

Pediatric Literacy Partnerships

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Schools and libraries are collaborating with pediatricians to improve the literacy of children even before they enter kindergarten in many Wisconsin communities.



So literacy-rich it resembles a classroom, this pediatric waiting room at [Mosaic Family Health](#) in Appleton was outfitted with books and other materials with help from the Appleton Public Library and United Way Fox Cities. Mosaic is one of many health care providers participating in the Fox Cities partnership. Image: Reach Out and Read Wisconsin

The idea is simple yet powerful: pediatricians at participating health care providers read age-appropriate books with every child, aged 6 months to 5 years, who comes in for a checkup.

Local educators or library staff often contribute their expertise to select the books, helping ensure the program is effective and feasible.

The kid gets to keep the book at the end of the visit — but while that might be the patient’s favorite part, it’s just the tip of the iceberg for what makes this program beneficial.

For one thing, putting a book in the pediatric appointment makes the advocacy of reading aloud more tangible.

That’s important since vocabulary gaps extant by the time kids enter kindergarten can be hard to erase.

But it also turns out that books are great diagnostic tools.

“[I would rather walk in without my stethoscope than without a book,](#)” explains Dipesh Navsaria in a video produced about the Reach Out and Read collaboration in the Fox Cities.



"I'm going to learn more about that child and that family, and their health and well-being, from the book than I will from listening to a normal heart and normal lungs," Navsaria says. Image: still frame from online video, "[Reach Out and Read Partners — Fox Cities](#)"

Navsaria is a pediatrician at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine / American Family Children's Hospital and is the medical director of the [Wisconsin branch of Reach Out and Read](#).

[Reach Out and Read](#) is one of the national partners which, along with the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) (AAP), have been encouraging doctors for over a year to advocate to parents about the brain-development and literacy benefits of reading aloud to their young children.

Pediatricians like Navsaria can quickly gauge brain development and family life from the simple interaction of seeing how they respond to a book.

In Taylor County in north-central Wisconsin, the Reach Out and Read program tapped a longstanding community partner, the non-profit [Taylor County Literacy Council](#). Many local educators are part of that group, says council president Joseph Greget (also the Medford Area Public School District's director of student services and special education).

These educators, being local experts on early literacy, select the books for each age group, ensuring there are both English and Spanish options.

In the first year of the Taylor County program, the Literacy Council bought the books with the help of a grant from the [local United Way](#); in the second year, the health care partner, [Aspirus](#), has taken on some of the costs.

Even with the community's history of coordination around health care and literacy (like parenting classes at local clinics), Taylor County Literacy Council Coordinator Cindy Gibson told *DPI-ConnectEd* it was inspiring and valuable that "everyone had the same vision" for helping young children learn to read.

"If it wasn't for the collaboration of the three stakeholders, I don't think it would have got off the ground here. But because everyone kept talking and working on it, it got going."

In the Fox Cities, it's the [Appleton Public Library](#) that chooses the books, again with the help of a [local United Way](#) grant. The library connection makes it easy for pediatricians at Fox Cities clinics to segue from giving away the book to reminding kids to visit their local library — where [a “whole world” of literacy experiences await them](#), as pediatrician Sarah Campbell of St. Elizabeth Hospital points out in the Fox Cities video.

“Why didn’t we think of it earlier?” [asks Nanci Micke](#) of United Way Fox Cities.

In other communities, local Reach Out and Read local partnerships have been supported by [Library Services and Technology Act](#) (LSTA) grants awarded by the Department of Public Instruction.

“Wisconsin has been a leader in tying libraries and Reach Out and Read together,” Navsaria says.

Karin Mahony, who manages the state Reach Out and Read initiative as an employee of the Children’s Health Alliance of Wisconsin, told *DPI-ConnectEd* that she always encourages clinics to reach out to local libraries for the program.

The national effort is a partnership between AAP; Reach Out and Read; [Scholastic](#); and [Too Small to Fail](#), an early childhood initiative which itself is a partnership of the Clinton Foundation and Next Generation.

Another statewide early literacy effort, [Growing Wisconsin Readers](#), is on hand to provide information to caregivers of young children so they can better prepare kids for learning at school and beyond.