

All Aboard the Literacy Locomotive:

A Grant Proposal


by

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**ABSTRACT**

Many children currently lack foundational language and literacy proficiency. In addition, many families lack the resources, strategies, and materials that can enhance literacy development in the preschool years. Without these foundational skills, children are at risk for future academic failure. Initiatives for increasing literacy include placing language rich materials in the home/child care setting and training parents/caregivers in using dialogic reading behaviors with children. The anticipated outcome is greater language and literacy proficiency for children entering Kindergarten. Grant activities include providing literacy kits for home use and offering training and mentoring in using dialogic reading strategies. Grant activities will be evaluated through parent/caregiver surveys and by language assessment results. Grant findings will be disseminated through parent newsletters, the school web site, and professional educational association networks.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Over the past several decades an increasing amount of research (Bayder, Brooks-Gunn, & Furstenburg, 1993; Dickenson & Neuman, 2007; Eliot, 1999; Hart & Risley, 1995; Missall et al., 2007; Morrow, 1993; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Strikland & Shanahan, 2004) confirms the enormous impact of early learning experiences on young children. Early experiences lay the foundation for life-long cognitive, social, emotional and psychological development. The first five years of life are especially critical for developing language and foundational literacy skills. Foundational language and literacy skills are key to developing reading skill and proficiency in the educational setting. Young children who begin school with strong foundational language and literacy skills are better prepared for formal reading instruction (Snow et al., 1998). Proficiency in reading allows for access across the curriculum as nearly 85% of the school curriculum involves reading. Those students who learn to read well are more likely to attain greater academic success than those who read poorly (Missall et al., 2007). Academic success and reading proficiency creates opportunities for broad social and economic success in adulthood. Nearly 85% of all adult work related tasks depend on reading comprehension (Fielding, Kerr & Rosier, 1998). Those who do not learn to read well are at greater risk for academic failure as children and later social failure as adults (Fielding et al., 1998). In fact, poor readers make up the largest identifiable group of those who are unemployed, underemployed, incarcerated and on public assistance (Fielding et al., 1998).

We also know that learning to read is affected by foundational skills in phonological awareness, print awareness, and by children's vocabulary development, which is formed in the

preschool years (Leslie & Allen, 1999). We know children's foundational skills vary greatly and that these differences can translate into disparities in later academic success. We have learned that children who come to kindergarten with significant deficits in their language and literacy skills are much more likely to experience difficulty learning to read (Juel, 1988). Research has also indicated that those children who enter school behind their peers in language and early literacy development are less likely to catch up and are at higher risk for reading failure (Missall et al., 2007). A number of studies have found strong correlations between preschool literacy skill development and later outcomes in reading achievement (Hindson et al., 2005; Savage & Ferraro, 2007; Schmitt & Gregory, 2005). Children who struggle learning to read in the primary classroom often remain struggling readers throughout their school years. In fact, Juel (1988) reported that 88% of those children who scored in the lowest quartile in reading comprehension at the end of first grade remained below the 50th percentile in fourth grade.

When students fail to acquire grade level reading proficiency additional instruction and remedial interventions are provided. Unfortunately, initiating interventions and remedial services only after students have failed to acquire reading skills when the gap between poor and proficient readers seldom closes. According to Fielding et al. (1998) 75% of struggling readers will continue to experience reading difficulties throughout high school. However, earlier intervention and prevention programs could result in a significant number of these children achieving sufficient reading levels in the first years of school. A considerable number of reading problems are preventable if children have access to effective early literacy development (Fielding et al., 1998).

There are a host of risk factors that can and do contribute to poor academic performance. Research (Hindson et al., 2005; Rosenkotter & Barton, 2002; Strickland & Shanahan, 2004) indicates that children who are at the greatest risk for reading problems in elementary school are students who start kindergarten with weak language skills, poor ability to attend to the sounds of language, deficient letter recognition, meager vocabularies and unfamiliarity with the basic purposes, and strategies of reading. Because learning to read has such a profound effect on future academic performance, it is imperative that early childhood educators and families address the foundational deficits prior to formal reading instruction and that the language environment for preschool age children is enriched. The foundational groundwork for reading development must be established in the first five years of life in order for children to maximize growth and development through formal reading instruction.

The home environments and family experiences for children during the first five years of life are also extremely diverse. Children live in homes with vastly different socio-economic situations and considerably different parenting styles. Some young children have access to numerous language and literacy experiences while other children have minimal exposure to language rich environments. An extensive study by Hart and Risley (1995) closely examined variations in parenting style across socio economic classes and how parenting style can influence literacy development. Researchers found some parents engaged in an incredible amount of verbal dialogue with their young children, while other parents conversed very little with their children. Those children who were spoken to less frequently, and whose parental directives included a higher percentage of prohibitions (*no, don't, stop it*) exhibited weaker language skills.

Additional findings indicated parents who conversed with their children more frequently, responded to them with positive feedback, and used a greater variety of words and sentences stimulated vocabulary growth and IQ in their children. This type of early stimulation can increase language and literacy skills and help prepare children for later academic success. A follow up study with the same group of children showed early language experiences have long lasting effects. Children in third grade, who had experienced substantially richer early language exposure in the form of positive conversation and feedback with parents and caregivers, performed significantly higher in reading, spelling, speaking and listening skills (Hart & Risley, 1995).

Hart and Risley (1995) also revealed that parenting styles were closely related to socio-economic class and that parenting style improved as families moved up the socio-economic ladder. For example, some children living in poverty heard as few as 600 words per hour addressed to them. Children in middle class families often heard up to 1,200 words per hour and children from upper class environments heard as many as 2,100 word per hour addressed to them. Furthermore, parents in the middle and upper class used more positive feedback, and fewer negative prohibitions and imperatives than lower income parents. While this study indicated correlations between socio-economic status and future school performance in children, Hart and Risley (1995) concluded that parenting style, which varied within a single economic class, is a much stronger predictor of a child's language and literacy development.

Based on the cumulative research on language and literacy development several essential points can be made. First, language stimulation must begin very early in order for optimal development. Second, it is the quantity of language the child hears that will have the

most profound impact on language development. This language must be directed to the child, and should be relevant to the child's experience in order for it to be significantly beneficial. Placing a youngster in front of a TV set all day where he hears language will not yield the same language development as the child who has people conversing with him. Third, with support and training parents from all socio-economic categories and educational levels can acquire verbal interaction styles that enhance the literacy and language development in the first five years of life.

One of the most important activities that can increase language and literacy experiences in the preschool years is the act of reading with children. Reading with young children enhances emergent literacy and pre-reading skills. Reading exposes children to rich vocabularies and story schema, expands language comprehension and helps develop listening and attention skills. In addition, reading together helps strengthen the parent-child bond and enhances the emotional and social development of the child. Reading with young children helps them build the broad base knowledge required for eventual success learning to read. It is especially important in the preschool years. Children who are read to frequently during the preschool years often have better language development and are better prepared for school (Fielding et al., 1998).

The amount of reading that occurs with preschoolers varies significantly. Research (Barnett et al., 2004; Hay & Fielding-Barnsley, 2007; Nord, Lennon, Liu, & Chandler, 2000) indicates that families in lower socio-economic environments read less frequently to their children. These families often have fewer books in the home and engage in literacy enhancing activities less frequently than families with higher socio-economic status. Research (Nord et al., 2000) also indicates the frequency of book reading is closely linked to the mother's level of

education. Mothers with a high school education or less do not read to their children as frequently as mothers with more education. The participation and engagement of fathers is also important and should not be underestimated. Gadsen and Bowman (1999) found that fathers' participation in literacy activities also affects children's literacy achievements. Early literacy development begins at birth and is dependent of a variety of literacy experiences. The lack of literacy experiences at home can limit the language development of young children. Poor literacy development can place children at risk for later reading difficulties.

### ***Problem Statement***

The Pine City Early Childhood Coalition in Pine City, Minnesota, takes seriously research indicating the urgent need for quality early learning experiences in order for young children to be successful in school and ultimately in life. The Coalition is a newly formed collaborative effort bringing a variety of interested constituents together in the common goal of improving early learning for children in our community. The twenty-member Coalition includes representatives from the faith community, the medical professions, media, early childhood educators, school administrators, parents and child-care providers in the Pine City School District. The members believe it is imperative to focus resources and attention on preparing children for learning and school success. Early literacy development is a major component of school readiness and has been found to strongly predict general curricular attainment (Savage et al., 1997).

Many young children in our district lack developmentally appropriate early literacy experiences. Risk factors such as poverty, low levels of parent education, and family dynamics can negatively impact children's developing literacy skills. At risk children may have

substantially fewer opportunities to engage in literacy enhancing activities and may be less likely to develop foundational skills in reading (Leslie & Allen, 1999). The consequences for children who do not learn to read in the early years are serious. Not only does this affect early school performance, but even more alarming is the fact several studies (Fielding et al., 1998; Gates, 2005; Lynch, 2004; Rolnick & Grunwald, 2007) report students with multiple risk factors early in life are more likely to experience other negative outcomes such as homelessness, poverty, substance and alcohol abuse, criminal activity, poor mental health, early pregnancy and unemployment later in life. This translates into enormous costs to the individual and to society.

The National Center for Education Statistics (1998) reports in a study of home literacy activities that children with two or more risk factors have far fewer early literacy experiences than children with no risk factors. Home literacy activities, such as, meaningful conversations, reading books, telling stories, discussing story elements, singing songs, playing word games, drawing pictures and visiting libraries are noticeably less frequent in homes where there is poverty, low levels of parental education, and single parent households.

In the Pine City School District, 10% of our residents are below the poverty level. In addition, 37% of our elementary students qualify for the free and reduced lunch program and Title I services. Financial limitations can hamper a family's ability to acquire high quality books and developmentally appropriate toys and games for children as well as restrict a child's ability to participate in center-based activities due to transportation and participation costs. The Pine City School District covers a large rural geographic area. Many residents live miles from town where there are no public transportation systems available, making it difficult for poor families to attend early childhood classes and activities. In addition, families facing financial difficulties

are less able to afford high quality preschool programs and day care programs with educationally sound preschool curriculums.

Low income is not the only prevalent risk factor in our district. Only 79% of our residents are high school graduates as compared with 88% of residents statewide (Pine County Quick Facts, 2007). Parents who have low levels of education may not be aware of strategies and techniques that can encourage optimal child development. Our Early Childhood activities and classes are designed to support families in acquiring these strategies and enhance early learning. However, parents with low levels of education may not read the local newspaper or the Early Childhood/Family Education brochures, which are primary sources for information on early learning. Thus, parents with low levels of education may remain unaware of the opportunities that are available to them and their children.

Financial constraints, transportation problems, work schedules, accessibility issues, lack of awareness, low education, single parenting, unemployment and limited resources all contribute to create home environments containing risk factors in the early learning experiences for children in our district. Increasing the early literacy learning experiences for these children will require additional efforts and support currently not available in the district.

Current early learning programs include: 1) Early childhood screenings (six times during the school year) for children beginning at age 3 ½. If warranted, the families are referred to appropriate programs and support services; 2) The “Ready-to-Learn/Ready-to-Read” program serving 50 identified at-risk students for 10 hours/week in our Early Childhood center; 3) The Early Childhood Special Education program serving 21 students who have been identified as having special needs; 4) The Early Childhood/Family Education program currently serving 60

students on a weekly basis in center-based classes; 5) “KinderKamp”, a weeklong session of summer classes for all district students entering Kindergarten in the fall. The purpose of this program is to orient students to Kindergarten and to identify specific needs before school begins. 6) The local library weekly preschool story hour; and 7) Faith-based preschool programs offered for 3- 4 year old children at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, St. Mary’s Catholic School, and Zion Lutheran Church.

Despite these programs, the current district data indicates that approximately 25% of our families with preschool-age children are not actively participating in any of the sponsored early learning opportunities (Cruz, 2007). The incidence of risk factors in our community may partially explain why only 47% of our students entered Kindergarten in the fall of 2007 proficient with the critical foundational literacy skills needed to be successful in school (Cruz, 2007). This is slightly less than the 54% of Minnesota children who reportedly enter Kindergarten with proficient literacy skill (Minnesota Department of Education, 2006). Clearly, there is a need for different programs and better delivery of early childhood programs and services in our community. In order to better prepare more children for school success we must continue to encourage and enhance early literacy development and we must find ways to reach those families who are not actively involved in early learning experiences.

***Purpose of the Project/Grant Proposal***

The Pine City Early Childhood Coalition seeks to reach all families and develop collaborative efforts throughout the community to better prepare preschool age children for school success and to improve foundational language and literacy skill development. We recognize the enormous impact of early experiences and we consider parents and families as

primary sources of foundational skill development in early childhood. The purpose of this grant proposal is to support and assist families and improve the language and literacy environment in the home. We will focus on several solutions that can help families increase early literacy experiences and improve early literacy development.

The first proposed solution is to increase the frequency of early literacy experiences to provide parents and caregivers with knowledge about the importance of literacy development in order to prepare children for school success. To further enrich the early literacy environment, parents and caregivers must have access to appropriate books and materials. Economic reasons may prohibit some families from acquiring these materials. The grant will allow for the purchase and distribution of literacy kits containing books, stories, songs, art supplies and activities to families and day care providers who lack these resources. The grant will also allow the Coalition to enrich foundational literacy development by offering training to parents and caregivers in using *dialogic reading* strategies. Dialogic reading focuses on active phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, print awareness, prediction, and vocabulary development as it encourages the child to think about the story and engage in dialogue related to the story and its elements. Instruction in dialogic reading strategies will also be provided through a DVD/Video containing information on the importance of early language and literacy development, the value of dialogic reading and model demonstrations of dialogic reading behaviors. The DVD/Video will provide another avenue for increasing the awareness of and access to data driven techniques that enhance the literacy development of young children.

In order to accomplish these three goals the Pine City Early Childhood Coalition needs funding. The Pine City School District, Pine City, MN cannot allocate additional funds beyond

the level currently budgeted for Early Childhood/Family Education. Recent declining enrollment in our district has reduced revenue and state funding increases have not been sufficient to maintain current spending within the district. As a result, we have been experiencing budget cuts for the past three years. Our desire to address early literacy development and prepare more children for school success depends on securing funding that allows us to provide training and materials to families.

### *Assumptions*

Language learning is most intense during the first five years of life. Language experiences during this stage of life lay the groundwork for future literacy development.

Every child, regardless of innate potential, can benefit from a more positive language environment. There is much that parents and caregivers can do to nurture language and literacy development in the home environment. Parents and caregivers can acquire useful strategies that allow them to enrich the language environment at home.

Reading abilities develop over time and are influenced by the environment, genetic potential, presence of additional disabilities, and the child's knowledge use.

Interventions used in this project cannot be assumed as solely responsible for any positive gains in school readiness, as additional factors influencing the school readiness of the children involved in this study cannot be controlled.

In addition, home environments may undergo changes that may hinder the interventions used during this project. These changes may have either positive or negative impacts on the assessed school readiness of the children participating in the project.

### ***Definition of Terms***

The following terms (Early Literacy Project, (n.d)) relate to the grant project goals:

*Alphabetic Understanding:* understanding that letters represent sounds and that whole words have a sound structure consisting of individual sounds and patterns of groups of sounds.

*Conventions of print:* knowledge of the semantic and visual structure of text.

*Conventional literacy:* reading, writing, and spelling of text in a conventional manner.

*Dialogic reading:* a set of book sharing strategies actively involving young children and encouraging them to verbalize during shared book reading.

*Emergent Literacy:* the process of literacy acquisition and various forms of early literacy behavior. It begins during the period before children receive formal reading instruction and encompasses learning about reading, writing, and print prior to schooling. It includes awareness of print, relationship of print to speech, text structure, phonological awareness, and letter naming and writing.

*Onsets:* the initial consonant of a word or syllable

*Phonemes:* basic vocalization of the sounds used to construct language.

*Phonemic Awareness:* an understanding about the smallest units of sound that make up speech.

*Phonological Awareness:* an ability to perceive spoken words as a sequence of sounds; conscious ability to detect and manipulate sound (move, combine, delete). Phonological awareness encompasses larger units of sound, such as syllables, onsets, and rimes.

*Rimes:* everything after the initial consonant in a one-syllable word or in syllables, often referred to as word families, (ack, ick, ake, ame)

### ***Methodology***

This grant proposal addresses the need to increase and enrich early language and literacy development and better prepare young children in our district for school success. Using preschool screening assessments we will identify up to fifty four-year old children, scheduled to enter Kindergarten Fall, 2009, who exhibit deficiency in phonological awareness, phonemic

awareness, alphabetical knowledge and/or vocabulary development. Families of identified children will be surveyed to determine type and frequency of literacy activities used with their preschoolers. Literacy kits and training in dialogic reading behaviors plus opportunities to increase parents' knowledge of literacy development will be provided to all participating families. Interventions will occur; parents will be trained in how to integrate dialogic reading strategies, parents will practice using strategies, and literacy kits for home use will be provided. At the completion of the project, the parents will be surveyed to determine what changes occurred in the type and frequency of literacy activity and their ability to integrate dialogic reading strategies. In addition, the children involved in the intervention will be re-assessed at the beginning of Kindergarten (2009) to identify what, if any changes occurred in their phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, alphabetical knowledge and vocabulary development.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### ***Project Need***

Developing foundational literacy skill in the preschool years is extremely important. However, a number of risk factors can affect children's language and literacy development. Risk factors include low socio-economic status, low maternal education, family attitudes towards literacy and single parent households. Young children with multiple risk factors may not be well prepared for school. Children who enter school behind their peers are unlikely to catch up (Juel, 1988) and are at risk for reading failure (Snow et al., 1988). Children who experience reading failure often suffer broad educational failure. They are also more likely to drop out of high school and experience broader social failures as well (Snow et al., 1998).

Some children enter Pine City Schools with deficits in their early literacy and language development. While some of these children are identified and served through interventions such as Head Start and Early Childhood Special Education programs, many students do not receive intervention services until they demonstrate failure in reading achievement during the primary school years. These students could benefit from increased literacy experiences before they begin formal schooling. Their gaps in language and literacy development could be addressed before age five in order to guarantee they come to school better prepared to learn and better equipped to maximize their potential for academic success.

A number of studies (Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, & Cutting, 2007; Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie, 2003) have shown that activities such as dialogic reading experiences, which engage the child in verbalizing and discussing a story, can facilitate development of language and literacy skills in toddlers and preschool age children. When

provided with training caregivers and parents can significantly increase their dialogic reading behaviors, which can have a positive effect on children's language skills (Huebner & Metzoff, 2005). A further benefit to increased literacy activities for preschool age children is that not only are language and emergent literacy skills enhanced, but the caregiver-child relationship is also strengthened. These experiences positively impact social and emotional learning in the early years, which in turn supports positive outcomes for children (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006).

Current research provides evidence of the importance of early literacy and language development and provides the impetus for our proposal. Research informs us early literacy skills are often linked to later academic performance. Studies show family environments may include risk factors that negatively affect literacy development and that investing in early education can yield significant economic benefits. In this chapter, specific research in these areas will be presented.

### ***Early Literacy Development and Later Academic Achievement***

A number of studies have investigated the relationship between early literacy skills, which can be assessed before age five, and later performance in reading, math and general curricular achievement. The findings indicate correlations between preschool literacy skill and later academic achievement and underscore the need for timely intervention with at risk youngsters.

Strickland and Shanahan (2004) reported on findings of the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP). One question the NELP explored was: What skills and abilities of preschool children are predictors of later academic outcomes? Researchers found early skills in alphabet knowledge, print knowledge, listening comprehension, oral language/vocabulary, phonologic and phonemic

awareness, and rapid naming were statistically correlated with later decoding and reading comprehension measures (NELP, 2004).

Bonamy, Dale and Ploman (2005) provide evidence that early literacy experience and pre-literacy knowledge at age four are indicators of literacy outcomes at age seven. Their study involved a representative sample of 3,052 children in the United Kingdom. Investigators explored the relationship between early literacy experiences, pre-literacy knowledge and later outcomes in reading and writing. They reported that while genetic influence is also significant, literacy experiences and pre-literacy knowledge are associated with later reading and writing outcomes (Bonamy, Dale & Ploman, 2005).

Missall et al. (2007) also examined the predictive validity of early literacy skills. They evaluated data on 116 children who were assessed during preschool using Early Literacy Individual Growth and Development Indicators (EL-IGDIs). Preschool IGDI's included Picture Naming, Rhyming and Alliteration Skill assessments. Follow-up assessments in the spring of kindergarten and first grade revealed that preschool EL-IDGI's were accurate predictors of grade one oral reading fluency (Missall et al., 2007). Of particular interest was the level to which the preschool Picture Naming IGDI correctly classified grade-one reading fluency. Ability to name pictures is reflective of a child's vocabulary and cognitive experiences. Children who performed well on the Picture Naming IDGI frequently became more fluent readers in grade one (Missall, et al., 2007). The Missall et al. (2007) study also found that students who were unable to answer IGDI questions related to understanding rhyme later performed poorly in reading outcomes at the end of grade one as compared to peers who possessed a basic concept for rhyme in preschool (Missall et al., 2007).

In a longitudinal study of 243 children Aarnoutse, van Leeuwe and Verhoeven (2005) examined which skills in early literacy determined word recognition, reading comprehension and spelling proficiency in second grade. They concluded that vocabulary, letter knowledge, phonemic awareness and rapid naming of letters were predictive of later reading comprehension and that rapid naming of numbers and letter knowledge predicted development of spelling proficiency (Aarnoutse, van Leeuwe & Verhoeven, 2005). This study stressed the importance of a youngster's vocabulary in the development of reading competency (Aarnoutse, van Leeuwe & Verhoeven, 2005).

Using six longitudinal studies Duncan et al. (2007) also investigated links between school readiness skills and later reading and math achievement. Researchers found that early oral language and conceptual ability are linked to later reading and math mastery (Duncan et al., 2007). Early language skills such as vocabulary, knowing letters, and phonemic awareness were consistently strong predictors of reading outcomes (Duncan et al., 2007).

In another study, Heath and Hogben (2004) explored the identification of preschool-age children at risk for reading failure. They assessed 227 children in the areas of phonological short-term memory, rapid naming, oral language, receptive vocabulary and listening comprehension. Based on assessment results, the children were categorized for low or high risk of reading failure. Reading outcomes were assessed at the end of grade two. Research found grade two performance results were consistent with phonological awareness performance in preschool. This study provided further evidence that strong early phonemic awareness accurately predicts successful reading outcomes (Heath & Hogben, 2004).

In a discussion of approximately 800 peer-reviewed articles about reading and reading difficulties, Snow et al. (1998) reported that early preschool language proficiency is predictive of reading development in the first three years of school. The authors found that reading readiness at entry to school is strongly correlated with learning to read in the primary years. Children who enter school without prerequisite reading skills often are struggling readers in the primary grades (Snow et al., 1998). Letter identification is one prerequisite skill that has correlations with reading difficulties. Understanding how print is used is another pre-reading skill that shows modest correlation with later reading achievement (Snow et al., 1998).

Additional support comes from The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP, 2007). The NELP analyzed 300 peer-reviewed research articles looking for early predictors of later reading outcomes. The Panel found strong evidence that alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and rapid naming of letters, digits, objects, and colors are important predictors of later reading and writing skills. The NELP also evaluated 182 articles describing interventions designed to impact early literacy skills. The interventions included such approaches as targeting phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge and print knowledge, shared reading programs, programs designed to improve young children's home literacy experiences and language enhancement interventions. The Panel reports that all interventions demonstrated positive effects for language and literacy outcomes (NELP, 2007).

### ***Family Environment Risk Factors Affecting Literacy Development***

There is a significant body of research regarding the predictive validity of early literacy skills with later academic outcomes. Additional research provides insight into the family

environment and how variations in home environment create differences in emergent literacy development for young children, which in turn may impact later educational achievement.

**Poverty.** The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 1995) has identified several family risk factors that are frequently associated with poor literacy development and later learning difficulties. One of these risk factors is poverty. Many researchers (Barton and Coley, 2007; Bayder et al., 1993; Cardigan, 2005; Fielding et al., 1998; Nord et al., 2000; Zill and Collins, 1995) have found that low socio-economic status is often linked with poor literacy development and poor educational achievement.

Nord et al. (2000) examined the home literacy activities of being read to, being told stories, being taught songs and music and being taught letters, words and numbers. They found differences in the frequency and type of literacy activities taking place in the home. Investigators determined which family factors were associated with fewer literacy experiences. Poverty was one factor identified with fewer literacy activities. Nord et al. (2000) found 69% of children living below the poverty level were read to three times per week as compared to 85% of the children living above the poverty level.

Barton and Coley (2007) found even greater disparities while researching family environments linked with later student achievement. They report children from the lowest socio-economic environments were read to much less frequently than children from higher income families. Investigators found 62% of children from the highest socio-economic environments were read to everyday, as compared to only 36% of children from the lowest socio-economic environments (Barton & Coley, 2007). Researchers also found that children from homes with the lowest incomes spent the most time watching television (Barton & Coley, 2007). While not

conclusively shown to be an indicator of school performance the evidence does show that by age 16 most children have spent between 10,000 to 15,000 hours watching television. Children who are watching television are generally not engaged in language and literacy enhancing activities such as reading, being read to, or conversing with people in their environment.

Not only have researchers found that poor children are read to less frequently, there is evidence that poor children possess fewer school readiness skills as well. In a national study of 2,000 four-year old children, Zill and Collins (1995) investigated the relationship between risk factors and children's school readiness skills. They identified five emergent literacy skills contributing to children's school readiness performance. These skills include: 1) counting to 20, 2) identifying primary colors by name, 3) telling connected stories when pretending to read, 4) writing ones' own name and 5) recognizing letters of the alphabet (Zill & Collins, 1995). In measures of the five literacy skills children living in poverty exhibited fewer literacy accomplishments. Zill and Collins (1995) found poor children averaged a score of 2.8/5, while the non-poor children's average scores were 3.7/5. Poor emergent literacy skills may place a child at risk for later reading difficulty and broad educational failure.

Hay and Fielding-Barnsley (2007) found children from higher socio-economic families often become more successful readers. Their research indicated higher socio-economic parents read significantly more with their children and used a higher level of discussion and verbal interaction with their children while reading to them. Parents with low socio-economic status read less frequently with their children and used a lower quality of discussion and verbal interaction with children. The authors concluded that it was not so much the socio-economic

status itself as it was child-parent interactions of lower socio-economic parents that were detrimental to the child's literacy development.

While many researchers report correlations between socio-economic status and literacy development some children from low socio-economic status can and do achieve reading proficiency. Authors Fielding, Kerr and Rosier (1998) state the following:

The primary difference between the poor who do well in school and the poor who do not stems from their pre-kindergarten literacy experiences. Successful children generally have hundreds of hours of literacy experience, have an extensive spoken vocabulary and are familiar with sounds, words and books. Unsuccessful children generally have few literacy experiences. (Fielding, Kerr & Rosier, 1998, p. 49)

The authors assert, "It appears we can change the academic performance of children without changing their low socio-economic status if we can increase their pre-literacy experience" (Fielding, Kerr & Rosier, 1998, p. 49).

Cadigan (2005) reporting for the Center for Early Education and Development at the University of Minnesota agrees. She says, "Literacy environments and experiences before kindergarten predict lifelong outcomes in reading" (Cadigan, 2005, p. 8). She adds that children living in poverty have less exposure to books; less shared reading at home and fewer literacy experiences than higher economic status peers. However, it is possible to change those variables to the benefit of children living in poverty.

***Low maternal education.*** A second family risk factor identified by the National Center for Educational Statistics is low maternal education. Several studies have shown that maternal education is linked to the type and frequency of literacy activities taking place in the home.

Well-educated mothers read to their children more frequently (Barton & Coley, 2007; Bayder et al., 1993; Nord et al., 2000). In fact, Nord et al. (2000) found that 61% of the children whose mother had less than a high school education were read to three or more times per week as compared to 90% of the children whose mothers were college graduates.

According to Nord et al. (2000) better-educated mothers also engage in a broader variety of literacy activities. Researchers found significant differences in frequency of other literacy activities such as arts and crafts, visiting libraries and being told stories. College educated mothers frequently provided a greater and more frequent variety of literacy activities than mothers with less education.

Nord et al. (2000) reports maternal education may be a significant factor in the emergent literacy skills of children. In addition to investigating type and frequency of home literacy activities Nord et al. (2000) also assessed emergent literacy skills of the children in their study. Investigators assessed children's ability to recognize all letters, count to 20 or higher, write name, and read or pretend to read storybooks. Only 17% of the children whose mother had a high school diploma recognized all letters as compared to 35% of those whose mothers had a college degree. The authors concluded that children whose families engaged in several types of literacy activities were more likely to show multiple signs of emerging literacy (Nord et al., 2000).

Based on their research, Zill and Collins (1995) assert the biggest risk factor for poor literacy development may be the mother's educational level, which was consistently associated with fewer signs of emerging literacy (Zill & Collins, 1995). They found approximately 50% of the children of mothers with less than high school educations were able to demonstrate

proficiency with emergent literacy tasks, while as many as 88% of children whose mothers had more education were capable of demonstrating emergent literacy skills (Zill & Collins, 1995). While low family income is often considered a key predictor of educational failure the authors of this study suggest that low maternal education is equally predictive of the likelihood of poor school performance (Zill & Collins, 1995).

***Single parent household.*** A third family risk factor identified by the National Center for Educational Statistics (1995) is single parent households. Authors Barton and Coley (2007) noted children from single parent families are less likely to have been read to than children in two parent households.

In another study, Bayder et al. (1993) reviewed longitudinal data from a 20-year study of black children born to teenage mothers in Baltimore, MD and analyzed the effects of the home environment on literacy skills. Researchers cited marital status as one factor impacting literacy skill development. They reported that children from two parent households were more likely to have been read to than children in single-parent household. The authors (Bayder et al., 1993) note that teenage mothers having several children in close succession can also have a negative impact on literacy development, due to the inadequate amount of verbal conversation and interaction between mothers and children. (Bayder et al., 1993).

Zill and Collins (1995) also found statistical differences in children's literacy achievements when mothers were not married at time of child's birth. Average literacy accomplishments scores on five measured literacy tasks ranged from 3.1 for children born to unmarried mothers to 3.6 for children born to married women (Zill & Collins, 1995).

*Literacy patterns in the home environment.* Reading to children is one activity that helps children develop literacy skills and become readers but there are additional literacy experiences that help lay the foundation for pre-reading skill development such as telling stories, singing songs, teaching letters and numbers and doing arts and crafts projects. These activities provide a rich language environment and can encourage vocabulary development and phonological awareness while providing information about the world and increasing the child's general knowledge base. In addition, these activities are excellent ways to nurture the emotional and social development of the child and help strengthen the parent-child bond. Zill and Collins (2005) suggested that children whose families frequently engaged in several types of literacy activities were more likely to show multiple signs of emerging literacy.

Many family factors can and do contribute to literacy development and later educational achievement. Bayder et al. (1993) analyzed the effects of the home environment on literacy development. Researchers found factors such as language patterns and interaction in the home plus family attitudes can affect literacy skill development in childhood. The authors report literacy development in childhood can predict literacy levels in young adulthood and suggest children at risk of entering school with delays in skills might benefit from intervention programs that target preschool children and their families.

Aulls and Sollars (2003) found similar results in an examination of the home environment and its influence on the early reading development of 60 children entering first grade. Aulls and Sollars (2003) evaluated the availability of print in the home, the degree of children's interaction with print, parent and child reading activities, library membership and use, and environmental print exposure. They found substantial differences in the richness of the

literacy environment and the richness of the environment corresponded with the child's print awareness and book knowledge. Book knowledge skills include knowing that print conveys messages, the starting word is found top left, print progresses left to right, being able to point to text word-by-word and identifying story beginning and ending. Print awareness and book knowledge were associated with word reading accuracy, fluency, and use of strategies in later reading situations (Aulls & Sollars, 2003).

In another study Hay and Fielding-Barnsley (2007) also found significant correlations between home environment and children's reading achievement. The factors they identified as contributing to later reading achievement were regular engagement in literacy activities, greater numbers of books in the home, parents spending time reading to children, and positive attitudes towards reading (Hay & Fielding-Barnsley, 2007). They found evidence that the frequency and quantity of parent-child book reading is associated with later reading achievement (2007). The authors concluded home literacy activities influence vocabulary development and alphabet knowledge, which can be associated with later reading fluency (Hay & Fielding-Barnsley, 2007). Based on their findings Hay and Fielding-Barnsley support interventions designed to enhance early literacy development, especially for at-risk children.

***Multiple risk factors.*** While poverty, low maternal education, and single parent households can each contribute to the lack of literacy rich experiences young children need, it is the presence of multiple risk factors in the home that poses the most significant danger. As the number of family and environmental risk factors increases children are at greater danger of demonstrating fewer literacy accomplishments. Zill and Collins (1995) noted that in homes with multiple risk factors, children had noticeably fewer literacy accomplishments. On average,

children with no family risk factors demonstrated emergent literacy scores of 3.9 out of 5 skills assessed, while children with three or more family risk factors scored an average of 2.5 out of 5 skills assessed (Zill & Collins, 1995).

A number of children in the Pine City School District are affected by multiple family risk factors. We have students from low socio-economic homes, children living with only one parent, and children whose mothers have only a high school education or less. Research indicates these risks can translate into reading difficulties in school, which may lead to a lower overall academic performance. Our Coalition seeks to provide interventions during the preschool years in order to mitigate the effects of the low socio-economic status, single parent households and low maternal education.

### ***Economic Benefits of Early Education***

A convincing amount of research (Hart & Risley, 1995; Snow et al., 1998; Morrow, 1993) has shown that reading failure often leads to school failure, which leads to broad social failure. Students who fail academically are more likely to drop out of school. High school dropouts are less likely to be gainfully employed. They are more likely to be on public assistance, and are more likely to be involved with criminal activity. An equally convincing amount of research has shown that the child's quality of life in the first five years is extremely influential in preparing a child for school as this period of life provides the foundation for language and literacy development as well as social-emotional functioning which are crucial for learning and school success. It has also been shown that interventions targeting early learning for at risk youth can yield substantial benefits. Those benefits may be to the individual children as they increase their academic performance, graduate from high school and earn better wages.

Not only do the individuals benefit from greater skill development, the community at large gains the benefit of better educated, productive, contributing adults.

Rolnick and Grunewald (2007), economic researchers for the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, MN, believe investing in early childhood education yields a high economic return. Their cost-benefit analysis of four well-known early childhood intervention projects with at risk populations (the Perry Preschool Program, the Abecedarian Project, the Chicago Child-Parent Centers and the Elmira Prenatal/Early Infancy Project) yielded returns ranging from \$3.00 to \$17.00 for every dollar invested. From an economic standpoint this translates to annual rate of return of 7% to 18% (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2007).

Bill and Melinda Gates (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2005) are equally convinced of the need to invest in early learning. They believe that risk factors in early childhood can lead to poor outcomes and a loss of human potential, which in turn creates significantly high costs to the taxpayer. At-risk children often become at-risk youth who may experience such problems as educational failure, alcohol and substance abuse, limited workforce involvement, poor mental health, anti-social behavior, homelessness and early pregnancy. The authors state, "Nationwide, multi-problem youth cost society an estimated \$335 billion a year (Gates, 2005, p. 8)." If these children received greater exposure to reading and language development in the foundational years it could result in increased social and mental development, higher self-esteem, better academic performance and lead to decreased incidence of early pregnancy, and less alcohol and drug abuse. The Gates Foundation also reports a significant return on each dollar invested in interventions aimed at at-risk children. The investment pays off in increased earnings for the individual, decreased costs of special education, remediation and welfare, decreased crime and

related court costs. They estimate the rate of return for investing in early learning at 16%, with enormous benefits to the general public due to decreased criminal activity (Gates, 2005).

In a recent report by the National Scientific Council (NSC) Center on the Developing Child (2007) the same message is conveyed. The Council claims, "Creating the right conditions for early childhood development is likely to be more effective and less costly than addressing problems at a later age" (NSC, 2007, p. 2). They maintain we have a fundamental and moral responsibility to address the inequities in opportunities during the earliest years of life in order to enhance the nation's social and economic future. The Council warns, "If we do not invest in our nation's children and families during the early years we will incur much higher costs associated with children needing special education, and adults who are under-employed, unemployable or incarcerated" (NSC, 2007, p. 3). By investing in families and early learning we increase the likelihood that children grow into adults who are more productive and responsible citizens. Even if the 17:1 benefit-cost ratio achieved by some model programs for at-risk youth is not realized, it is highly likely that the benefit-cost ratio will still be greater than 1:1 (NSC, 2007).

Investing in early childhood pays off. Lynch (2004) of the Economic Policy Institute reports, "The benefits of improving early learning for at-risk children include better academic achievement, fewer grade retentions, increased graduation rates, better employment and increased earning potentials, decreased welfare dependency, lowered crime rates and decreased costs of criminal behavior (Lynch, 2004). Lynch says, "Investments in early childhood often generate more than a \$3.00 return for every \$1.00 invested" (Lynch, 2004, p. 6). He believes early childhood investments benefit taxpayers in four ways. First, public schools expenses are lowered as costs for special education, remediation and grade retention decrease. Second,

criminal justice costs are lowered as crime and delinquency decrease as educational achievement increases. Third, due to better educational achievement, children can become adults who earn more, and subsequently pay more taxes. Fourth, fewer individuals may end up on public assistance and welfare due to better education and better jobs (Lynch, 2004). Lynch estimates that if we were to implement publicly financed early childhood development for all children from low income families we would see benefits exceeding costs by \$31 billion within 25 years. He adds, “Within 45 years the gross domestic product could be raised by \$107 billion (Lynch, 2004, p. 12)” and “Economic costs of criminal behavior could be decreased by \$155 billion (Lynch, 2004, p. 15).

Much of the economic benefit of investing in early childhood is not immediately realized. According to Burr and Grunewald (2006) some economic benefits become most apparent when children reach adolescence. Burr and Grunewald reviewed a number of early childhood studies that focused on improving early learning for at-risk children. They found benefits accrue over the life of the child. Some benefits of early childhood interventions are not fully realized until 15 or 20 years later. A noticeable reduction in adolescent criminal behavior is one such benefit of early intervention (Burr & Grunewald, 2006). Burr and Grunewald (2006) suggest that early intervention can increase school success, which leads to less delinquency later in life.

### ***Summary***

Given the strong influence of early literacy development on many areas of academic, social and emotional growth and development and given the evidence of significant differences in the level of skill among children at the start of school it is of vital importance that we

diligently work to address the gaps in literacy development before children come to school and experience failure.

Our proposal can benefit children and families in the Pine City School District by supplying additional ways and means to enhance literacy development in the preschool years. We want to reach those families not currently active in our Early Childhood/Family Education programming and focus our attention on at-risk children who need enriched literacy skill development in order to be adequately prepared for school. Our ultimate goal is to decrease the number of students who enter Kindergarten with deficits in their literacy and language development skills. The anticipated benefit of this grant is to have 75% of students entering kindergarten in the fall of 2009 achieve a proficient rating in literacy and language skills.

### Chapter III: Goals and Objectives

Early learning has a profound and lasting impact on young children. Experiences in early childhood influence social, emotional and cognitive development. The goal of the Pine City Early Childhood Coalition is to enhance early learning in order to prepare children for school success. With this project we address early language and literacy development in hopes of reducing reading difficulties and reading failure for at risk children.

#### ***Goal 1: Identification of Children and Families***

The first goal is to identify up to 50 preschool age children in the Pine City School District and families who exhibit risk factors for reading failure.

##### ***Objectives:***

- A. Collect baseline data on type and frequency of literacy activity occurring in the homes of families participating in the project.
- B. Collect baseline data on participating children's phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, alphabetical awareness, and vocabulary development.

#### ***Goal 2: Provide Intervention Strategies***

The second goal is to provide intervention strategies with up to 50 parents of preschool age children in the Pine City School District.

##### ***Objectives:***

- A. Provide three different literacy kits to participating families with preschool age children during a twelve- month period.

- B. Three early childhood instructors from the Pine City School District will work with small groups of parents at the early childhood center based classes to explain and model five dialogic reading strategies.
- C. Teachers will provide a DVD about dialogic reading strategies to all participating parents.
- D. Parents will use the literacy kits and the dialogic reading strategies with children at home over a 12-month period.

***Goal 3: Assess Kindergarten Literacy Skills***

The third goal is to assess the pre-reading skill development of up to 50 children in preparation for Kindergarten.

***Objectives:***

- A. Assess the language and literacy readiness skills of those children whose parent(s) participated in training and/or received literacy kits.
- B. Assessments will be conducted during the first two weeks of the Kindergarten year by the Ready 4 K coordinator using the Ready 4 K evaluation tool.

***Goal 4. Assess the program goals and outcomes***

***Objectives:***

- A. Parents will be surveyed at the end of the year to evaluate outcomes of using dialogic reading strategies with their children.
- B. Investigate additional needs for language and literacy development activities for preschool children and their families.

C. Report back to families and Early Childhood center with results and recommendations.

## Chapter IV: Project Methodology

In order to enhance the early literacy development of preschool age children our coalition has designed the “All Aboard the Literacy Locomotive” project. This project is dependent upon funding. Once funding has been secured we will implement the planned interventions according to the timeline below. At the regularly scheduled fall Preschool screening each child’s literacy skills will be assessed. We will survey the parents of the 50 preschool children receiving the lowest literacy scores to determine what literacy activities are currently being used in the home. These parents will be invited to participate in a twelve-month long program that will include the distribution of three different literacy kits containing books and materials for home use, five sessions working with Early Childhood teachers who will model and assist parents in the use of dialogic reading strategies, and a DVD for parents which will describe and model dialogic reading behaviors. At the completion of the project, the parents will be surveyed. Feedback from parents regarding change in type and frequency of literacy activities and their perceptions related to the value of the strategies training will be collected.

This section contains the proposed project timeline, explanation of project tools, a budget and budget narrative, the dissemination plan and the evaluation plan.

### ***Project Timeline***

MONTH	LITERACY ACTIVITY
OCTOBER 08	Survey parents at Preschool Screening Identify 50 families for participation in Early Literacy activities Distribute Literacy Kit #1 to families, and to selected community organizations. Mail ECFE Fall/Winter Class Schedule Teacher training sessions in dialogic reading
NOVEMBER 08	ECFE teachers work with parents at center; discuss importance of early literacy development.

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	Publish information on the importance of early literacy development in local newspaper.
DECEMBER 08	Mail Ready 4 K newsletter to families. Describe literacy skills that are needed in Kindergarten.
JANUARY 09	Distribute a recommended reading list at “Snack with Santa” ECFE teachers work with parents at center. Teach specific dialogic reading behaviors.
FEBRUARY 09	Distribute Literacy Kit #2 to families and selected community organizations. Publish tips for literacy development in conjunction with “I Love to Read Month” in local newspaper.
MARCH 09	ECFE teachers work with parents at center, explore literacy activities. Mail ECFE Sprig/Summer Class Schedule
APRIL 09	Distribute tips for literacy development at “Easter Bunny Breakfast” Distribute Literacy Kit #3 to families and selected community organizations.
MAY 09	ECFE teachers work with parents at center; explore vocabulary-building activities. Mail Ready 4 K newsletter with literacy tips and suggested summer activities.
JUNE 09	Summer reading program at the Public library, storytellers model dialogic reading during preschool story hour.
JULY 09	Mail Ready 4 K newsletter with tips and suggested activities for literacy development.
AUGUST 09	Kindergarten teachers work with children at KinderKamp. Distribute KinderKamp newsletter highlighting activities that enhance literacy. ECFE teachers work with parents at center on skills needed in Kindergarten.
SEPTEMBER 09	Assess literacy development of Kindergarten’09 students who participated in early literacy development activities. Survey parents who participated in dialogic reading activities. Evaluate data from parents and children. Provide feedback to parents. Evaluate project goals and write final grant report. Report to families and to ECFE organization.

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### ***Project Tools***

A parent survey (see appendix C) will be used to gather baseline data on the type and frequency of literacy activities currently used by the participating families. At the completion of

the intervention a second parent survey will be used to gather data on the change in type and frequency of literacy activities, as well as participant feedback on the training and DVD used during the intervention.

### **Budget**

The following is the requested budget needed to meet grant goals.

### **Budget Request: "All Aboard the Literacy Locomotive"**

#### **I. Personnel**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Number of hours</b>	<b>Total</b>
Director	Pine City Early Childhood/Family Ed Program	10 @ \$25.00	\$250.00
Coordinator	Pine City Ready 4 K Program	10 @ \$25.00	\$250.00
Grant Developer	Project Manager	10 @ \$25.00	\$250.00
<b>SUBTOTAL PERSONNEL</b>		<b>30 @ \$25.00</b>	<b>\$750.00</b>

#### **II. Direct Costs-Service and Supplies**

<b>Description</b>		<b>Total</b>
Literacy Kit #1	75 sets of books/materials @ \$12.00 each	\$900.00
Literacy Kit #2	75 sets of books/ materials @ \$12.00 each	\$900.00
Literacy Kit #3	75 sets of books/materials @ \$12.00 each	\$900.00
Plastic Book Bags	1 carton @\$35.00/carton	\$35.00
Hear and Say Reading Program DVD	1 original (copy permitted) @ \$14.00	\$14.00
Blank DVD's	75 Blank DVD's @ \$3.00 each (copy Hear and Say Reading Program DVD)	\$225.00
Duplicating	Printing Surveys, Dialogic Reading Tip Sheets, flyers/newsletters and reports	\$30.00
Postage	Mail surveys, flyers and newsletters	\$100.00
<b>SUBTOTAL DIRECT COSTS</b>		<b>\$3104.00</b>

#### **III. Indirect Costs (3%)**

<b>Description</b>		<b>Total</b>
Indirect Costs	3% X \$3100 = \$93.00	\$93.00

**IV. Equipment**

Description	Total
None	\$ 0

**V. Consultant/Contractual agreements**

Description	Total
None	\$0

<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>	<b>\$3,947.00</b>
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**TOTAL REQUEST: \$3,947.00****Budget Narrative****I. Personnel**

**The Early Childhood/Family Education Director, Pine City School District.** The director will conduct the preschool screening activities and be instrumental in identification of families for participation in the project. She will also train parents, day care providers and library staff in dialogic reading strategies. She will prepare the Early Childhood/Family Education brochure and develops the curriculum for Early Childhood classes. She will assist in the data analysis and evaluation of project outcomes. She will devote 10 hours of evening/weekend time above and beyond her contract to this project. The requested budget is for compensation at \$25.00/ hour for a total of \$250.00.

**The Ready 4 K Coordinator, Pine City School District.** The coordinator will orchestrate collaboration between the school, local, state and county family service agencies, local medical facilities, public library staff and local day care providers in a joint effort to best serve families and children in the Pine City School district. She will prepare informative articles for publication in local media, tip sheets and activity guides for the literacy kits and public notice promoting early literacy development for use in local businesses and agencies. She will also conduct the individual assessment of literacy readiness at the beginning of the Kindergarten year for all students involved in the project. She will assist in the data analysis and evaluation of project outcomes. She will devote 10 hours of evening/weekend time above and beyond her contract to this project. The requested budget is for compensation at \$25.00/ hour for a total of \$250.00.

**The Project manager/Grant author, Pine City School District.** The grant manager will assemble and distribute the literacy kits, develop the survey instruments, assist in the data collection and analysis, and in the evaluation of project outcomes. She will write and present the final reports on project outcomes to families and school administrators. She will devote 10 hours of evening/weekend time above and beyond her contract to this project. The requested budget is for compensation at \$25.00/ hour for a total of \$250.00.

## **II. Total Direct Costs**

**Literacy Kits:** The total requested budget for literacy kits is \$2,700.00. This includes the books and materials, such as crayons, markers, alphabet magnets and literacy enhancing items for distribution to 50 families, and for placement in 25 local facilities that serve families and children. Three different kits will be assembled and distributed throughout the year in order to supply families with a variety of high quality materials that can be used to create a literacy rich environment in the home.

**Plastic Book Bags:** The requested budget is \$35.00. Literacy materials will be packaged in bags and distributed to participating families.

**Hear and Say Reading Program DVD:** The requested budget is \$14.00. This training DVD was developed and published by the Bainbridge Island, WA Rotary Club. It is a model of using dialogic reading techniques and behaviors. Permission to copy the DVD is permitted.

**Blank DVDs:** The total requested budget is \$225.00. The 75 blank DVD's will be used to copy the Hear and Say Reading Program DVD for distribution in the literacy kits. The DVD's will be copied using equipment owned by Pine City Schools at no additional cost.

**Duplicating:** The total requested budget is \$50.00. Duplicating costs will cover the expense of printing surveys, tip sheets, flyers and newsletters for families participating in the project. School district duplicating equipment will be used at no cost.

**Postage:** The total requested budget is \$100.00. The cost of postage includes mailing flyers and newsletters to participating families and agencies throughout the year. Also included is the cost of mailing results and outcomes to parents at the end of the project.

## **III. Indirect Costs:**

The requested indirect cost budget of \$93.00 is 3% of direct costs only. Indirect costs cover grant-related costs that are not easily identified, but are necessary to conduct the grant such as space rental costs, accounting and reporting costs, etc.

**IV: Equipment:** None.

**V: Consultant/Contractual Agreements:** None.

In total, the Pine City Early Childhood Coalition requests \$3,947.00 in funds from the Minnesota Initiative Foundation.

***Dissemination Plan***

Because our primary concern is to better prepare children with the language and literacy skills that will help them be successful in the school setting we will disseminate outcomes of our literacy project to a broad base of individuals and associations involved in early learning. We will disseminate information to parents at the local level through newsletters, Early Childhood education brochures, local media and our local school district web site. We will include our local day care providers and local health care and family services agencies in sharing the outcomes of this project, because they have the opportunity to further promote early literacy development through their contact with children and families. We will share project outcomes with the local and regional Early Education Associations, the local and regional Head Start organizations and the regional Early Learning Coalition. We will include the Minnesota Alliance of Early Childhood Professionals, the Minnesota Ready 4 K program and the Minnesota Department of Education in our dissemination plans. We will be available to present our project and its outcomes at state and local conferences and conventions addressing early childhood language and literacy development. The project manager will be responsible for the dissemination of project outcomes to the selected audiences.

***Evaluation Plan***

At the completion of this intervention we will gather responses and feedback through parent surveys. We will use the data to evaluate the effectiveness and value of project activities. We will also evaluate the literacy performance of the participating students during the first weeks of Kindergarten and note changes, if any, in their skill level as compared to their Kindergarten

peers. Results of this intervention will help us determine further needs, training and/or programs that can be incorporated into our efforts to prepare all children for school success.

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## Appendix A: Cover Letter

October 3, 2007

MN Initiative Foundation  
405 First Street Southeast  
Little Falls, MN 56345

Dear Program Director,

The Pine City Early Childhood Coalition is pleased to submit a letter of intent to the Minnesota Initiative Foundation's Children, Youth and Families program to improve the quality of care and education for our youngest children.

In keeping with your vision, our coalition plans to educate citizens about the importance of early learning experiences, support parents in their efforts to nurture and educate children and promote early learning in our community. We are greatly concerned with the results of a pilot study showing that 56% of Minnesota kindergartners are not proficient in the language and literacy skills that are critically important for school success. We would like to implement a program that will supply literacy kits to families with preschool age children in our school district. We would also like to supply literacy kits to local daycare providers, local congregation based preschool programs, local health care facilities, our county social services department and area businesses that serve families and children.

Along with the literacy kits we intend to provide educational events and activities that support and encourage parents in engaging their children in early literacy development and promote literacy development throughout our community. Our goal is to substantially increase literacy rich experiences and emerging literacy skills for preschool age children. We believe that by providing access, education and encouragement for families more children will come to our school better prepared for success.

With your invitation, a complete proposal will be prepared and submitted for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Laurie Mettling, Grant Developer  
Pine City Early Childhood Coalition  
900 4<sup>th</sup> Street SE  
Pine City, MN 55063

## Appendix B: Minnesota Initiative Foundation Grant Guidelines

### GRANT GUIDELINES

The Initiative Foundation makes grants for projects and programs that advance our mission to *unlock the power of Central Minnesota people to build and sustain healthy communities*. Nearly 90 percent of our grant dollars are awarded to projects that originate from strategic plans developed through our *Healthy Communities Partnership (HCP)*, *Healthy Lakes and Rivers Partnership (HLRP)*, *Healthy Organizations Partnership (HOP)*, the *Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative (ECI)*, and the *Minnesota Thrive Initiative for early childhood mental health*. Information on each of these programs is posted on [www.ifound.org](http://www.ifound.org), and printed fact sheets are available upon request.

Our remaining grant support is allocated through our “**Innovation Fund**” or by the appropriate Component Funds (see website), and is awarded through an open grant inquiry process. The Initiative Foundation gives priority consideration to projects which:

- Strengthen children, youth and families;
- Embrace diversity as a resource across age, class, culture and ability level;
- Engage and support those living in poverty, and;
- Help preserve a sense of place, open space, and natural resources.

**Eligible Applicants** must be 501(c)(3) nonprofits, local units of government that serve the people in Benton, Cass, Chisago, Crow Wing, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Pine, Sherburne, Stearns, Todd, Wadena, and Wright Counties. *Funding requests for projects outside of this area will not be considered.*

In the most recent fiscal year the Initiative Foundation’s average grant award was approximately \$5,000. Grant funding typically observes the following maximum levels:

- Nonprofit organizational development efforts: up to \$2,500
- Program/project planning or short-term efforts: up to \$5,000
- Program/project implementation for projects: up to \$10,000

Awards are made for the following purposes:

- Citizen and resident-led activities which strengthen communities by helping to mobilize the gifts and talents of volunteers, or which use existing resources in innovative ways.
- Multi-community projects that address innovative ways for communities to work cooperatively to solve common problems and capitalize on shared opportunities.
- Projects which address barriers to economic development including transportation, affordable housing and workforce trends, or which enhance financial literacy.

- Training, technical assistance and market research to support eligible service providers which assist new and existing businesses in workforce development, productivity and profitability.
- Support to develop/implement strategic economic development plans, to identify business-financing opportunities, and to diversify the local economic base.

## **GRANT GUIDELINES INQUIRY AND APPLICATION PROCESS**

### ***Inquiries***

Organizations interested in applying to the Initiative Foundation are asked to complete the *Grant Inquiry Form*, which can be found at [www.ifound.org](http://www.ifound.org) on the “Grants” page under “How to Apply.” Inquiries are accepted on an ongoing basis and are generally reviewed within 14 days upon receipt. If the proposed project appears to fit within priority funding areas and meets funding criteria than a full proposal will be invited. Proposals are generally reviewed within 90 days of receipt.

Inquiry forms may not be needed for Partnership Program applications; contact appropriate program staff for details. There are separate application procedures and timelines for the Initiative Foundation’s Partnership Programs (HCP, HLRP, HOP, ECI and Thrive).

### ***Full Proposals***

If your organization is invited to submit a full application in response to your grant inquiry than the appropriate application materials will be forwarded to you. Proposals are accepted on an ongoing basis and are generally reviewed within 90 days of receipt.

The Initiative Foundation strives to treat our applicants with courtesy and respect. Staff members are sensitive to varying levels of experience in completing grant applications, and therefore encourage open communication with our staff for assistance. Questions may be submitted to the Initiative Foundation via the “Contact Us” form located on our website.

## **INELIGIBLE EXPENSES**

- Any programs or projects that DO NOT directly benefit residents in the Initiative Foundation’s 14- county service area.
- Replacement of government or other funding.
- Endowments, local fund drives, or grants to individuals and businesses.
- Religious activities.
- Capital expenses (e.g., buildings, equipment, signs, vehicles, etc.).
- Expenses incurred prior to receipt of grant award.
- Lobbying or campaigning for a candidate, issue or referendum vote.
- Development or purchase of school curriculum or support for school athletic programs.
- Arts, health related and media production project applications are discouraged, unless they are a part of a strategic plan developed through an Initiative Foundation Partnership program.
- Multiple applications from a single organization at the same time are discouraged.

**For more information, please contact (email preferred):**

grants@ifound.org

Initiative Foundation

405 First Street SE, Little Falls, MN 56345

320/632-9255 or toll free 877/632-9255

TDD 1-800-627-3529 320/632-9258 (Fax)

www.ifound.org

**REVIEW CRITERIA**

When preparing your funding application, be sure to indicate how the following will be integrated in to your program/project:

1. Proposals must indicate how the program/project benefits residents within the 14 counties previously listed. When a grant award is made, the Initiative Foundation encourages spending the dollars within the region (e.g. hiring local consultants, purchasing supplies locally, etc.).
2. Applicants must show evidence of broad-based community involvement in both the planning and implementation of the project. List contact information for partnerships and collaboratives.
3. Applicants must demonstrate how local cash or in-kind resources, including volunteers, are identified and mobilized for the project. Include a detailed list of other funding sources that are committed and pending.
4. Project ideas should show creative, innovative approaches for addressing needs and opportunities. How is this project different from other efforts? Indicate how those affected by the project have and will be involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the project, and an active part of the solution.
5. Applicants should indicate how the project fits with the vision and plans of their community. How will local relationships and a sense of community be enhanced?
6. If the project uses consultant(s), include contact information and detail their responsibilities.
7. Describe how these efforts will create positive and lasting change in the lives of those living and working in central Minnesota.

## Appendix C: Project Assessment Tool: Pre Intervention Parent Survey

**“All Aboard the Literacy Locomotive”*****Parent Survey***

1. Approximately how many books for preschool age children do you currently have in your home?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ None
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Fewer than 15
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ More than 15
  
2. In an average week how often do you or another adult in your home read storybooks with your preschooler?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ Less than five times per week
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Five to 10 times per week
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ Eleven or more times per week
  
3. When you read a familiar story with your child how frequently do you pause and ask your child to predict or tell you what will happen next?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently
  
4. When you read with your child how frequently do you pause and ask “who”, “what”, “where”, “when” “why” or “how many” questions about the story, and allow your child to form an answer?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently
  
5. When you read with your child how frequently do you point to words and letters and identify them for your child? (You say, “This is a “C,” this word says “Caterpillar”)
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently
  
6. When you read with your child how frequently do you ask your child to identify letters in the text? (point to a “c” and ask, “What letter is this?”)
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently

7. When you read with your child how frequently do you ask your child to identify beginning sounds? (point to the cat, say "this is a cat, what sound does "cat" start with?")
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently
8. When you read with your child how frequently do you pick a word from the text or a picture and ask your child for another word that begins with the same sound? (point to the mouse, say "This is a mouse, what's another word that starts with mmm?")
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently
9. When you read with your child how frequently do you pick words from the text or pictures and point out rhyming patterns? (you read or point to "cat" then say, "cat and hat" sound alike.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently
10. When you read with your child how frequently do you pick out a word or a picture and ask your child to give you a word that sounds like or rhymes with the word or picture you selected? (point to the cat and ask, "What word sounds like cat?")
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently
11. How often do you visit public libraries?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely (less than six times per year)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally (approximately once or twice a month)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently (approximately three or more times per month)
12. How often do you sing songs or have your child listen to children's music?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely (less than once a week)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally (between 1-5 times per week)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently (more than 5 times per week)
13. How often do you read aloud to you child from various forms of print such as newspapers? magazines, recipes, directions etc.?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely (less than once a week)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally (between 1-5 times per week)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently (more than 5 times per week)

14. How often does your child use crayons, paints, or other types of artwork materials?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely (less than once a week)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally (between 1-5 times per week)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently (more than 5 times per week)
15. As your child plays how often do you ask your child to describe his/her actions to you?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely (less than once a week)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally (between 1-5 times per week)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently (more than 5 times per week)
16. How often do you describe what you are doing or will be doing as you go about the day?  
(For example you say: "I'm washing the dishes now, then I'm going to vacuum.")
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rarely
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Occasionally
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently

***Project Assessment Tool: Post Intervention Parent Survey***

Following completion of the intervention activities the above survey will be used to gather data on changes in type and frequency of literacy activities. The following additional questions will be included in the post intervention survey.

17. How many training sessions did you attend?
- \_\_\_\_\_ None
  - \_\_\_\_\_ One to two
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Three to four
  - \_\_\_\_\_ All five
18. If you attended training sessions please rate the sessions. Please check all that apply.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The sessions were too short.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ The sessions were too long.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ The strategies were explained and modeled in a clear and understandable fashion.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ The strategies were not explained and/or modeled in a clear and understandable fashion.

Comments:

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19. If you did not attend training sessions please indicate why. Please check all that apply.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The sessions were offered at an inconvenient time.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Transportation was not available.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Illness/personal reasons prevented my attending.



24. If you used dialogic reading strategies please rate your ability to use them with your child.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ The strategies were difficult to use.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ The strategies were somewhat difficult to use.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ The strategies were fairly easy to use.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ The strategies were very easy to use.

Additional comments:

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25. Please check all the following that apply.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ I now have more children's books and literacy materials available in my home.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ I read more to my child now than we did before participating in the training program.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ The training sessions helped me understand the importance of early literacy development.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ The training sessions provided me with activities and suggestions for helping develop my child's language and literacy skills.
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ I am using some of the strategies and activities with my child.
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ My child responds well to the strategies I use.
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ I would recommend training for other parents.