

2020 CSAC CHALLENGE AWARDS – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Los Angeles County – Library’s Smarty Pants Storytime Encourages School Readiness

OVERVIEW: Smarty Pants Storytime is a new take on traditional Storytime, developed to increase school readiness, targeting families who may not have access to early-learning opportunities.

CHALLENGE: At an 18% poverty rate, many low-income families in LA County struggle to afford traditional childcare for their children age 0 – 5. These children may not receive essential early literacy training, and developmental disabilities may go unnoticed. Different school districts—65 in the LA County Library service area— have different recommendations on the skills children should possess to be prepared for school; the Library identified those skills most commonly recommended and found that they could be incorporated into the traditional Storytime program model.

SOLUTION: In order to incorporate school readiness competencies, LA County Library created a committee of Library staff to research and develop the program. The committee also partnered with the LA County Office of Education to help identify curriculum based on state standards. The result was the creation of Smarty Pants Storytime, designed to help toddler-to-preschool-aged children develop competency in the following areas: basic reading, basic math, problem-solving, social interaction, and regulation of emotions and behavior. Curriculums with these indicators are introduced in a fun and interactive setting, utilizing songs, stories, games, and activities. The program also emphasizes caregiver engagement by modeling activities, educating about their importance, and offering take-home activities. All 85 LA County library locations host at least one ongoing Smarty Pants Storytime program, which is conducted in 6-week sessions, highlighting a competency area each week. The committee developed a training for librarians on this new Storytime model using multiple learning modalities, and created a comprehensive manual which outlines school readiness information, curriculum, detailed activities, and resources. Librarians then utilize the training and materials to develop Smarty Pants Storytime sessions, tailoring activity types and techniques based on the level of engagement of any given group, such as using props vs active movement, or leading open-ended activities vs more structured ones. Each Smarty Pants Storytime also has a cap of 30 participants to allow each individual direct one-on-one interaction with the librarian, maximizing engagement.

INNOVATION: Storytimes traditionally focused on exposing children and families to literature, building a connection to reading through stories and other activities. Reengineering the model to incorporate elements that are

2020 CSAC CHALLENGE AWARDS – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Los Angeles County – Library’s Smarty Pants Storytime Encourages School Readiness

important to preparing children for a school environment was a cost-effective and efficient way to provide additional tools for parents and caregivers, particularly for those that would not be able to readily access early-education resources. The transition to school readiness competencies was better incorporated for staff as training focused on components that already were a part of Storytime, but only required modifications making them more purposeful and targeted. This new Storytime model concentrates on engaging caregivers meaningfully, with more active support so that they feel equipped and motivated to practice with their child. Because repetition is an important part of learning, take-home activities can be easily done at home with no materials or those common in households, to help each child learn, get better at, or maintain skills and behaviors needed for school success. The comprehensive design of the program also equipped the staff to incorporate school readiness competencies, notably education for parents on the importance of each Storytime element, to the Library’s Virtual Storytime, broadcasted system-wide on social media when the COVID-19 pandemic required libraries to close to the public.

RESULTS: Since October 2018, 86 library locations have held 4,803 sessions, with 100,718 children and caregivers attending. 96% of surveyed caretakers felt information provided was helpful and 83% felt that the program made them feel better prepared to deal with parenting and school readiness challenges. Virtual Storytime has had over 130,000 views and counting, with caregivers commenting how they appreciate the videos as a tool for interacting with their children during the COVID-19 stay-at-home order.

REPLICABILITY: LA County Library staff conducted a SmartyPants Storytime training in 2019 at the California Library Association Conference. Participants noted that the training was effective for their professional development, and that the manual was a useful tool they could use to incorporate school readiness in their own Storytime programs. Developed training methodology, the in-depth manual, and low or no cost required for implementation allow for replicability based on staff capacity.

PROJECT CONTACT: Jessie Towers, Marketing Manager. LA County Library, 7400 E Imperial Hwy, Downey, CA 90242. Direct line: 562.381.5157. JTowers@library.lacounty.gov.

OPTIONAL SUBMISSION: SmartyPants Storytime training manual and flyer sample can be found here:

<https://lacountylibrary.canto.com/b/IJF3A>