

Services for Children of All Abilities in Libraries: An Exploration (SCALE)

Summary: The University of Kentucky in collaboration with The University of Missouri and Emporia State University and in partnership with state education and library agencies in three states proposes a three-year exploratory stage research project in the Lifelong Learning project category, to investigate the availability and scope of existing public and school library services and programs designed to address the needs of young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays and their families. We request funds of \$497,000.

Statement of National Need:

The quality of learning environments and interactions in the first years of life set the stage for school success, and have last impacts on mental and physical health and wellbeing across the lifespan, and even life expectancy (Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, 2014; Kaplan, 2014; Reynolds et al., 2011). Libraries are positioned to provide rich learning opportunities for young children and their caregivers (IMLS, 2013, 2014; Urban Libraries Council, 2007), and parents who participate in library programs tend to engage in more literacy supportive activities in the home (Canfield, Seery, Weisleder, Workman, Cates, et al., in press).

Library services should be beneficial for and accessible to all young children, particularly given the oft stated values of “Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion” (ALA, 2017). However, librarians report few children with disabilities participating in programs or accessing services (Cahill et al., 2019; Prendergast, 2016), despite the fact that nearly 10% of young children qualify for early intervention or special education services through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Even when libraries provide programs for young children with disabilities, those children and their families may not feel welcome as conveyed by a mother of young children with disabilities, “As deep a love as I have for libraries, I have often felt let down by the library when it comes to my children and my friends’ children” (Holmes, 2007, p. 24).

Research addressing library programming and services for young children with disabilities and/or development delays in public libraries is sparse and focused primarily on urban libraries (e.g. Adkins & Bushman, 2015; Prendergast, 2013), and no empirical investigations of school library services for preschool children who qualify for special education services have been conducted. Yet, if libraries are to play a part in supporting the development, learning, and community building of all young children, research is necessary to better understand how, if at all, existing services and programs offered through public and school libraries support young children with disabilities and how libraries might modify and/or expand services to better meet their needs. Because IDEA Parts C (early intervention for infants and toddlers) and Part B Section 619 (preschool services) bridge public and school library services and also differ across U.S. states and territories, a multi-state exploratory stage research study across both library types is necessary to gain a comprehensive and meaningful picture.

The overarching questions guiding this exploratory research study are RQ1: **How, if at all, do existing services and programs offered through public and school libraries support young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays and their families?** And RQ2: **How can public and school libraries better meet the needs of young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays and their families?**

Project design: *Partners and advisory board:* The research team will consist of six researchers in the fields of library science and early childhood special education. We will partner with state library agencies and departments of education in the three states where the study is planned: KY, KS, and MO. We will virtually meet regularly with a strategic advisory board that will consist of the research team, partner agency and department personnel, and researcher advisors who have expertise in special education, library services and programs for young children, rural community health services, and health services in libraries.

Data collection and data analysis: We will collect multiple sources of data as reflected in the lists below. We will use systematic observational techniques to determine practices and participant behaviors in the

observations and will employ open coding and an iterative and inductive approach to qualitative data analysis. Where appropriate, we will quantize the qualitative data to allow for comparisons across library types, sizes, locations, and community setting (i.e. rural, suburban, urban).

We will conduct separate **focus group interviews** with each of the following groups: public library directors, parents/caregivers of children who attend public library programs designed for children between the ages birth-5 years with disabilities and/or developmental delays; parents/caregivers of children who attend preschools (with school libraries) that provide IDEA Part B services; parents of children who attend preschools (without school libraries) that provide IDEA Part B services; and early intervention (Part C) First Steps Point of Entry managers.

We will conduct separate **semi-structured interviews** with the following: children's librarians in public libraries; administrators, teachers, and school librarians in preschools (with school libraries) that provide IDEA Part B services; administrators and teachers in preschools (without school libraries) that provide IDEA Part B services; and school district special education coordinators who oversee IDEA Part B Section 619 services.

We will collect **video recorded observations** of the following: programs in public libraries designed for all children between the ages of birth-5 years; programs in public libraries designed specifically for young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays; programs in school libraries designed for classes serving preschool children with disabilities and/or developmental delays; public library outreach programs provided to preschools serving children with disabilities and/or developmental delays

Developing guidelines and disseminating findings: The research team will consolidate the findings to identify evidence-based guidelines for services and programs to young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays. We will also disseminate findings through traditional venues such as journal publications and conference presentations. Finally, we will work with project partners and health organizations to disseminate findings to practitioners within and beyond libraries who serve young children with disabilities. This plan allows for findings about library services to young children with disabilities to further inform library practice while also alerting professionals beyond libraries to the role that libraries could and should play in meeting the needs of this significant segment of the population.

Diversity plan: By its nature, this project addresses the needs of a diverse and underserved population: young children with disabilities and developmental delays. Additionally, we will stratify the sample to include libraries and preschools serving populations across the urban to rural continuum and include library systems and branches with small, medium and large public service areas as well as large and small school systems.

National impact: If funded, our Research Grant project will provide data to support the value of libraries, both public and school, in meeting the needs of young children with disabilities and developmental delays and also provide information to help librarians tailor programs and services to meet the needs of various stakeholders within the early intervention and special education communities. Further, sharing of the guidelines with healthcare and early intervention providers will spread the value of libraries to other professional audiences. Finally, the findings will benefit libraries, the communities they serve, and most germane, the young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays and their families who are not currently able or who are not choosing to access the services and programs offered through libraries.

Budget summary: For the proposed three-year project, our estimated budget is \$497,000, divided as follows: \$266K for researcher effort (including \$118K for 3 student research assistants); \$25K for travel for data collection and research dissemination; \$3K for supplies; \$20K to support librarian, educator, and parent research subject payments; \$3K for advisory board payments; and \$180K in indirect costs.