



Behavioral Insights and Parenting Lab

CAPER: Children and Parents Engaged in Reading

THE CHALLENGE

Research shows that reading to children promotes their cognitive development.

However, parents disadvantaged by low income and low education are less likely than more advantaged parents to read to their children even though they report having books and time to read and believe that reading to their children will improve their child's life chances.

THE STUDY

Children and Parents Engaged in Reading (CAPER) is an 11-month reading intervention that uses behavioral tools to increase the amount of time parents spend reading to their pre-school aged children, with the aim of improving children's literacy skills.

Building on the successful Parents and Children Together (PACT) project, that more than doubled the amount of time that low-income parents spent reading to their children, CAPER tests the effectiveness of two different behavioral tools, namely reminders and goal-setting on the time that parents read to their children and on children's literacy scores. Literacy scores will be measured using child assessments at the baseline, end of the intervention and again 6-months post intervention.

Chicago - area parents with children ages three to four who are currently enrolled in subsidized preschool programs are randomly assigned to one of three treatment groups or a control group:

- **Treatment group one** parents are lent a tablet preloaded with a digital library.
- **Treatment group two** parents are lent the same tablet with a digital library as group one and in addition will receive text message reminders to read to their child.
- **Treatment group three** parents are lent the same tablet with a digital library as the other groups and in addition will be asked to set a goal for how much time they will spend reading with their child each week and at the end of the week they will get a text message telling them how much they actually read to their child.
- **Control group** parents receive neither the tablet nor any behaviorally-informed treatment.

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WHO WE ARE

The Behavioral Insights and Parenting Lab at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy studies the science of parental decision-making especially through the lens of behavioral science. Parents are the single greatest influence on children. Parents' investments and engagement in their children's development drives children's skill acquisition and varies greatly by family background. Disadvantaged children are at particular risk for entering kindergarten behind their more advantaged peers, setting up an achievement gap that persists across the school years and into adulthood. Finding ways to support effective parent investment and engagement in children's development is key to closing this gap.

Research shows that a variety of low-cost, light-touch behavioral supports can optimize the decisions that people make in a number of key arenas of life, including decisions about health and financial savings. The BIP Lab is dedicated to understanding how such behavioral supports can be used to leverage parental investments to promote children's development in low-income families. The Lab was co-founded in 2014 by Professors Ariel Kalil and Susan Mayer.

DIRECTORS

Ariel Kalil, PhD, is a professor at Harris Public Policy, where she also directs the Center for Human Potential and Public Policy. She is a developmental psychologist who studies economic conditions, parenting, and child development. In addition to her work at the BIP Lab, her current research examines the historical evolution of income-based gaps in parenting behavior and children's cognitive and non-cognitive skills.

Susan E. Mayer, PhD, is a professor and dean emeritus at Harris Public Policy. She has published numerous articles on the measurement of poverty, the effect of growing up in poor neighborhoods, and the effect of parental income on children's well-being. In addition to her work at the BIP Lab, she is engaged in a number of studies of intergenerational economic mobility.



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