agency. For example, a participant in the first focus group said, "they love the books, like we get them, and they're like, open it, open it."

Pertaining to reading habits, the participants' responses were primarily regarding family bonding and engagement with books. They mentioned that the periodical (i.e.,

monthly) arrival of books reminded them to read to their child(ren); thus, DPIL helped them build reading routines in the house and spend time on family bonding. For example, a father from Wayne County mentioned in the second focus group:

It's kind of in your face, in a good way, ... like, hey, do this with your kid. ... it's almost a signal every month to ... sit with your kid. And this is a good thing to do. ... It's kind of just a reminder.

In addition, they also said that the presence of DPIL books in the homes reminded them to read. One father explained how they would leave DPIL books in the living room as a visible reminder to read.

Building off engagement with books, the participants also talked about development in their child(ren)'s vocabulary. They mentioned seeing their child(ren)'s vocabulary expand after enrolling in DPIL. When we asked for specific examples, they mentioned that their child(ren) made real world associations for objects they had seen in the DPIL books. For example, a participant mentioned in the first focus group, "My son knows, like every single vehicle in that book. ... He will open that book and [say] school bus, train, plane, boat, ship. ... I'm like, you didn't know any of these words before we started reading this book." That parent also said, "he'll see like a tractor. He'll be like, it's a green tractor. ... see a fire truck away [and say] that's a fire truck. ... when he sees them, he's like, he recognizes them."

Finally, the participants talked about the enhancement of their child(ren)'s book collection due to the addition of DPIL books. The caregivers mentioned that DPIL books added volume, diversity, and quality to their child(ren)'s personal library. When we asked if they also enjoy the books, they overwhelmingly said "yes". Caregivers'

enjoyment of the books is a secondary benefit of DPIL. For example, a participant mentioned in the first focus group:

It's a completely wide variety of different kinds of books that you could ... potentially have your kid get interested. Like they just sent out that homebuilders with the forest ... And the bird book. So like if they haven't really been interested in that before maybe as they get older, they'll read that more and then they'll be like, ... let's go look for birds ... and see where people build their homes where the animals build their homes in the forest, ... and that couldn't have been a topic of conversation for them at all without having that book. And if that's not the type of books that you're into, ... you wouldn't have picked it up otherwise.

Survey Results

In the sections that follow, we explain the process we used to analyze the survey data. We begin by explaining how we classified participants into income categories, and then we describe demographic characteristics of the sample. We present the descriptive statistics for the survey items, and then we explore both differences and relationships among variables.

Income Categories

We were interested in exploring how responses to survey items varied as a function of income. In particular, we were interested in whether there were differential effects for families in poverty and ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) families. In order to isolate the impact of DPIL on those families, we used family size, household income, the Federal Poverty Thresholds, employment status, and qualification for government assistance to classify participants as poverty, potential

ALICE, or neither.

For the poverty classification, we used the 2023 Federal Poverty Thresholds (United States Census Bureau [USCB], 2024). These values vary as a function of the size of the family and number of dependent children under 18 years of age. For example, the Federal Poverty Threshold for a family with two adults and two children is \$30,900 (USCB, 2024). We looked at each participant's family size and compared the income category they selected with the Federal Poverty Thresholds. If they selected an income category which either included or was lower than the applicable federal poverty threshold, we coded them as in poverty. For example, if the aforementioned family (two-adults, two-children) selected an annual household income of \$25,000-\$34,999, we classified them as in poverty. Given that many of the poverty threshold values fall within one of the survey categories – as is the case for our example – we recognize that this is an imperfect classification.

After we identified the families in poverty, we used nested logic in Microsoft Excel to identify all participants who could be categorized as potentially ALICE. We used four criteria to identify the potential ALICE families: 1) we had not classified them as in poverty, 2) participants selected “yes” for “one adult is employed full-time,” 3) they selected “no” for “we qualify for government assistance,” and 4) they selected an income category lower than \$75,000 - \$84,999. We chose this income range because it captures the median income for both counties in our study. For 2022, the median income for Holmes County was \$72,987 and for Wayne County \$70,320 (USCB, n.d.-a; USCB, n.d.-b). Finally, we added a “neither” code for all participants we had not categorized as in poverty or potential ALICE. We were unable to classify 33 participants

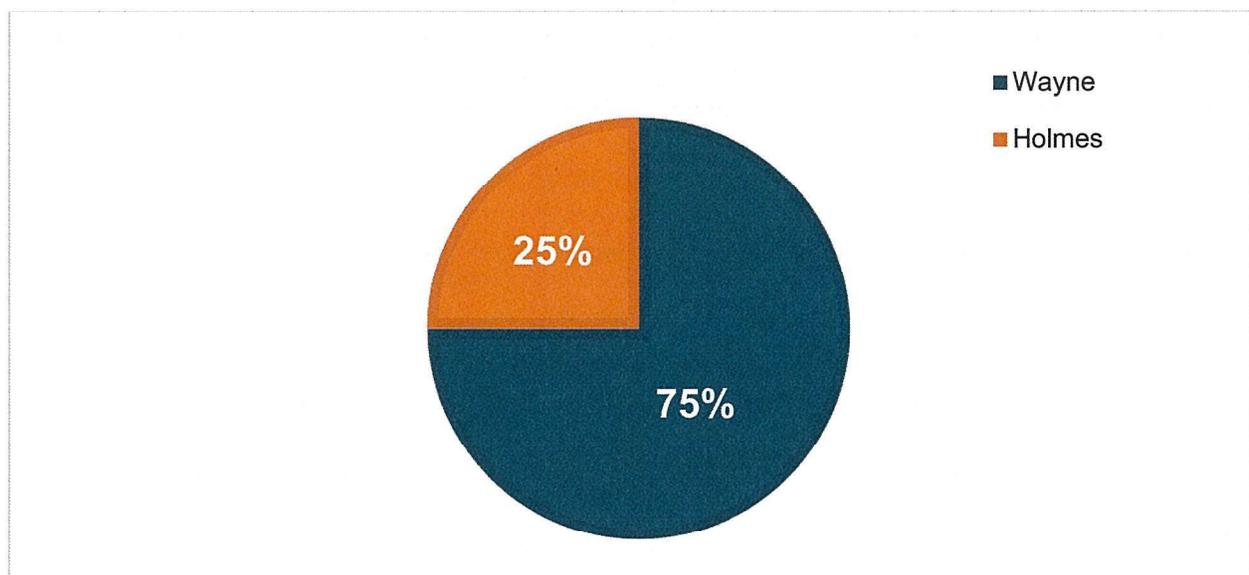
because they did not report either their income or the number of children in their home. In total, we coded 50 participants in poverty, 86 participants as potential ALICE, and 194 participants as neither of the aforementioned categories.

Demographics

Participants responded to a series of demographic questions which helped us identify who was taking the survey and the different types of populations represented within the sample. First, they indicated which county they resided in. The results showed that 75% of the participants were from Wayne County which mirrors the overall enrollment numbers (see Figure 1). At the time of this report, about 5,550 children were enrolled in DPIL. Approximately 4,000 (72%) children enrolled were in Wayne County and 1,550 (28%) children were in Holmes County.

Figure 1

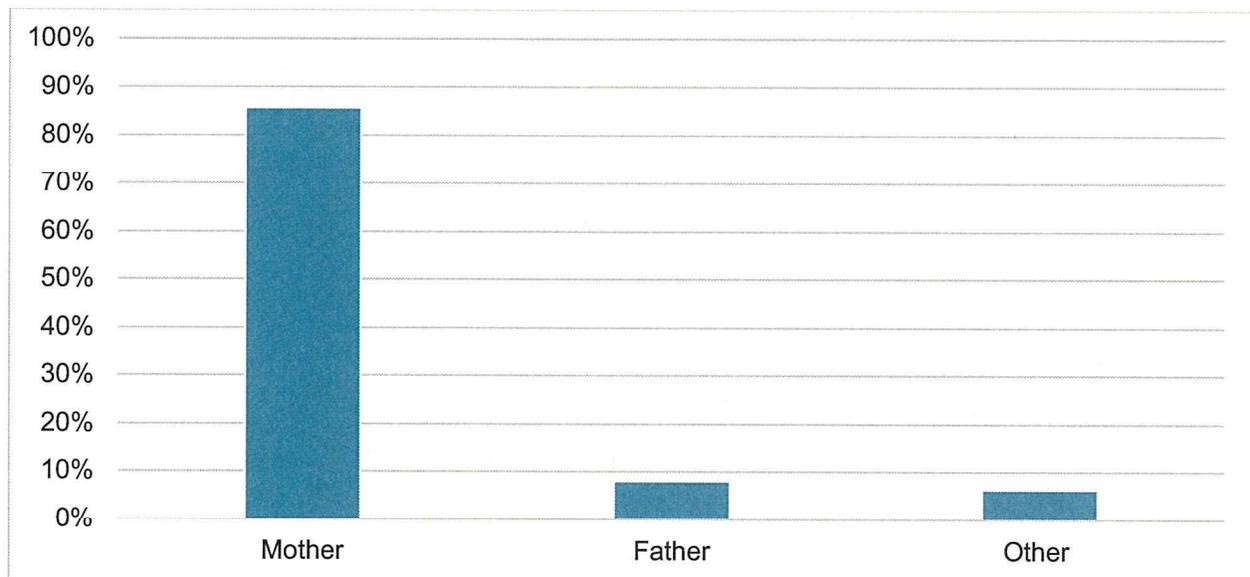
What county do you live in? (N = 363)



Participants next indicated what their relationship was to the child/children was enrolled in the Imagination Library. They were given the options of “Father,” “Mother,” and “Other, please specify.” The results are depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2

What is your relationship to the child/children enrolled in Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library? (N = 360)



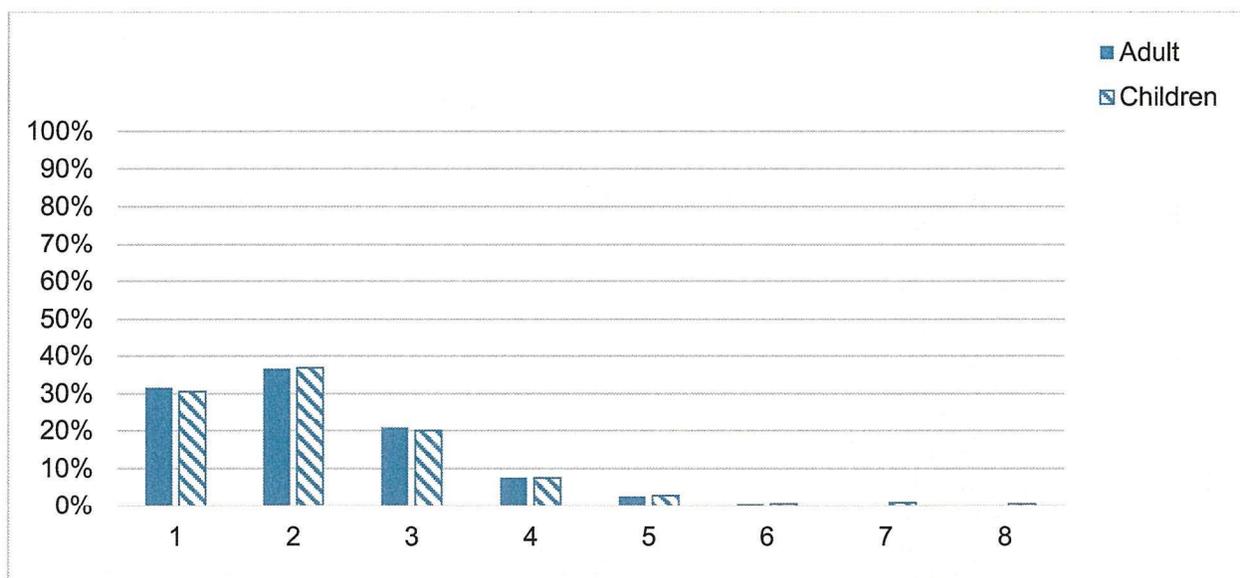
Respondents reported how many adults and how many children under the age of 18 lived in their households. The results for both questions are graphed in Figure 3. It is important to note that this graph does not represent family structures. Rather, it indicates the percentage of households with a particular number of adults or children without indicating the household composition.

Next, participants reported how many of their children under 5 years of age were in the IL program. The response options included “1 child” through “5 children” and “more than 5.” The majority of responses were “1 child” (see Figure 4).

Following this question, we asked participants to report the ages of the child/children in the IL program. The answer choices ranged from “Less than 1 year” up to “4 years.” The responses are graphed in Figure 5.

Figure 3

How many people live in your house? ($N_{Adult} = 363$) ($N_{Children} = 356$)

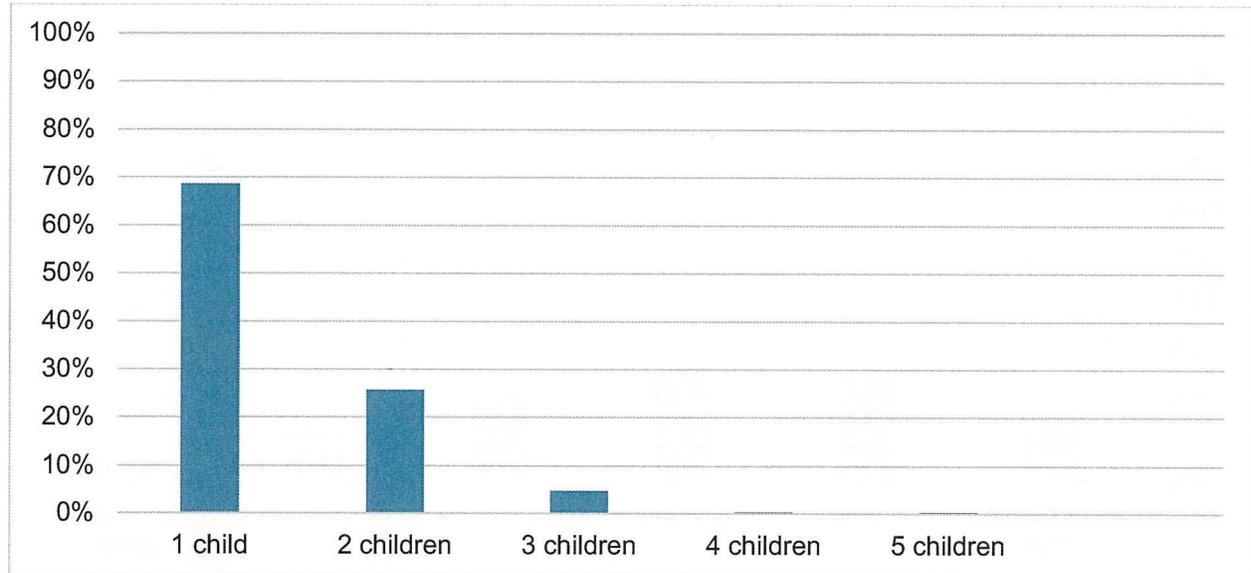


Participants reported how long the child/children had been enrolled in the IL program using response options that ranged from “Less than 1 year” to “More than 4 years.” The survey language invited participants to select all that applied (see Figure 6).

Participants indicated how they learned about DPIL. The survey included 17 response options, one of which was “Other, please specify.” We included options based on conversations with UWWH staff about where they advertised the program. The top three responses were “Word-of-mouth,” “Hospital,” and “Social media.” All of the responses are graphed in Figure 7.

Figure 4

How many of your children under 5 years of age are currently enrolled in the Imagination Library? (N = 361)



Note. None of the participants selected “more than 5”.

Figure 5

What are the ages of the children currently enrolled in the Imagination Library? Select all that apply. (N = 492)

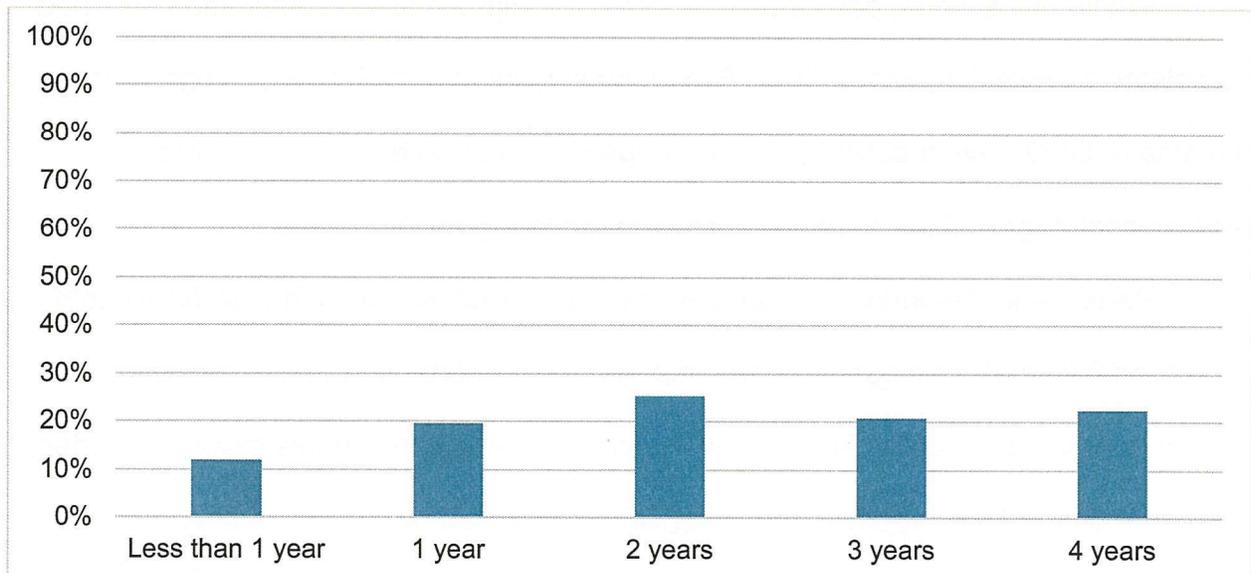
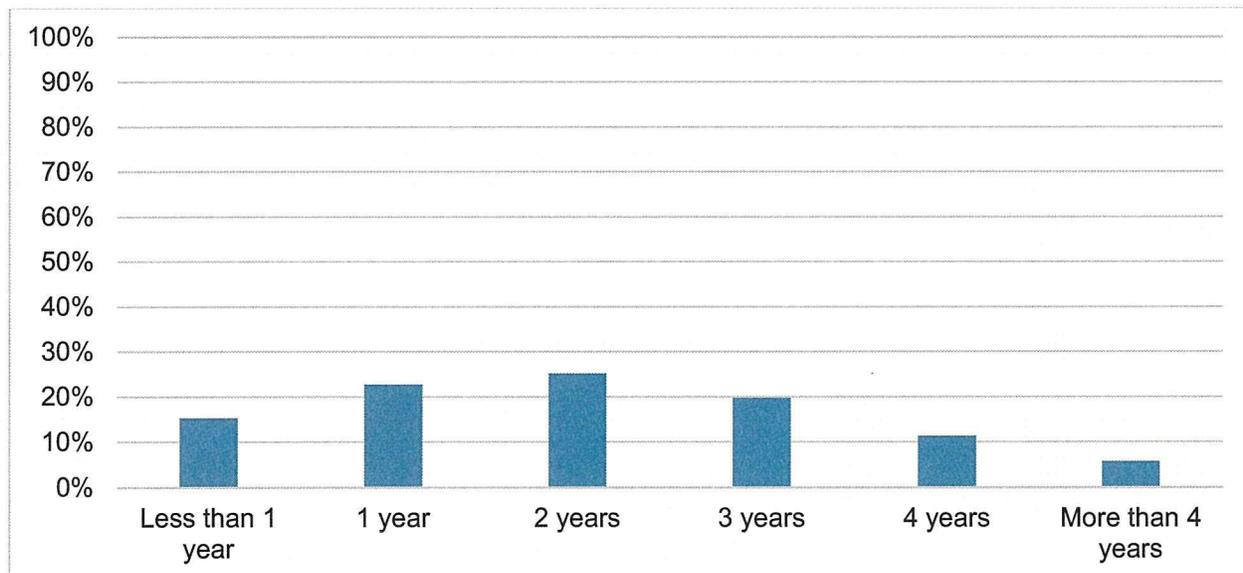


Figure 6

*How many years has your child/children been enrolled in the Imagination Library?
Select all that apply. (N = 440)*



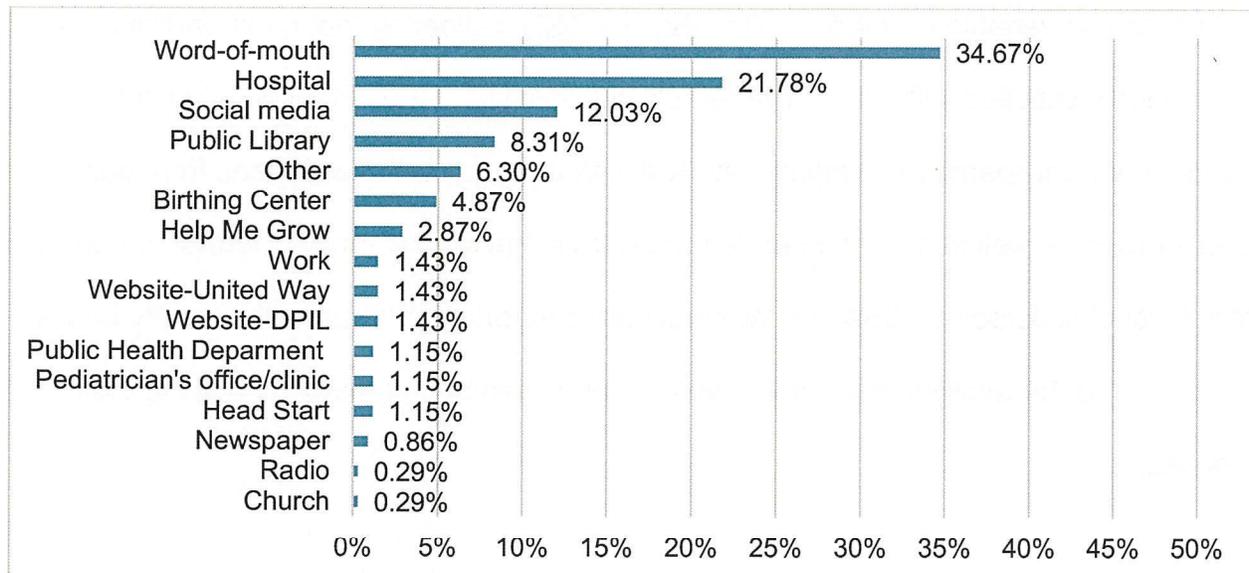
We included four additional demographic questions at the end of the survey due to their more sensitive nature. There was a block of text explaining why we included these questions. The response rates for these questions are lower than that of others.

Within this section, participants reported the highest level of education they had completed by selecting one of these five options: Less than high school, High school diploma or GED, 2-year college degree, 4-year college degree, and Graduate or professional degree. The responses are graphed in Figure 8.

Participants responded to the question, *Is at least one adult in your household employed full time?* This question was important for ascertaining which families could be categorized as potential ALICE. The majority of participants in this sample reported “yes” ($n = 341, 93.9\%$) and the remaining subset reported no ($n = 20, 5.5\%$). Two participants (.6%) did not respond to this question.

Figure 7

Where did you learn about Dolly Parton's Imagination Library? (N = 349)



Note. Less than 5% of the sample for either county selected: Church, Head Start, Newspaper, Pediatrician's office/clinic, Public Health, QR code in a book in a waiting room, Radio, Website – Imagination Library, Website - United Way, Work. In response to "Other," three people referred to Amish health and safety days, three people noted learning about DPIL at a school, and two indicated that they were unsure and there were no duplicates among the remaining responses (see Appendix J for entire list of responses).

Next, participants reported whether or not their family qualified for government assistance with examples of assistance programs (e.g., WIC, free or reduced lunch, SNAP, TANF). Most of the participants selected no ($n = 291$, 80.2%), with 65 (17.9%) selecting "yes" and 7 (1.9%) not responding to the question.

Finally, participants reported their annual household income. The response options ranged from "Less than \$25,000" to "More than \$85,000" with increments of \$10,000 in between. The results are graphed in Figure 9.

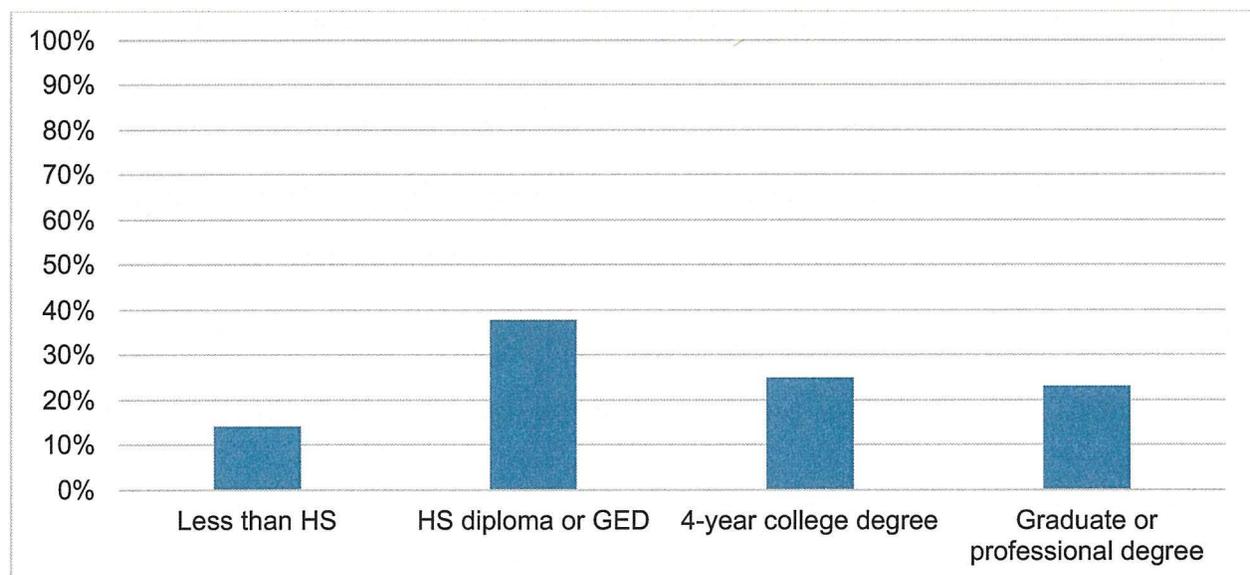
Program Perception

We asked participants to rate their overall level of satisfaction with the DPIL program (cf. Prael, 2023). They responded using a five-point Likert scale where 1 represented "Very

Dissatisfied,” 2 represented “Dissatisfied,” 3 represented “Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied,” 4 represented “Satisfied,” and 5 represented “Very Satisfied.” The mean rating for this variable was 4.53 ($SD = .82$, $N = 362$), indicating that most participants were highly satisfied with DPIL. The results are consistent with Prah (2023) who also found that participants were highly satisfied with the program. Responses from our focus group as well as the open-ended answers in the survey provide further support for this level of satisfaction. Specifically, participants reported DPIL provides quality books at no cost to the families, and they have the convenience of receiving books at their houses.

Figure 8

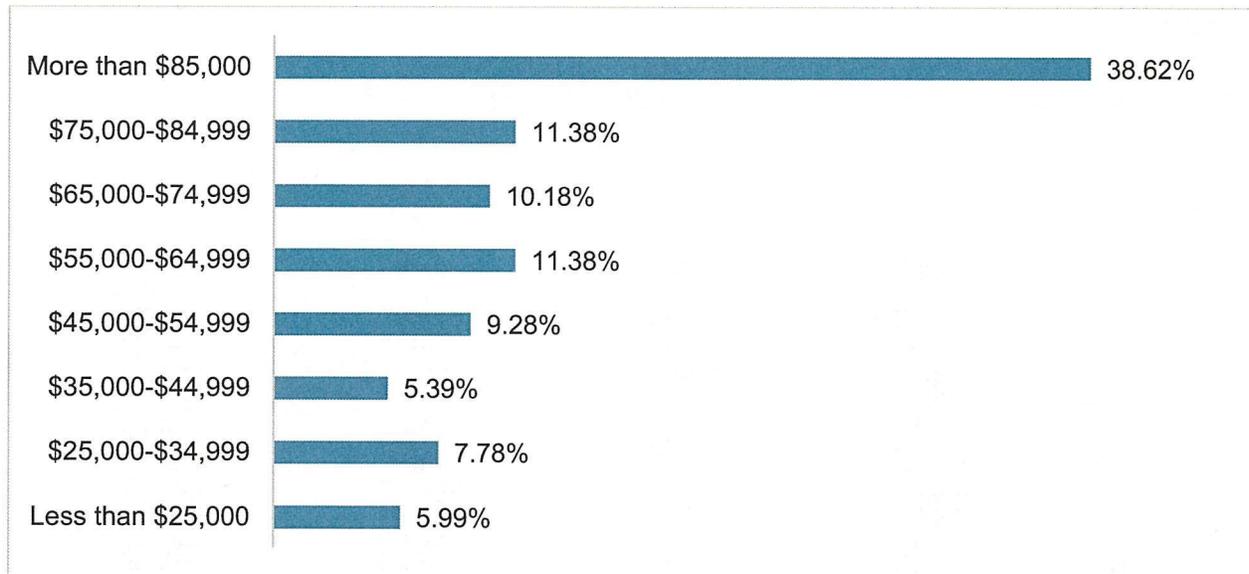
What is the highest level of education that you have completed? (N = 359)



Note. None of the participants selected 2-year college degree. Four participants did not respond to this question.

Figure 9

What is your annual household income? (N = 334)



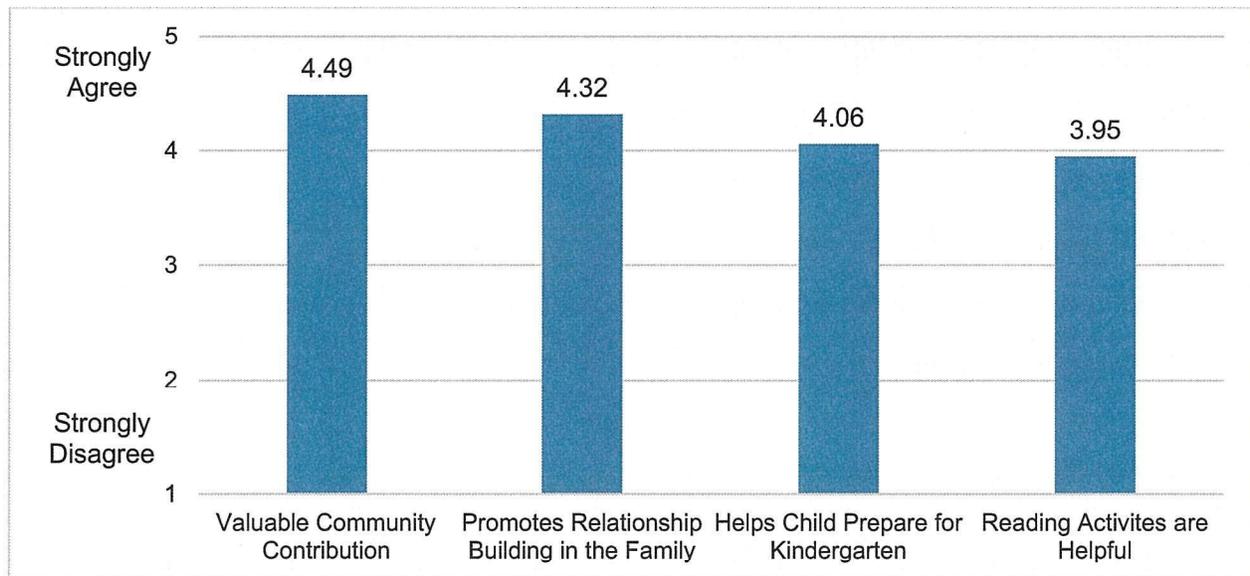
Note. 29 participants did not respond to this question.

Participants responded to four additional statements pertaining to the program using a five-point Likert scale where 1 represented “Strongly Disagree,” 2 represented “Disagree,” 3 represented “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” 4 represented “Agree,” and 5 represented “Strongly Agree.” These four statements concerned perceptions about the contributions of the DPIL program to their child/children’s kindergarten readiness (cf. CCS, 2022; Dorman & Fair, 2021), the helpfulness of the reading activities included in some DPIL books (cf. CCS, 2022; Galea et al., 2024; Prah, 2023; Singh, 2023), the contribution of the DPIL program in promoting familial relationships (cf. Funge et al., 2017; Galea et al, 2024) and the contribution of the DPIL program to the community. Given that not all DPIL books have a front flap with reading activities, this item also included an “I am not aware of the activities” response option ($N = 111$). The means for

each of these items are graphed in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Means for Perception Items (N = 362, N = 361, N = 362, N = 250)



These scores show positive ratings for each of the items with very strong agreement that DPIL makes a valuable contribution to the community and that it promotes relationship building within participants' families. Waldron (2018) also found that parents felt like DPIL made a valuable contribution to their community which mirrors our findings.

The findings regarding familial relationship building are aligned with the results from both Galea et al. (2024) and Funge et al. (2017) who attributed this to shared book reading. The result for participants' perception that DPIL helps with kindergarten readiness mirrors the Impact Reports from Lorain and Cuyahoga Counties (CCS 2022; Dorman & Fair, 2021). Finally, the findings for the helpfulness of reading activities are

also consistent with previous scholarship with our score falling between that obtained by Prah1 (2023) and the Lorain and Cuyahoga Impact Reports (CCS, 2022; Dorman & Fair, 2021). In addition, our finding that a high proportion of participants (30.75%) are unaware of the reading activities is comparable to the results from Anderson et al. (2019) and Prah1 (2023), who both reported that a majority of their participants were not aware of the reading activities.

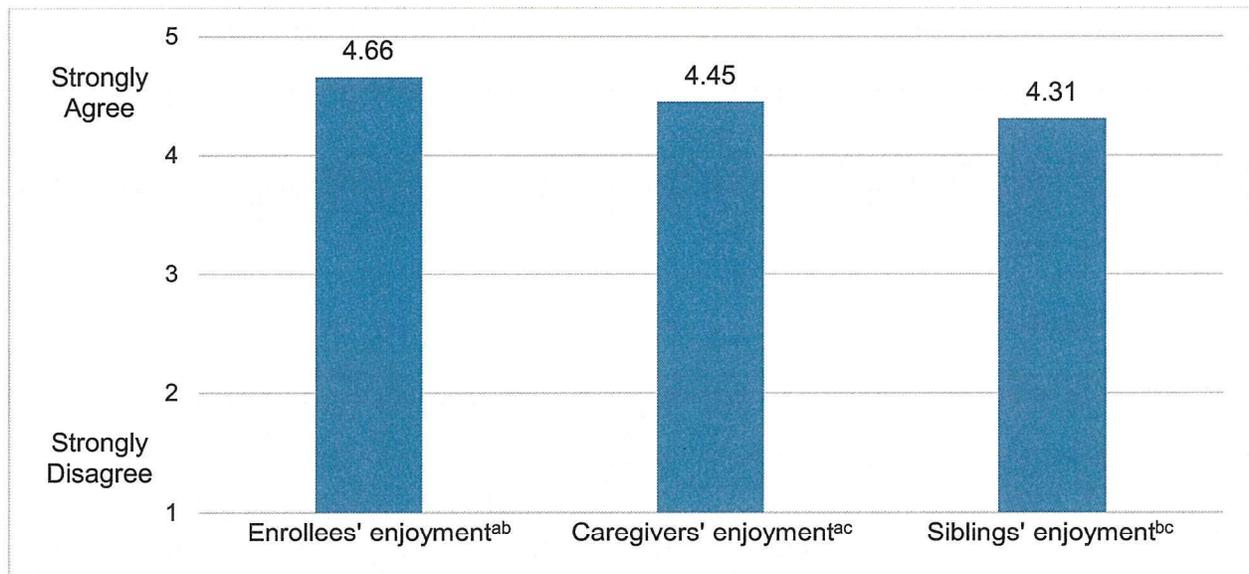
Enjoyment and Excitement

The next set of statements pertained to their household's enjoyment of the DPIL books, including the child, the caregiver, and older non-enrolled siblings (cf. CCS, 2022; Dorman & Fair, 2021). The findings show that everyone in the household enjoys DPIL books with the children enrolled enjoying the most. A series of paired sample *t*-tests showed that enrollees have a significantly higher enjoyment score than caregivers ($p < 0.001$) or older siblings ($p < 0.001$) and the caregivers have a significantly higher level of enjoyment than the older siblings ($p = 0.003$). The means for each of these items are graphed in Figure 11.

Next, participants reported any change in the level of excitement about books for the enrolled child/children, using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "Decreased a Lot," 2 represented "Decreased a Little," 3 represented "Is about the Same," 4 represented "Increased a Little," and 5 represented "Increased a Lot" (cf. Funge et al., 2017; Prah1, 2023). The mean for this item was 4.22 ($SD = .82$, $N = 358$). This indicates that the level of excitement about books has increased in the enrolled child(ren) which is a primary goal of the program (DPIL, n.d.).

Figure 11

Means for Enjoyment Items (N = 363, N = 361, N = 359)



Note. Like letters indicate significant differences, $p < .05$

Our participants reported higher levels of enjoyment than those which were documented in the previous scholarship (Lorain and Cuyahoga Impact Reports) for enrollees and siblings' enjoyment (CCS, 2022; Dorman & Fair, 2021). In addition, our participants reported a larger increase in excitement about reading than Prah (2023) or Funge et al. (2017) documented. For example, one participant in our focus group said, "My 6-year-old she doesn't get the books, but she gets her brother's books. I think she's definitely gotten excited to come over to look at all of his books and to read all his books to him."

Reading Habits

We asked how many times an adult read to the enrolled child(ren), the child(ren) asked to be read to, and child(ren) spent time looking at books themselves (cf. CCS, 2022; Dorman & Fair, 2021; Funge et al., 2017, Prah, 2023). They responded using a

numerical scale of 0-7 with a final option of “More than 7 times.” The highest percentage of responses for each question was the “More than 7 times” category which indicates that children are asking to be read to, being read to, and looking at books by themselves every day. Some kind of engagement with books more than 7 times a week seems to be a good foundation for reading habits among DPIL enrollees. Based on Logan et al.’s calculations (2019), reading to children multiple times each day exposes them to more than a million words by the age of five. The percentage of responses in each category for these three questions are graphed in Figure 12.

Our participants reported reading more often to their children than many previous studies, such as Lorain and Cuyahoga Impact Reports, but that may be a function of the range of response options we provided (CCS, 2022; Dorman & Fair, 2021). Our results for the child(ren) asking to be read to are consistent with those of Prahll (2023). Anderson et al. (2018) reported a smaller portion of children who interacted with books “frequently” than we did but, it is not clear how their participants interpreted “frequently” so direct comparisons are not possible.

Participants responded to two questions about any change in reading habits since DPIL enrollment, using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented “Much less often,” 2 represented “A little less often,” 3 represented “About the same,” 4 represented “A little more often,” and 5 represented “A lot more often.” We asked participants if they read to their child(ren) or their child(ren) asked to be read to more often since they enrolled in the program (cf. CCS, 2022; Dorman & Fair, 2021). The means for these two questions show that most people slightly increased their reading frequency after enrolling in DPIL (see Figure 13). In the focus groups, participants indicated that their

child(ren) want to read more often since enrolling in DPIL and they also ask to be read to more.

Our finding that child(ren) asked to be read to slightly more often since enrolling in DPIL is comparable to the results of the Lorain and Cuyahoga Impact Reports (CCS, 2022; Dorman & Fair, 2021). For adults reading to children more since enrolling in DPIL, our results showed that a smaller proportion of people had an increase in frequency compared Prahl’s (2023) findings. However, Funge et al. (2017) had a higher frequency of adults reading to their children since enrolling in DPIL compared to our results.

Figure 12

Engagement with Books in the Last 7 Days

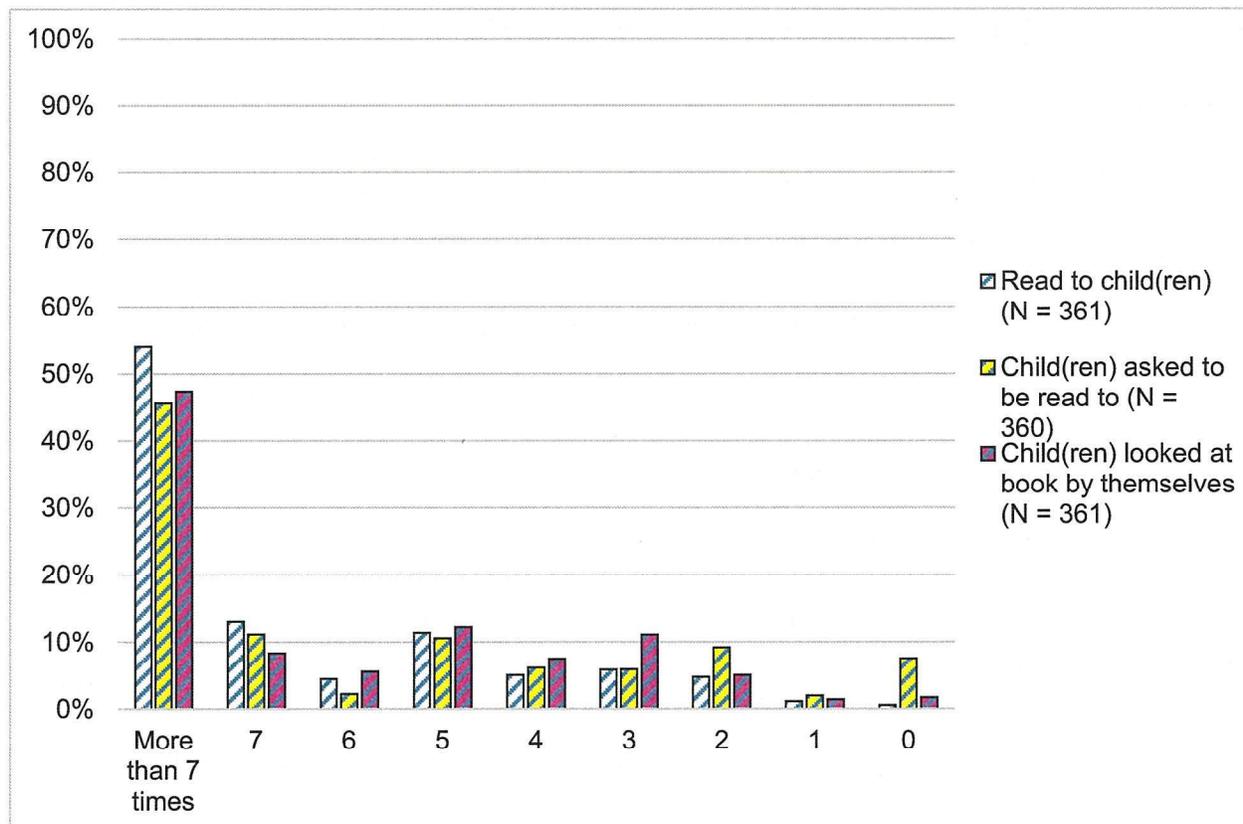
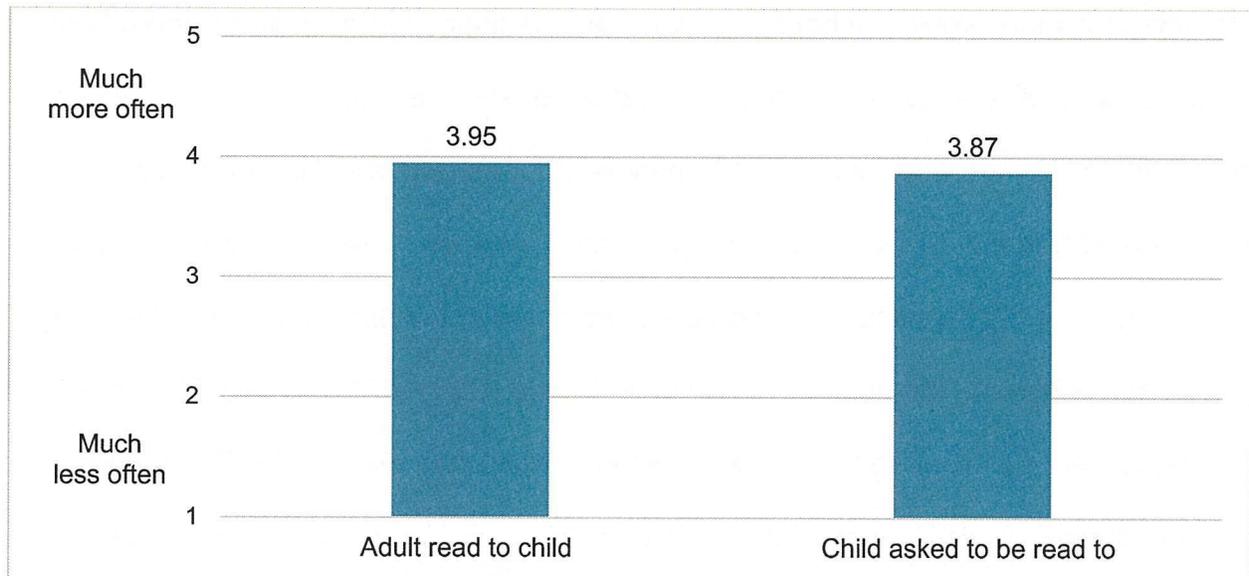


Figure 13

Means for Changes in Reading Habits (N = 361, N = 355)



For the final question in the reading habits section, participants reported their level of agreement with the statement, *Receiving Imagination Library books helped build a reading routine in my household*, using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The mean for this variable was 3.92 ($SD = .88$, $N = 360$) which indicates that participants agreed with the question. Even in the focus group, a participant mentioned, “like the program definitely done help out and my son, and obviously my daughter to also want to read I want to read too and stuff.” Therefore, DPIL helps build reading routines in households; this finding is also consistent with Neyer et al.’s (2021) results.

Learning from Books

In this section, participants responded to five statements about what their children were learning from DPIL books. We gave them statements asking whether:

their child(ren) learned from DPIL books, their child(ren) heard new words from DPIL books, their child(ren) attempted to imitate the new words, DPIL books sparked conversations that would not happen otherwise, and their child(ren) talked about DPIL books outside of reading them. They responded using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "Never," 2 represented "Sometimes," 3 represented "About half the time," 4 represented "Most of the time," and 5 represented "Always." The last three statements also included a "Not applicable" option because some of the participants' children may not be speaking yet. The number of participants who selected "Not applicable" varied for each question, so the N-size of these questions varied from 309 to 363. The results indicate there were behavioral changes due to DPIL books, but magnitude of change was relatively small. Although the means for this item are lower than those we reported for other Likert items, it is important to recall that participants used a different scale to answer these questions. For four of these five items, the means correspond to "about half the time or more." The means for these responses are graphed in Figure 14.

Access to Books

The questions pertaining to access to books had a variety of response options. We asked about the frequency of library/bookmobile visits for the households and the response options (in descending frequency) were more than once a week, once a week, once a month, six times a year, four times a year, twice a year, once a year, and never. The percentage of each response is graphed in Figure 15.

Participants reported if their library use has changed since enrollment in DPIL using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Decreased a Lot) to 5 (Increased a Lot)

(cf. CCS, 2022; Dorman & Fair, 2021). The mean for this question was 3.14 ($SD = .72$, $N = 347$). This indicates that their library/bookmobile use was relatively unchanged; this finding is consistent with the Lorain and Cuyahoga Impact Reports (CCS, 2022; Dorman & Fair, 2021). By contrast, Funge et al. (2017) found that participants' library use increased slightly.

Figure 14

Means for Learning from Books Items

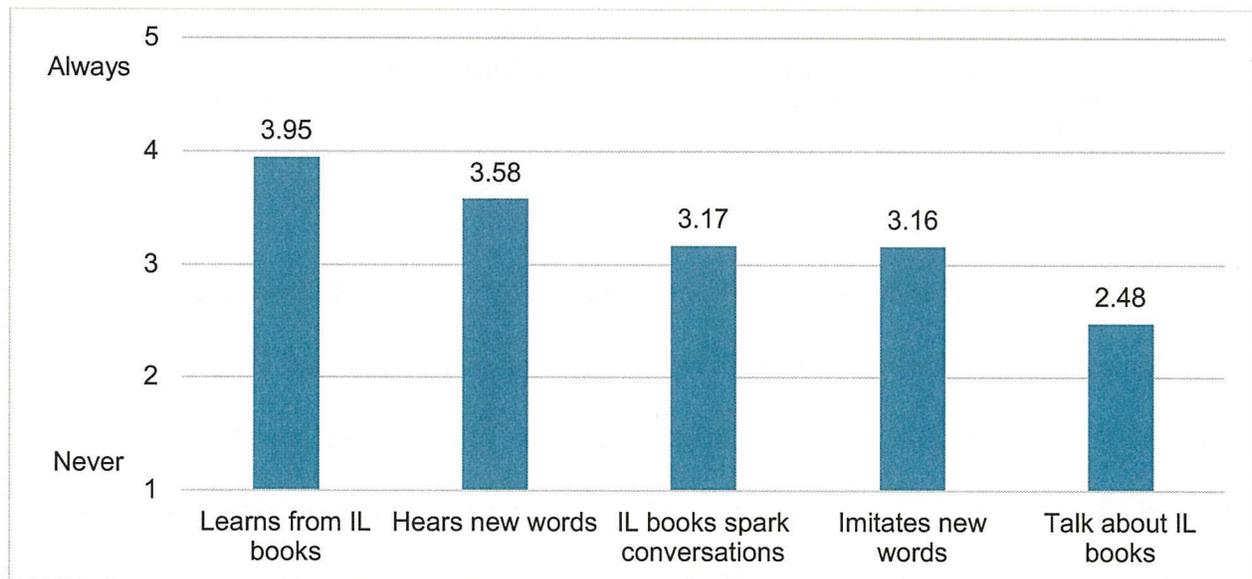
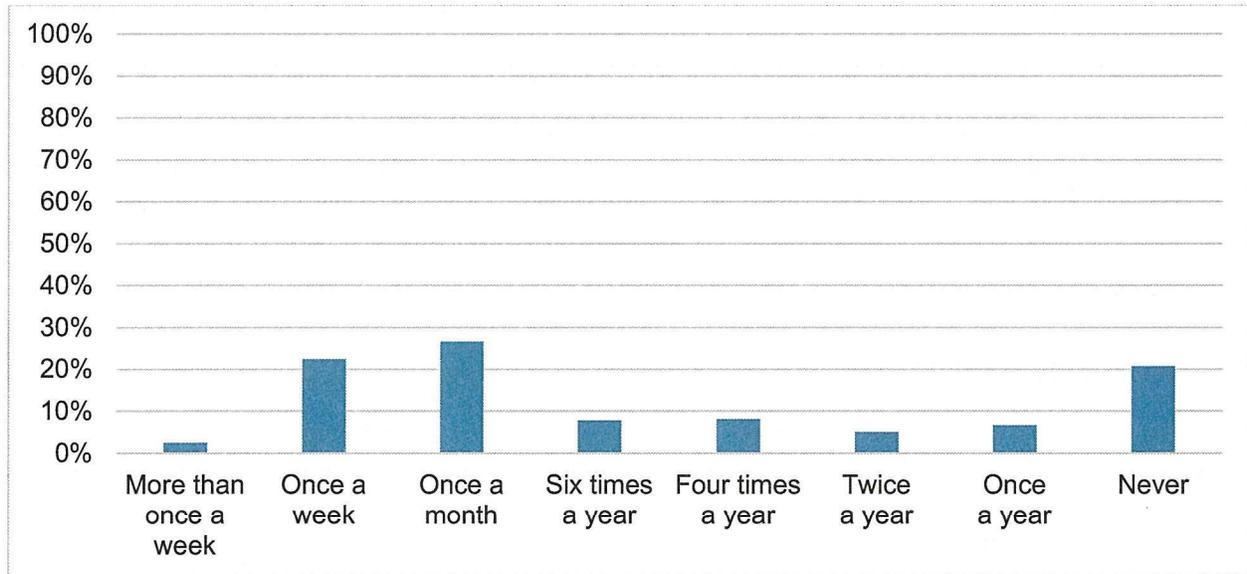


Figure 15

Percentages for Frequency of Library/Bookmobile Visits (N = 357)



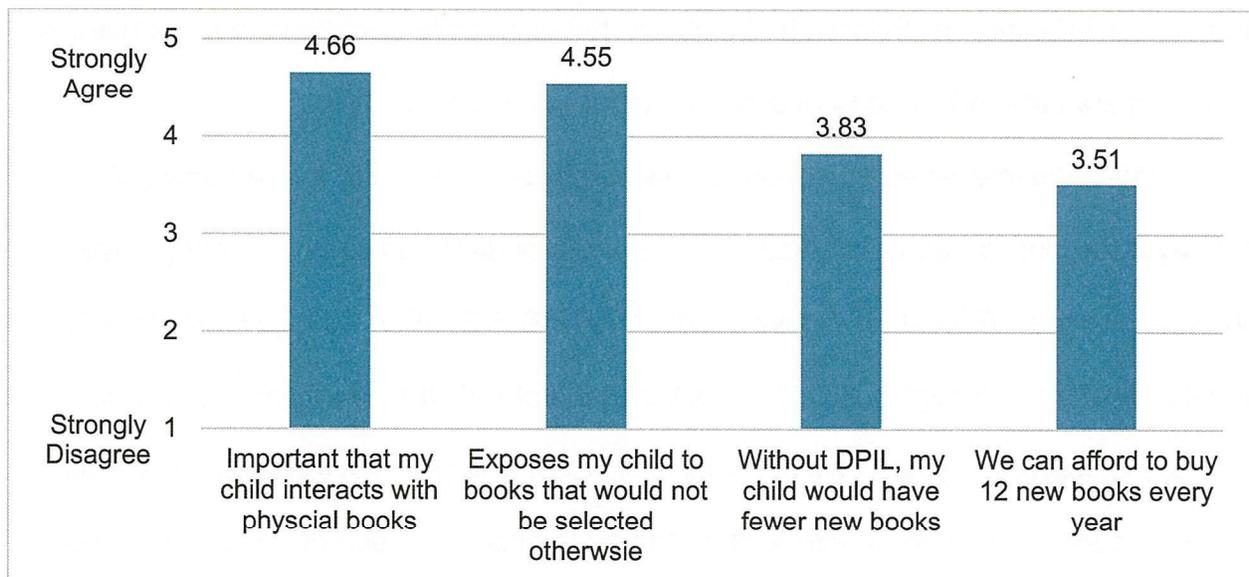
Participants reported approximately what portion of the child(ren)'s books were DPIL books, and the response options included "Less than 10%" and 10% increments up to 100% (cf. CCS, 2022; Dorman & Fair, 2021). In order to calculate the mean percentage, we coded the "Less than 10%" responses as 1% to make the responses numeric; the mean percentage of DPIL books among the participants was 33.41% ($SD = 27.1\%$, $N = 361$). This shows that DPIL books make up about one-third of the child(ren)'s home library and the portion of books comprised of DPIL books vary greatly among households. Our finding that one-third of child(ren)'s home library being comprised of DPIL books, and the variability among responses are similar to those reported in the Lorain and Cuyahoga Impact Reports (CCS, 2022; Dorman & Fair, 2021). Because one of the factors impacting the variability may be income, we categorized percentage of DPIL books by our three income levels of poverty, potential

ALICE, and neither and found that participants in poverty have the highest portion of books (52.28%) from DPIL in their home libraries, potential ALICE had the second highest portion of books (32.66%), and neither had the lowest portion of DPIL books (28.81%).

Finally, participants reported their level of agreement with each of four statements using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The statements included whether they could afford to buy 12 new books every year for each child under five years, if their child(ren) would have fewer new books without DPIL, if it is important that their child(ren) interact with physical books, and if participation in DPIL exposed their child(ren) to books that they would otherwise not have selected. The means for these answers are graphed in Figure 16.

Figure 16

Means for Access to Books Items (N = 360)



Clearly, our participants find value in physical books and feel that DPIL books expose their children to new and different topics. These evaluations may explain in part the earlier findings of satisfaction with and enjoyment of DPIL. Though a bit lower, the ratings for children having fewer books without DPIL and ability to buy new books show the valuable contribution of DPIL books to children's ability to have access to books. To sum it all up, one caregiver in the focus group said, "These are amazing books, and they are of amazing quality."

Exploring Differences Among Groups

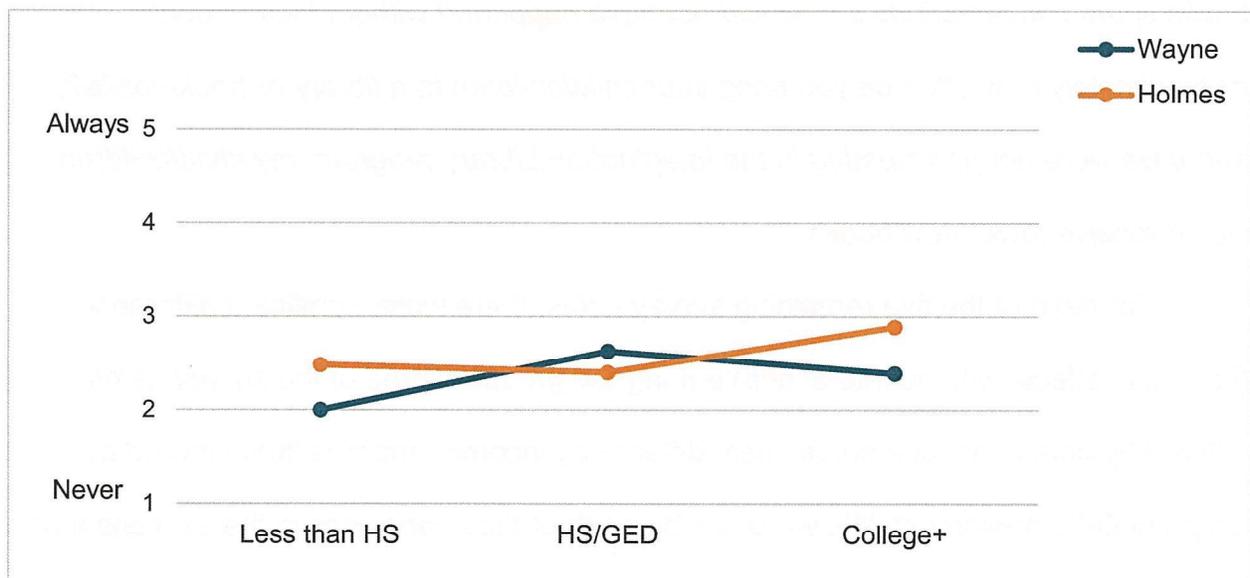
We used 23 of the 27 survey items to compare ratings across several groups using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The four items we did not use in the comparisons include all three of the items that begin with "In the last 7 days." We excluded these items because the choice of "More than 7 times" could include a very wide frequency range. Moreover, most of the participants selected "More than 7 times" for all three questions. The other question that we did not use in the statistical comparisons was the item about bringing the children to the library or bookmobile because the responses to that item are categorical and not appropriate for use in an ANOVA.

We were interested in exploring how responses to each of the remaining 23 survey questions varied as a function of four independent variables: County (2 levels: Wayne, Holmes), Education (3 levels: Less than HS, HS/GED, College+), Income (3 levels: Poverty, Potential ALICE, Neither), and Length of DPIL Enrollment (3 levels: < 2 years, 2-3 years, > 3 years). As an initial step in our analysis, we ran a factorial ANOVA for each survey question to both explore the main effects of each of the aforementioned independent variables and determine if there were any significant interactions.

“Interactions occur when the effect of one variable impacts the effect of another variable on the dependent variable” (Cronk, 2018, p. 82). As an example, Figure 17 depicts a two-way interaction (county by education) for the item, “My child/children talks about the Imagination Library books – even when we are not reading the books.” Note that the response pattern is the same for the highest and lowest education levels (i.e., Holmes County > Wayne County), but the pattern is reversed for the HS/GED participants (i.e., Wayne County > Holmes County).

Figure 17

Example of a Two-Way Interaction



Whenever a significant interaction is present among independent variables, it is not appropriate to interpret the main effects of those independent variables. Our analysis revealed significant interactions for nine of the 23 survey items (see Appendix X for a list of these items). Therefore, we did not run any further analyses with these items.

There were no significant differences for an additional nine survey items as a function of any of the four independent variables (i.e., county, education, income, length of DPIL enrollment). These included: *Please indicate your overall satisfaction with the Imagination Library program; Participating in the Imagination Library program is helping my child/children prepare for kindergarten; Older children in our home who are not enrolled in the Imagination Library program read and enjoy Imagination Library books; My child/children learns from Imagination Library books; Receiving Imagination Library books helped build a reading routine in my household; My child/children attempts to imitate new words they hear when I read Imagination Library books; Imagination Library books spark conversations that would not have happened without these books; Approximately how often do you bring your child/children to a library or bookmobile?, and If we were not participating in the Imagination Library program, my child/children would receive fewer new books.*

For each of the five remaining survey items, there were significant differences (i.e., main effects with no interaction) among the groups. Three of the survey items differed by education, one survey item differed by income, and one item differed by length of DPIL enrollment. We will describe each of these analyses in the sections that follow.

In order to explore the effect of education, we combined the participants who selected “4-year college degree” with those who selected “Graduate or professional degree” in line with previous scholarship (e.g., Dollaghan et al., 1999). The resulting three groups included 50 people with less than a high school education, 136 with a high school diploma or GED, and 173 with a 4-year college degree or advanced degree. We

ran three one-way ANOVAs to explore the effect of education on three survey items: *The Imagination Library program makes a valuable contribution to my community; I enjoy reading and looking at Imagination Library books, and It is important that my child/children interacts with physical books.*

In order to explore the effect of income, we classified participants based on 2023 Federal Poverty Thresholds, varying by family size and number of dependent children under 18. If a family's annual household income fell at or below the applicable threshold, they were coded as "in poverty." We identified potential ALICE families using nested logic in Excel, by excluding those in poverty, with at least one adult employed full-time, not qualifying for government assistance, and reporting incomes below the \$75,000 - \$84,999 response option, a level which captures the 2022 median incomes for both Holmes and Wayne Counties. We coded participants who did not fall into either category as "neither." We could not classify 33 participants due to missing income or household data, resulting in 50 coded as in poverty, 86 as potential ALICE, and 194 as neither.

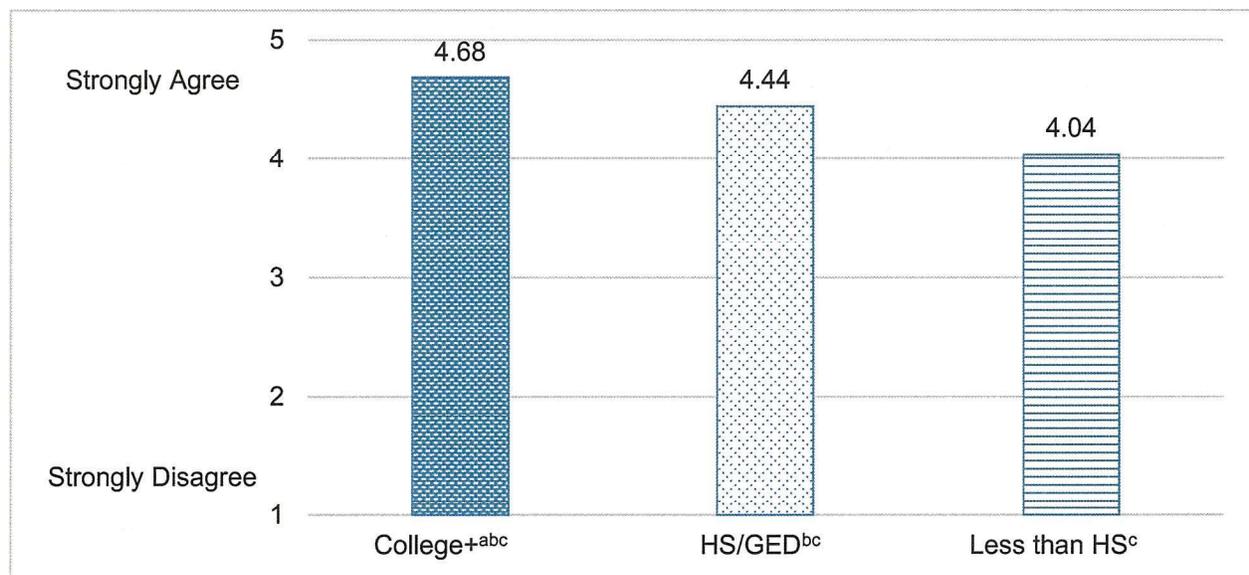
We found a significant difference in response to "*The Imagination Library program makes a valuable contribution to my community*" as a function of education ($F(2, 355) = 16.38, p < .001$). We used Tukey's test to determine the nature of the differences among the education levels. This analysis revealed significant differences among all three groups. Participants with a 4-year college degree or higher ($M = 4.68, SD = .68$) had a higher level of agreement than participants with a high school diploma or GED ($M = 4.44, SD = .76$) and participants with less than a high school education ($M = 4.04, SD = .61$). In addition, there was a significant difference between participants

with a high school diploma or GED and participants with less than a high school diploma (see Figure 18).

We also found a significant difference in *I enjoy reading and looking at Imagination Library books* as a function of education ($F(2, 354) = 9.90, p < .001$). We ran Tukey's test to explore the differences among education levels. The results revealed that participants with a 4-year college degree or higher ($M = 4.53, SD = .64$) had a significantly higher level of agreement than participants with less than a high school diploma ($M = 4.10, SD = .61$). In addition, participants with a high school diploma or GED ($M = 4.50, SD = .57$) had a higher level of agreement than participants with less than a high school diploma. There were no differences between participants with a 4-year college degree or higher and those with a HS diploma or GED (see Figure 19).

Figure 18

The Imagination Library program makes a valuable contribution to my community



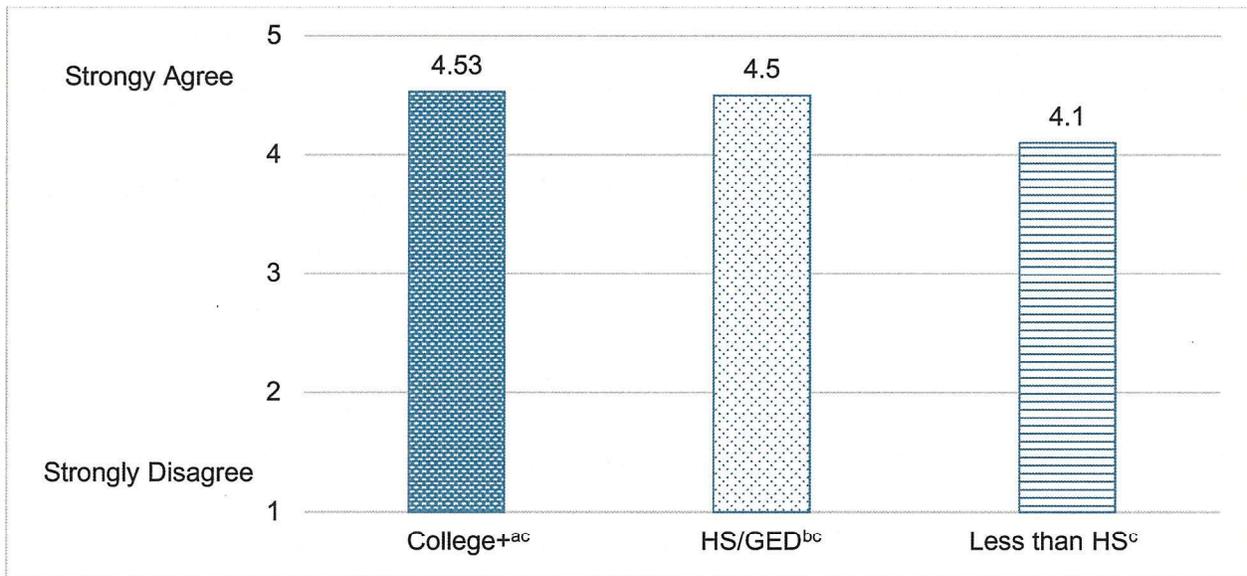
Note. Like letters indicate significant difference, $p < .001$

We also found significant differences in response to *It is important that my child/children interacts with physical books* as a function of education level ($F(2,353) = 13.54, p < .001$). In order to explore the nature of those differences, we ran Tukey's test. The results of this analysis revealed that participants with a 4-year college degree or higher ($M = 4.78, SD = .49$) had a significantly higher level of agreement than the participants with a high school diploma or GED ($M = 4.61, SD = .57$) and the participants with less than a high school education ($M = 4.33, SD = .66$). In addition, there was a significant difference between participants with a high school diploma or GED and participants with less than a high school education (see Figure 20).

Although the means indicate that all three education groups agreed with the aforementioned three statements, the participants' level of agreement increased progressively from the lowest level of education (i.e., less than a high school diploma) to the highest level of education completed (i.e., a four-year college degree or advanced degree). Waldron (2018) claimed that higher educated parents value reading more than parents who are less educated. Given this argument, it makes sense that higher-educated parents would think DPIL makes a greater contribution to their community. If parents with higher education levels value reading more, they may read more often and also enjoy DPIL books to a greater degree. According to Kucirkova and Grover (2024), the majority of parents prefer print books over electronic books. Combining this with the idea that higher educated parents are more likely to partake in shared book reading practices, they may choose to do it more often with physical books and view it as important (Waldron, 2018).

Figure 19

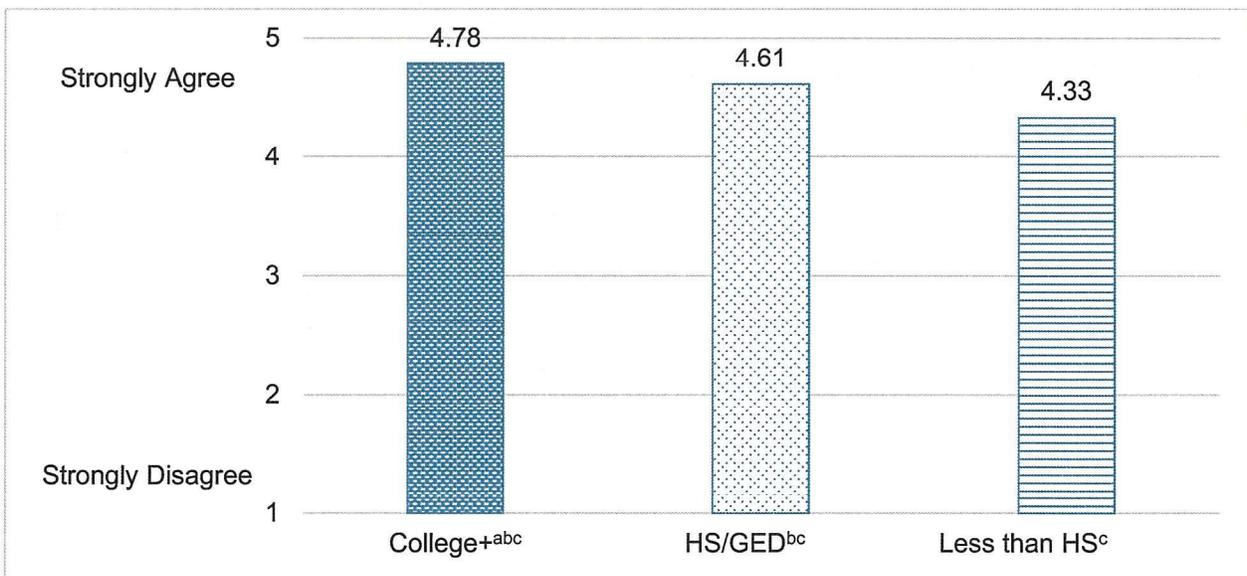
I enjoy reading and looking at Imagination Library books.



Note. Like letters indicate significant difference, $p < .001$

Figure 20

It is important that my child/children interacts with physical books.



Note. Like letters indicate significant difference, $p < .001$

We ran a one-way ANOVA to explore the effect of income on the following survey item: *We can afford to buy 12 new books a year for each of our children under 5 years of age*. We found a significant difference among the different income levels ($F(2,326) = 17.68, p < .001$). We ran Tukey's test to determine the nature of the differences among the education levels. This analysis revealed that participants classified as in poverty ($M = 2.84, SD = 1.27$) differed significantly from those classified as potential ALICE ($M = 3.41, SD = 1.11$) and from those classified as neither ($M = 3.85, SD = 1.07$). In addition, participants in the potential ALICE group differed significantly from those in the neither group (see Figure 21).

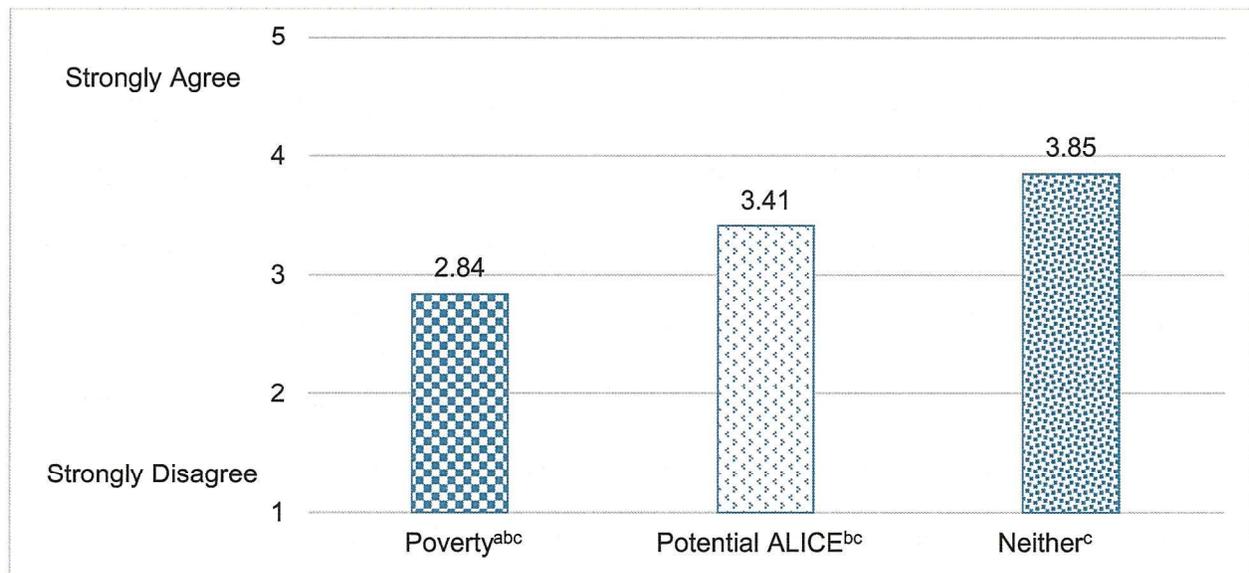
These findings indicate that participants' ability to afford to purchase 12 new books per year varies based on their income levels. That is, the responses align with our predictions. We anticipated that families in poverty and potential ALICE families would have limited disposable income to buy books. Books are frequently categorized as a luxury item rather than an essential need (e.g., Galea, 2024; Waldron, 2018). Participants in the "neither" group had the highest mean level of agreement in response to this item, and participants in poverty had the lowest mean. The results of this analysis also serve as confirmation of the income groupings we calculated.

We ran a one-way ANOVA to explore the effect of the child's length of enrollment in DPIL on the following survey item: *My child/children hears new words when I read Imagination Library books for the first time*. For these analyses, we combined participants who selected "Less than 1 year" with those who selected "1 year" into a category labeled "Less than 2 years." Similarly, we combined participants who selected

"2 years" with those who selected "3 years" into a category labeled "2-3 years". Finally, we combined participants who selected "4 years" with those who selected "More than 4 years" into a category labeled "4 or more years." The resulting groups included 119 participants in the "Less than 2 years" group, 167 participants in the "2-3 years, group, and 74 participants in the "4 or more years" group. We found a significant difference among participants as a function of the length of enrollment ($F(2,357) = 7.58, p < .001$). We ran Tukey's test to explore the nature of the differences among education levels.

Figure 21

We can afford to buy 12 new books a year for each of our children 5 years of age.



Note. Like letters indicate significant difference, $p < .001$

This analysis revealed that participants with children enrolled in the program for "less than 2 years" ($M = 3.87, SD = 1.10$) differed significantly from both participants with children enrolled in the program for 2-3 years ($M = 3.53, SD = 1.09$), and from participants with children enrolled in the program for 4 or more years ($M = 3.24, SD =$

1.17). There was no significant difference between participants who had been enrolled “2-3 years” and those who had been enrolled for “4 or more years.”

These findings indicate that the level of agreement among respondents regarding their child hearing new words when a caregiver reads DPIL books for the first time varies based on the duration of their child's enrollment in the program (see Figure 22). The mean level of agreement was highest for the shortest enrollment duration relative to the two longer duration intervals. If children with the shortest duration in the program are also younger children, they are likely to have smaller vocabularies. Therefore, there is a greater likelihood that they would encounter a new word in DPIL books than older children who have more expansive vocabularies. Although their variables were different (i.e., reporting of daily reading and “How often do you talk about the story and ask your child questions about the story?”), Ridzi and colleagues (2014) also documented differences as a function of the duration of the child’s enrollment in the program.

Exploring Relationships Among Variables

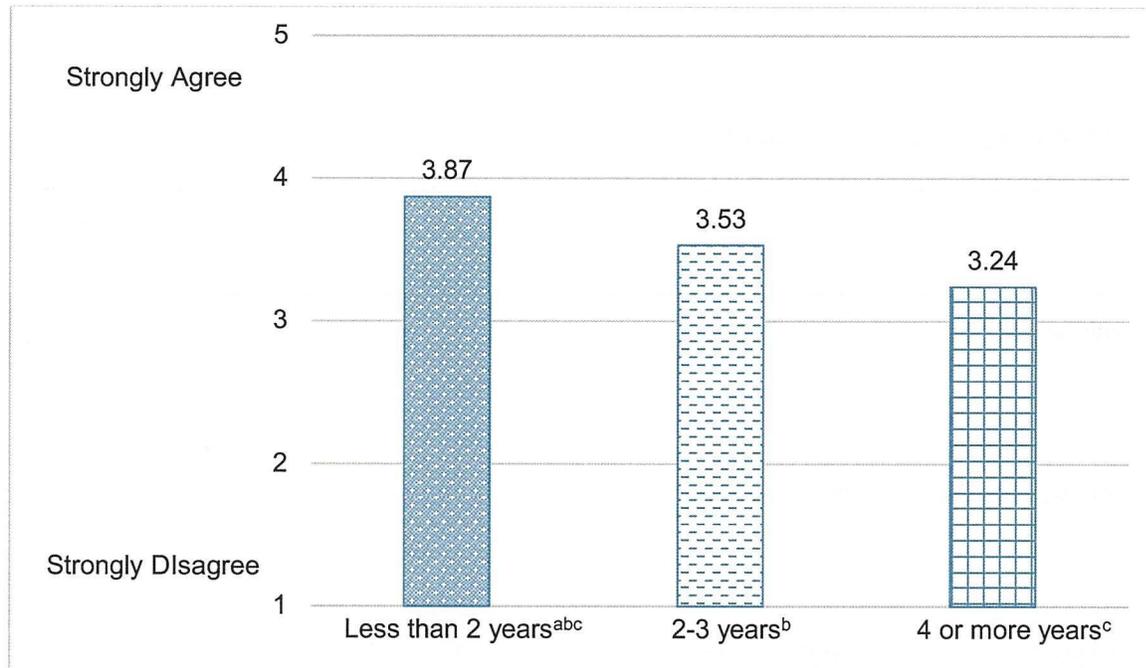
We ran a correlation analysis to investigate the relationships among the following seven survey items: *Please indicate your overall level of satisfaction with the Imagination Library program (overall satisfaction)*, *Since enrolling in the Imagination Library program, my child’s/children’s level of excitement about books or reading (excitement about books)*, *It is important that my child/children interacts with physical books (physical books)*, *Participating in the Imagination Library program exposes my child/children to books that we might not have selected (exposes my child)*, *I enjoy reading and looking at Imagination Library books (I enjoy)*, *My child/children learns from Imagination Library books (child learns from)*, *Imagination Library books spark*

conversations that would not have happened without these books (spark conversation). We calculated Pearson correlation coefficients to explore the relationships among all combinations of the aforementioned survey items (see Table 1). The results revealed that 20 out of 21 correlations were statistically significant in the positive direction, with coefficients equal to or greater than $r(319) = .185, p < .001$, two-tailed except for one correlation that was significant at the $p < .05$ level. The relationship between overall satisfaction and exposes my child was not statistically significant. While many relationships among these variables were weak, there were moderate relationships with coefficients $>.4$ between the following variable pairs: spark conversations and child learns from; spark conversations and I enjoy; child learns from and I enjoy, and child learns from and excitement about books.

We ran a correlation analysis to investigate the relationships between the following survey items: *The reading activities included on the front inside flap of Imagination Library books are helpful* and *Imagination Library books spark conversations that would not have happened without these books*. We calculated a Pearson correlation coefficient to explore the relationship between these two items. A moderate positive correlation was found ($r(230) = .438, p < .001$), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. This finding suggests that respondents who find the reading activities on the front inside flap of DPIL books helpful also report that these books spark conversations that might not have occurred otherwise. It is possible that the reading activities may suggest conversations about the books.

Figure 22

My child/children hears new words when I read Imagination Library books for the first time.



Note. Like letters indicate significant difference, $p < .001$

We ran a correlation analysis to investigate the relationship between the following survey items: *We can afford to buy 12 new books a year for each of our children under 5 years of age and Imagination Library books make up approximately what portion of your child's/children's books?*. We calculated a Pearson correlation coefficient to explore the relationship between these two items. This revealed a weak negative correlation ($r(358) = -.323, p < .001$). The fact that the correlation is negative indicates that participants with higher level of agreement that they can afford to buy 12 new books a year for each child under 5 years of age reported that DPIL books represented a smaller proportion of their child's library. Conversely, DPIL books represent a larger proportion of the child's library for participants who expressed lower

levels of agreement that they can afford to purchase 12 new books a year for each of their children under 5 years of age.

Table 1

Correlations among selected variables

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| 1. Overall satisfaction ¹ | — | | | | | | |
| 2. Excitement about books ² | 185** | — | | | | | |
| 3. Physical books ³ | 199** | 117* | — | | | | |
| 4. Exposes my child ³ | 065 | 250** | 374** | — | | | |
| 5. I enjoy ³ | 254** | 367** | 254** | 342** | — | | |
| 6. Child learns from ⁴ | 189** | 419** | 259** | 244** | 493** | — | |
| 7. Spark conversations ⁴ | 213** | 334** | 189** | 254** | 417** | 521** | — |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, ¹ = Very Dissatisfied (1) to Very Satisfied (5) scale, ² = Decreased a lot (1) to Increased a lot (5) scale, ³ = Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) scale, ⁴ = Never (1) to Always (5) scale

Open-Ended Response Themes

At the end of the survey, we gave participants an opportunity to write anything else they wanted to share with us concerning DPIL. We received 126 responses, most of which fell into four main categories: Community, Diversity, Mail, and Duplicates. We describe each of these themes in the sections that follow.

In terms of Community, participants wrote about how this program was a resource for their family and community. They expressed gratitude for it being available along with hopes that it will continue, and that enrollment will increase. For example, a participant (Holmes, electronic survey) wrote: "Please keep finding [sic] this program - children need access to this resource. You are doing amazing work." Another participant (Wayne, electronic survey) wrote: "We are thankful for Dolly Parton Imagination Library and the role they are playing within our communities!"

Turning to the Diversity theme, participants expressed both appreciation for and criticism of the titles, topics, and characters in IL books. Some participants reported that they enjoyed receiving books they may not have personally chosen, while others wrote that they felt some books contained themes they were not comfortable with or did not align with their child's interests. One participant (Wayne, electronic survey) wrote: "The imagination library helps to enrich the variety of books my child is reading. The books have valuable messages and are well written." An example of a participant (Holmes, paper survey) who did not enjoy the book themes wrote: "I would like to see more realistic books. Rather than dressed up animals!" The Diversity themes also included comments, both positive and negative, related to the bilingual books. For example, one participant (Wayne, electronic survey) wrote, "Thank you for this excellent program!"

We'd love more books that are bilingual/Spanish.” By contrast, another participant (Wayne, electronic survey) wrote: “I'm not to [sic] fond of having Spanish AND English in each book now. That's kind of confusing.”

Responses within the Mail theme centered around a child's excitement for receiving the books in the mail. Many participants wrote that their child would ask to check the mail for the books themselves. One participant (Holmes, paper survey) wrote, “My kids are always excited to get another new book in the mail. We drop everything and read the new book right away. Thank you for this free organization.” A few participants expressed frustration that when they moved, they would sometimes stop receiving books or go many months without receiving a book. For example, one participant (Wayne, electronic survey) wrote: “When we moved we stopped receiving books. Other [than] that it's an amazing program!”

The final theme, Duplicates, included issues with receiving the same book multiple times. Participants commented that when they had more than one child in the program, they received duplicate book titles. A participant (Holmes, electronic survey) wrote, “With multiple children, we are now receiving the same book twice that we received for our older child.” Another (Wayne, electronic survey) wrote: “We love this program. With having 3 children enrolled, we do receive duplicate books for the kids. If there were some way to cycle or track the books sent to families, that would be helpful in reducing duplicate books.”

Conclusions

In the following sections, we will discuss the key findings from the survey: perception and enjoyment, learning outcomes, establishment of reading habits, and access. We will then explore the study's implications and limitations.

Major Conclusions and Implications

Overall, the program has made a positive impact on the families and children enrolled in Wayne and Holmes Counties. Across all categories, they enjoyed the program with over 95% of people indicating they were satisfied with the Imagination Library. Not only did it help increase the number of books, but it also enhanced enjoyment around literature in the home and created an environment where reading was exciting for many family members. Children enrolled in this program were also learning from these books. Parents reported that their children were hearing new words from DPIL books even when they had been enrolled for less than two years. One mother from a focus group spoke at length about how reading DPIL books expanded her son's vocabulary. DPIL also had a positive impact on the reading habits of households. According to the survey results, most families were actively involved in reading to their children multiple times each day. This frequent reading exposes children to new words, thereby supporting the development of their vocabulary. Although DPIL participation did not strongly connect to how often families engage with other sources of books such as a public library, it did positively contribute to children's book collections, especially in families that might have been in poverty. For families who were potentially in poverty, DPIL books made up on average over half of the child's books. Furthermore, DPIL books helped enrich the child's book collection with greater diversity of titles.

We learned a lot about the effectiveness of advertisements for DPIL through our focus groups and surveys. From survey responses, we learned that word-of-mouth was the most common way for people to learn about the Imagination Library, followed by hospital, social media, and the public library. Over 75% of participants selected one of those four categories. No participants indicated that they learned about DPIL through the books that contain a QR code for enrolling in DPIL that UWWH placed in waiting rooms for families.

Through focus groups and survey feedback, we also gained insights about how Wayne and Holmes Counties participants are using, or not using, the reading activities provided on the front flap of many DPIL books. During a focus group one parent said they may use them later to help with home schooling. "We do plan to homeschool. So [reading activities] are helpful, even if I'm not using these books, then I'll probably refer back to the questions for my own sake." Approximately half the survey participants reported finding the reading activities helpful. Conversely, a large percentage of participants did not know about the activities.

Our findings provide evidence beyond enrollment numbers that Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is making a real impact on the children enrolled, their families, and their communities. DPIL should continue to be offered and should continue to provide a wide range of books. Methods for getting the word about the program out however, may need to change as traditional forms of advertising do not seem to be working. In addition, families may benefit from more focus on the reading activities suggested in the books.

Limitations

As with all studies there are limitations to this one. Our limitations revolve around the sample and the survey questions. While we achieved an 11.9% response rate, which is good, our findings do not include over 88% of the target group. As such, we may be missing valuable information about the program. Our findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of enrollees.

The limitations of the survey include their self-administered nature and the absence of a few questions that should have been asked. When surveys are distributed to participants via email and paper, they can be easily disregarded and there is no immediate way for participants to ask clarifying questions. Upon engaging in data analysis, it became clear that we should have asked how many children under five lived in the household so that we could determine if families were enrolling all eligible children or not. Given that the parameters for qualifying for free or reduced lunch are different from other government assistance programs, we should not have included free or reduced lunch as an example of government assistance. Rather, we should have asked this as a separate question. Finally, we learned in our practice focus groups that people were not aware that UWWH provides the funding for DPIL. We did not further investigate this in our survey, so we recommend that future research focus on measuring awareness.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Questions

Let us begin by giving names, number of kids in the home, and relationships to the child(ren) in the program and their ages. (This is so that you can gather demographics and allow the participants to become familiar to each other; the facilitators give an intro then ask the participants)

(The main questions are bolded, and questions underneath each main question are follow-up questions)

- 1. Why did you choose to enroll in DPIL (Dolly Parton Imagination Library)?**
- 2. Could you walk me through the typical process for book delivery day at home?**
 - What are the main tasks involved in managing book delivery day?
 - Are there any specific challenges or obstacles you typically encounter during book delivery day, and how do you overcome them?
 - Can you describe any memorable moments or experiences you've had during past book delivery days?
 - How has your child's excitement for reading changed after enrolling in DPIL?
- 3. What differences do you see in the child's/family's reading habits?**
 - Do your child/children interact with the books? How often are they reading?
 - Who reads the books at home? In what way do older siblings interact with the books?
 - If you have begun to receive books that contain a flap at the front, are you aware of the reading activities provided? How do you use them? How has it changed how you read to your children?