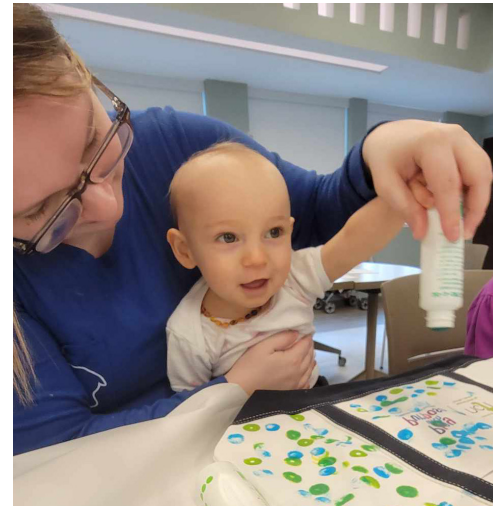


Louisville Say and Play with Words Interim Report for Louisville Metro Government

Louisville Say and Play with Words brings together Louisville Metro Government, the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL), Language Environment Analysis (LENA), and Sparkler to provide children and families furthest from opportunity with free access to high-quality, evidence- and research-based programming that promotes family engagement. Funded by Louisville Metro Government with American Rescue Plan dollars, Louisville Say and Play with Words brings together two programs—Play with Purpose (PWP) and LENA Start—to support kindergarten readiness and ensure parenting adults can help their children to reach predicted milestones in early literacy and language development.



Successful family engagement strategies honor parenting adults as a child's first and most important teacher. These strategies build a partnership between parenting adults and practitioners that links children's learning and development, expanding channels of parental advocacy and support both within and beyond school walls. Louisville Say and Play with Words is intentionally designed to nurture this partnership during the early childhood period while providing parenting adults with the tools to support their children's learning journey.



Play with Purpose playgroups utilize NCFL's curriculum, bringing together small groups of parenting adult and child pairs with a trained facilitator for one hour weekly playgroups over nine weeks. Parenting adults have access to the Sparkler app which allows them to take a developmental screening (Ages & Stages Questionnaire®), set goals based on their child's individual needs, and read through parenting and play cards for at-home learning. Organizations implementing PWP playgroups across the first year of the program include: Better Together Collective, LDG Development, Play Cousins Collective, Bright Skies Therapy, and the YMCA.

Of the 103 parenting adults and child pairs who started the PWP program within the first program year, 74 of those pairs met the minimum requirements for completion. Participants were drawn from across Louisville Metro (**figure 1**).

LENA parent groups utilize the LENA Start curriculum, bringing together small groups of parenting adults with a trained facilitator for one hour weekly sessions over 10 weeks. Organizations implementing LENA groups across the first year of the program include: Backside Learning Center, Family Health Centers, and Play Cousins Collective. Due to the limited number of LENA groups completing the program prior to the end of the reporting window, **this interim report will focus on results from Play with Purpose groups only.**

Results¹

An overall positive change was noted in parenting adults' confidence and efficacy regarding their role as their children's first teacher (**figure 2**). When asked to identify actions or interactions with their child that they had experienced more of since joining PWP, parents noted that they spent more time reading with their child and that they enjoyed more of the time they spent with their child (**figure 3**). In respondent feedback surveys, one parenting adult noted: "My child being able to socialize with others her age—I feel like it's helping with her development." When parenting adults feel more confident in their role as their child's first teacher, they are more likely to seek out community resources, advocate for their child's wellbeing during early childhood, and seek interventions for areas of need such as speech and language acquisition.

Important social effects were also noted for parenting adults themselves, with gains in talking to other parents to share experiences and dealing with the day-to-day stresses of parenting (**figure 4**). In respondent feedback surveys, one parenting adult noted: "Play with Purpose is a great opportunity to connect with other moms and find new and creative ways to interact with your child in

figure 1 Participant Zip Codes

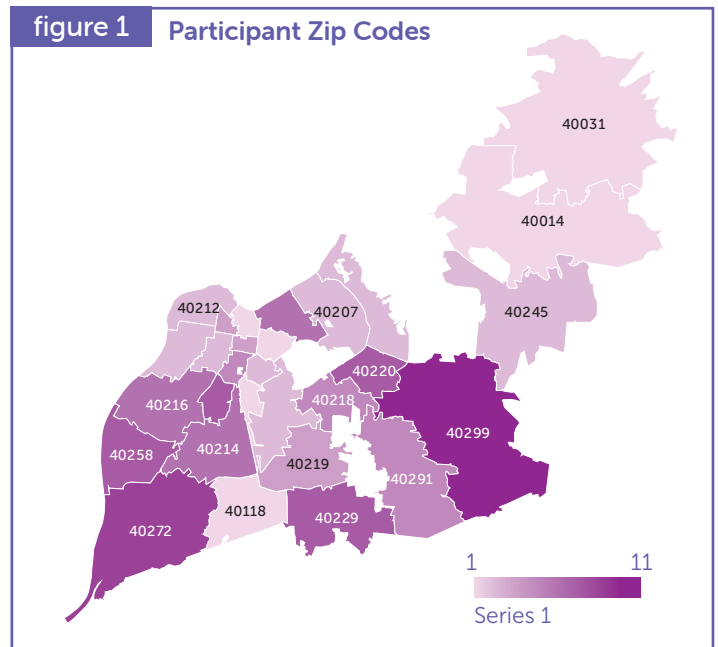
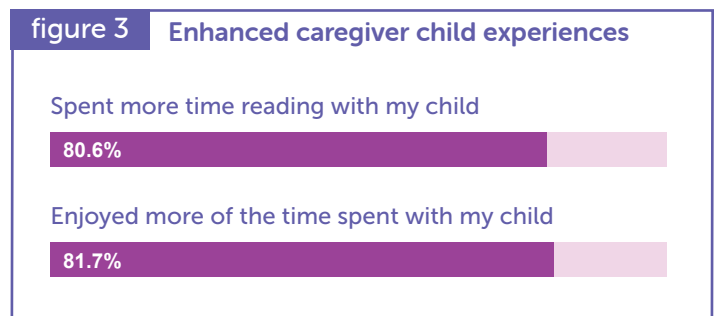


figure 2 Describe your confidence in the following:



figure 3 Enhanced caregiver child experiences



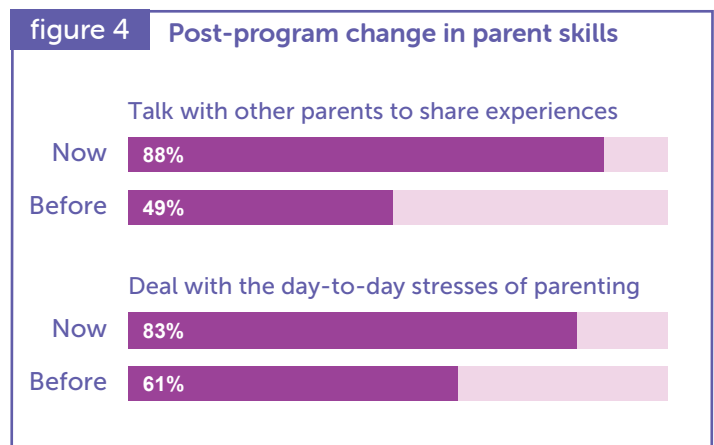
a meaningful way.” Parents who are able to make social connections are more likely to create a ‘village’ of support for parenting needs. Research also suggests this deeper sense of belonging can lead to increased participation with other community-based events and resources.

Anecdotal data from Sparkler also shows that Play with Purpose families represent some of the most engaged users of Sparklers’ app. This suggests that PWP’s weekly playgroup model may also offer increased opportunities for parent engagement and play through digital literacy.

In addition to the data collected through surveys, parenting adults were given the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions focused on what the PWP program did well and what the program could improve upon. The findings highlighting areas of strength and growth are summarized below.

Areas of Strength

- Materials and resources. Many (n=25) parenting adults appreciated the toys and books provided and the learning materials that were part of the program. Five parenting adults also specifically mentioned the Sparkler app as being an instrumental part of the program. One noted, “The resources provided are something we always put to use, and [my child] likes that this is something just for her. I love that!”
- Sharing information and ideas. Respondents (n=22) frequently talked about the benefits and impact of the information and ideas shared. Parenting adults focused on the ways the program helped their communication and the quality of the time spent with their child. Parents noted that the techniques, tips, and tools integrated into the program gave them new ideas for enhancing their interactions through reading and play and showed them ways to interact more intentionally with their children throughout the day.
- Building connections. Several respondents (n=10) commented about the connections they built with other parenting adults. They noted feeling a greater sense of support and camaraderie because of these new connections.



Areas for Growth

Program flow and session structure. Comments shared by 17 parenting adults focused on aspects of the playgroup sessions themselves. Eleven comments expressed the desire to have fewer participants in each group or increase the size of the meeting space to limit distractions. Another common response focused on the timing of the meetings with four participants noting the sessions felt too long and three wanting a longer program.

Background

NCFL conducted Louisville Say & Play with Words from 2019-2022 in partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies, Louisville Metro Government, and LENA. Trend analyses from this implementation showed that parenting adults increased their parenting skills while children showed positive gains in their language and literacy development. The success of this work led to NCFL's development of a playgroup curriculum called Play with Purpose, for families of children ages birth to three years.



During the same timeframe, the extreme impacts of the pandemic led to the American Rescue Plan Act, accompanied by significant funding that allowed the Louisville Metro Government to fund projects promoting early childhood development. NCFL's proposal to expand its work from the 2019-22 study by implementing PWP playgroups and additional LENA Start groups was funded beginning in 2023. Early in the new program's implementation, NCFL expanded the reach of PWP by developing a preschool version for parents and their children ages three to five years and engaging with a larger number of community partners interested in implementing one or both programs.

Next Steps

The implementation of Louisville Say and Play with words will be ongoing through October 2026. The final report on this work will be delivered upon completion of all Play with Purpose and LENA playgroups and will provide a comprehensive overview of all findings.

¹All results are drawn from work done by external evaluator NG Consulting



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