

**Peninsula Community Foundation**  
**Evaluating the Impact of the**  
**Raising A Reader™ Book Bag Program**

**July 2000**

**P** Pacific  
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**G** Group

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**Palo Alto, California**

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This Phase I evaluation was conducted during Raising A Reader's start-up period. Additional components, including a "Read Aloud" video for parents, a blue book bag for each child to take to the library and an interactive training program for childcare providers, have been subsequently incorporated into the program. Phase II evaluation will assess the enhanced program. The report from this next phase is due for release in Spring 2001.

# Introduction

# Raising A Reader™ Program Overview

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- **Background to the Raising A Reader™ Program**

- Research has found that academic success is influenced by early childhood experiences: “Whether or not children succeed in school is in part related to events and experiences that occur prior to their entering kindergarten for the first time” (America’s Kindergartners, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Fall 1998).
- Research also shows that “the single most important activity for building understanding and skills essential for reading success appears to be reading aloud to children” (Bus, Van Dzendorn, and Pellegrini, 1995; Wells, 1985).
- According to the International Reading Association and the National Association for Education of Young Children, adult caregivers should read daily to children. Stevenson and Fredman (1990) found that “there seemed to be a cut-off point whereby children who were read to less than four times a week achieved less well than those read to more regularly.”
- In addition, children with more risk factors for poor reading skills (low-income, English as a second language, and parents with lower levels of education) are less likely to pass various reading proficiencies than are those with fewer risk factors.

- **Raising A Reader™ Program Description**

- Children in the program receive a colorful book bag filled with three books that they borrow for one week. Each week they return the books and receive new ones.
- The program aims to encourage families in an easy, engaging, and non-intimidating manner to establish a regular reading routine at home that excites parents and their pre-school aged children. It aims especially to engage busy parents, as well as those with poor reading skills.
- The Raising A Reader™ program has been implemented in a variety of San Mateo County child care centers with low and/or middle-income children. The program’s main focus is on children with risk factors (low-income, English as a second language, and parents with lower levels of education), but it encompasses those with fewer or no risk factors as well.

# Evaluation Project Overview

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- **Goals of Evaluation Project**

- To uncover the reading behaviors of the parents and children in selected classrooms in San Mateo County prior to the introduction of the Raising A Reader™ program. To assess differences between low and middle-income families.
- To evaluate the impact of the Raising A Reader™ program on all of these children, and in particular on at-risk children (low-income and Spanish-speaking).

- **Description of Evaluation Project**

- In January 2000, prior to enrollment in the Raising A Reader™ program, 410 families received a questionnaire asking about their reading behaviors (pre-test questionnaires). These families were randomly selected from 718 families in San Mateo County child care centers who would be enrolled in the program. This original sample consisted of eleven centers, encompassing eighteen classrooms. 374 of the 410 families returned the first questionnaire.
- These questionnaires, completed prior to the start of the program, provided baseline data against which to measure the influence of the program on these families. The data also showed the differences between the reading behaviors of at-risk and low-risk families prior to the intervention.
- In April 2000, after the program had been in effect for at least three months, the same questionnaire was again distributed to 299 of the original 410 families (post-test questionnaires). Two of the classrooms (one of the centers) that had been enrolled for less than three months did not receive post-test questionnaires. Children who no longer attended their original child care center were also removed from the sample. This sample consisted of ten centers, encompassing sixteen classrooms. 266 out of the 299 families who received the questionnaire a second time returned it.
- Analyses of improvements in reading behaviors between the pre-test and the post-test included only those 266 respondents who completed the questionnaire both times.
- In this report, changes labeled “Significant Improvement” are significant at the 95% confidence level (.05 significance) and those labeled “Somewhat Significant Improvement” are significant at the 90% confidence level (.10 significance).

# Report Description

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- **Respondent Profiles**

- Questions about household income, the language spoken at home, the number of children at home, and the highest level of education were designed to gather demographic information and to enable comparisons of specific groups. The responses to these questions are presented in the first section of this report.
- Responses about income and about the language spoken at home, two indicators of at-risk children, were used to compare the improvement in reading behaviors of different types of respondents in the second section of this report.

- **Reading Behaviors**

- The other questions on the survey encompass aspects of positive reading behaviors that encourage the development of a child's reading abilities. They cover the number of times a week an adult reads to the child, the respondent's enjoyment in reading to the child, the number of times a week the child reads to himself or herself, whether the child has an at-home reading routine, the number of children's books at home, and the frequency of visits to the library.
- In this report, the pre-test and post-test responses to each question about reading behaviors are presented side by side to enable comparison.
- The statistical test identifying significant changes takes into account all of the positive and negative changes from the pre-test to the post-test, together with the number of respondents in a particular group.

# Report Description (continued)

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- **Reading Behaviors (continued)**

- Overall and Income

- For each survey question presented in this report, the responses of the overall sample are shown first, followed by the responses grouped by level of income. This format shows when an improvement in the general population is driven by an improvement in one segment of respondents.
    - Level of income was chosen as the variable by which to group the analysis because it is the most salient identifier of at-risk children. Low income was defined as as \$53,000 or less per year, which is equal to 80% of the San Mateo County median income for a family of four.

- Spanish Speakers

- The second Reading Behaviors section focuses on the behaviors of Spanish-speaking respondents, another indicator of at-risk children. Only the responses of Spanish-speaking respondents (97% low income) are presented because the behaviors of English-speaking respondents varied based on their income level.
    - The categories “other” and “more than one language” had too few respondents for analysis. Because families speaking other languages or more than one language are not necessarily similar to Spanish-speaking families, they were not included as part of this group.
    - The purpose of this analysis is to determine whether the program has an impact on Spanish-speaking respondents even though the majority of the books in the bags are in English.

- Classroom and Center

- Finally, two tables present changes in behaviors by classroom and then by child care center for the purpose of determining whether differences in the teacher’s or the school’s implementation of the program effect its impact on participants.

- **Comments from Parents**

- The final question on the survey asked, “Are there any additional comments you would like to make?”
  - Representative positive comments and suggestions for improvement are included in this section.

## Report Highlights: Comparison of Respondent Groups

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- 266 of the 299 families who received the questionnaire both before and after the program completed the two surveys, for a response rate of 89%.
- 46% of respondents were low-income, and 36% spoke a language other than English as their primary language. 26% of all respondents spoke Spanish as their primary language. 48% of respondents lived in homes where the highest level of education was less than a college degree.
- Prior to participating in the program, there was a large gap in reading behaviors between low- and middle-income families. Spanish-speaking families exhibited behaviors similar to those of low-income families.
  - 49% of low-income parents were reading to their children fewer than three times a week, compared with 7% of middle-income parents. 57% of Spanish-speaking parents were reading to their children fewer than three times a week.
  - Fewer low-income (57%) parents enjoyed reading to their children “a lot” than did middle-income (88%) parents. Only 42% of Spanish-speaking parents enjoyed reading to their children.
  - Fewer low-income (55%) children read or told stories to themselves three or more times a week than did middle-income (79%) children. 57% of Spanish-speaking children read or told stories to themselves.
  - Only 24% of low-income children had a reading routine at home, compared with 66% of middle-income children. 22% of Spanish-speaking children had an at-home reading routine.
  - Fewer low-income (53%) homes had twenty or more books than did middle-income (96%) homes. Only 30% of Spanish-speaking homes had twenty or more books.
  - Low-income parents took their children to the library less often than did middle-income parents. Spanish-speaking parents also visited the library with their children relatively infrequently.



# Report Highlights: Improvements over Time

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- **After the program, a gap remained between low and middle income families, but it narrowed, often due to a significant improvement in a specific reading behavior.**
  - All of the percentages of the reading behaviors of the low-income respondents shifted closer to the percentages of the middle-income respondents. The percentages of the behaviors of Spanish-speaking respondents also improved.
- **The table on the next page shows where significant improvements occurred in the behaviors of the overall group and of the three sub-groups.**
  - In the overall group, four of the six reading behaviors showed a significant improvement. These behaviors include the number of times a week an adult reads to the child, the child has an at-home reading routine, the number of children's books at home, and the frequency of visits to the library. One additional behavior, the respondent's enjoyment in reading to the child, showed a somewhat significant improvement.
  - Low-income respondents showed the same improvements as the overall group as well as an improvement in the number of times a week the child reads to himself or herself. The overall improvements seem to be driven by the low-income improvements.
  - For middle-income respondents, having an at-home reading routine was the only behavior that showed a significant improvement.
  - Even though only one of the four books in the book bag is in Spanish, the Spanish-speaking respondents showed a significant improvement in all four reading behaviors that improved in the overall group. In addition, the number of times a week the child reads to himself or herself showed a somewhat significant improvement.
- **These results are very encouraging. However, it is important to note one caution: this study is limited to a single community, and it does not use a control group. Therefore, it does not meet the standards of a true experimental design. With this caution in mind, the results indicate that the Raising A Reader™ program, together with further evaluations of its effectiveness, should continue.**

# Report Highlights: Summary of Improvements over Time

| Reading Behavior                              | Group   |            |               |                  |
|---|---------|------------|---------------|------------------|
|   | Overall | Low-Income | Middle-Income | Spanish-Speaking |
| Number of Times Read to Child Each Week       | ★       | ★          |               | ★                |
| Enjoy Reading to Child                        | ★       | ★          |               |                  |
| Number of Times Child Reads to Self Each Week |         | ★          |               | ★                |
| Child Has a Reading Routine at Home           | ★       | ★          | ★             | ★                |
| Number of Children's Books in Home            | ★       | ★          |               | ★                |
| Take Child to Library                         | ★       | ★          |               | ★                |



★ = Significant improvement (at the 95% confidence level) in reading behavior following intervention



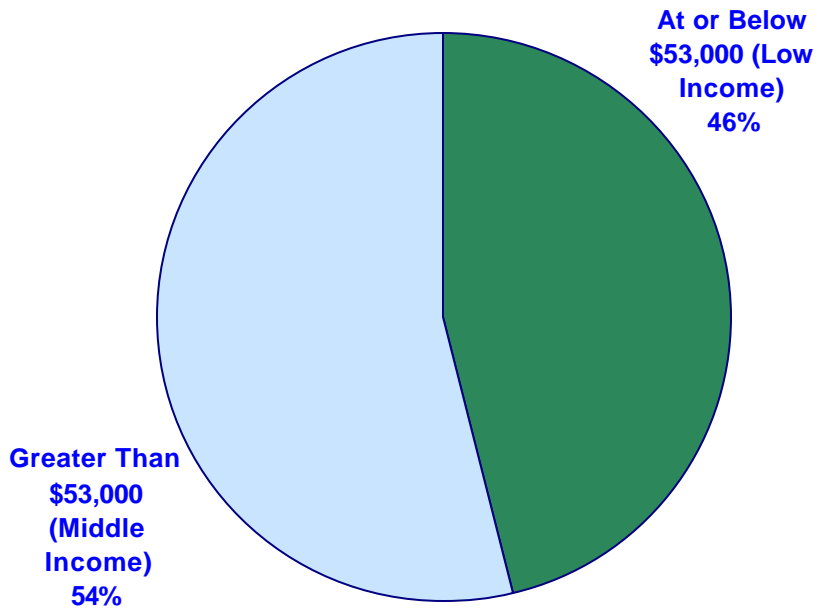
★ = Somewhat significant improvement (at the 90% confidence level) in reading behavior following intervention

## **Respondent Profiles**

# Respondent Profiles by Income and Language\*

## Household Income

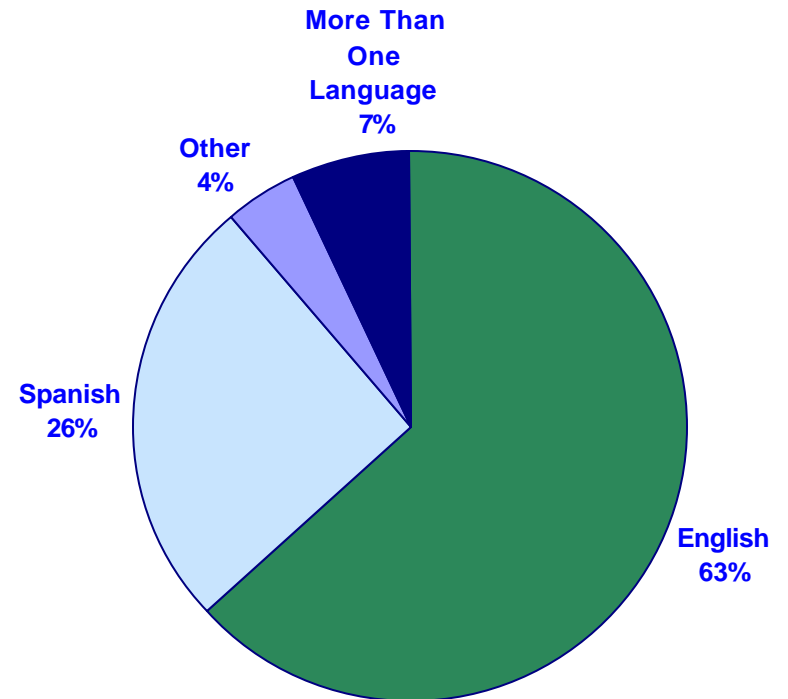
(N\*\* = 255)



Low income is defined as \$53,000 or less per year, which is equal to 80% of the San Mateo County median income for a family of four.

## Primary Language in Home

(N = 266)



Other languages include Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, Indian, and Hebrew. The majority of those who indicated More Than One Language listed English and Spanish.

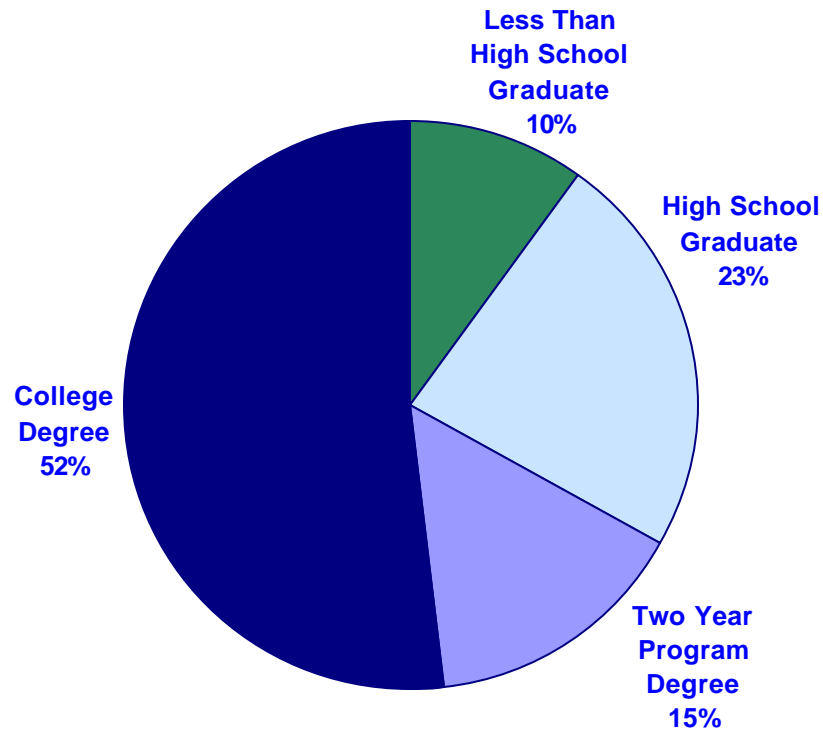
\*The respondent profiles are based on the information supplied on the pre-test questionnaire. The percentages in each category were similar across the two surveys.

\*\*N = Number of Respondents

# Respondent Profiles by Education and Children\*

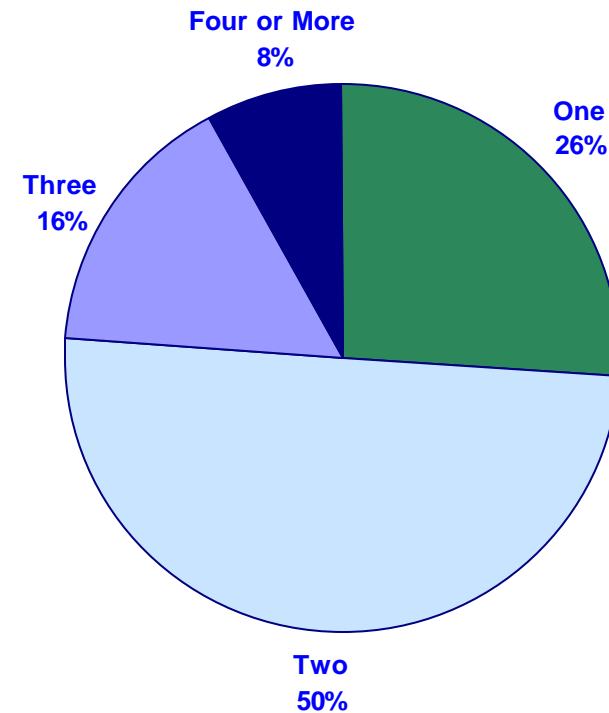
## Highest Level of Education

(N = 262)



## Number of Children in Home

(N = 265)

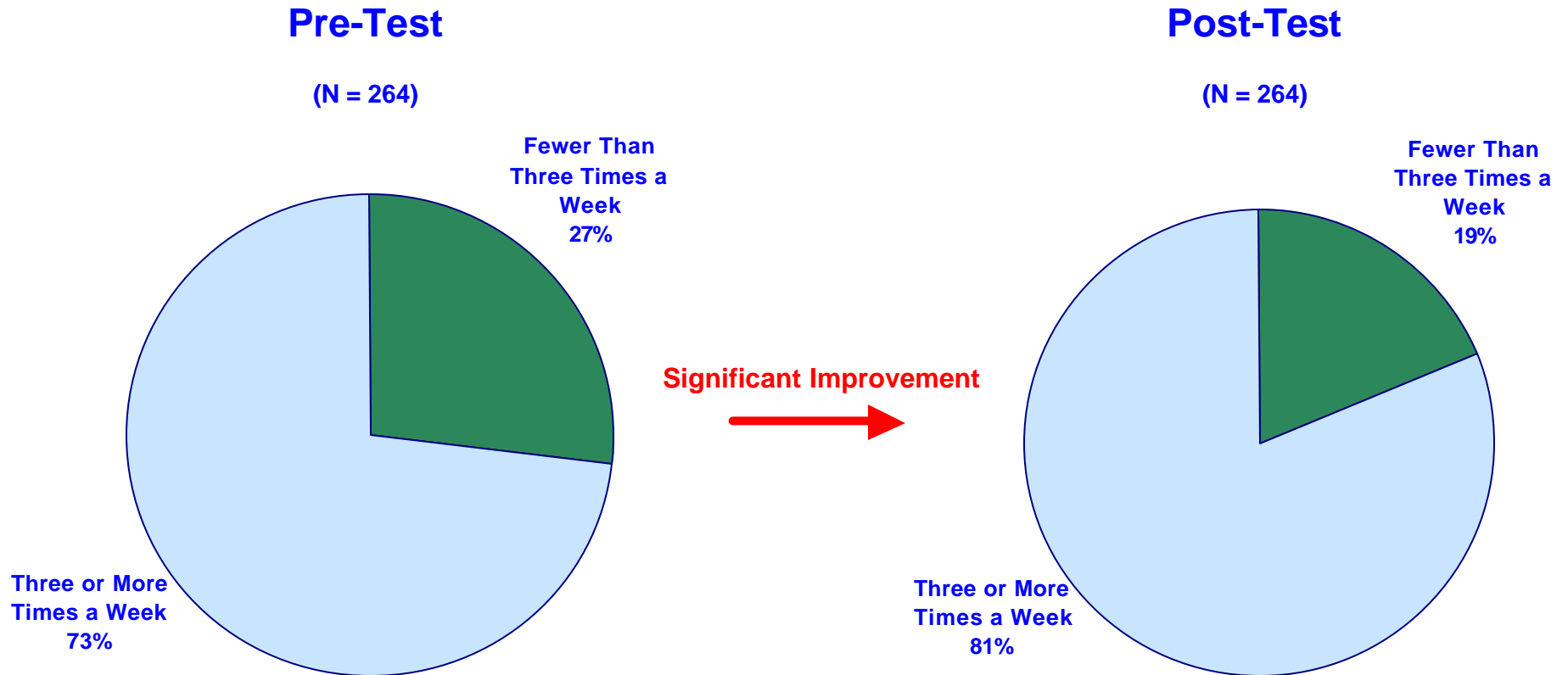


\* The respondent profiles are based on the information supplied on the pre-test questionnaire. The percentages in each category were similar across the two surveys.

**Reading Behaviors:  
Overall and Income**

# Read or Tell Stories to Child: Overall

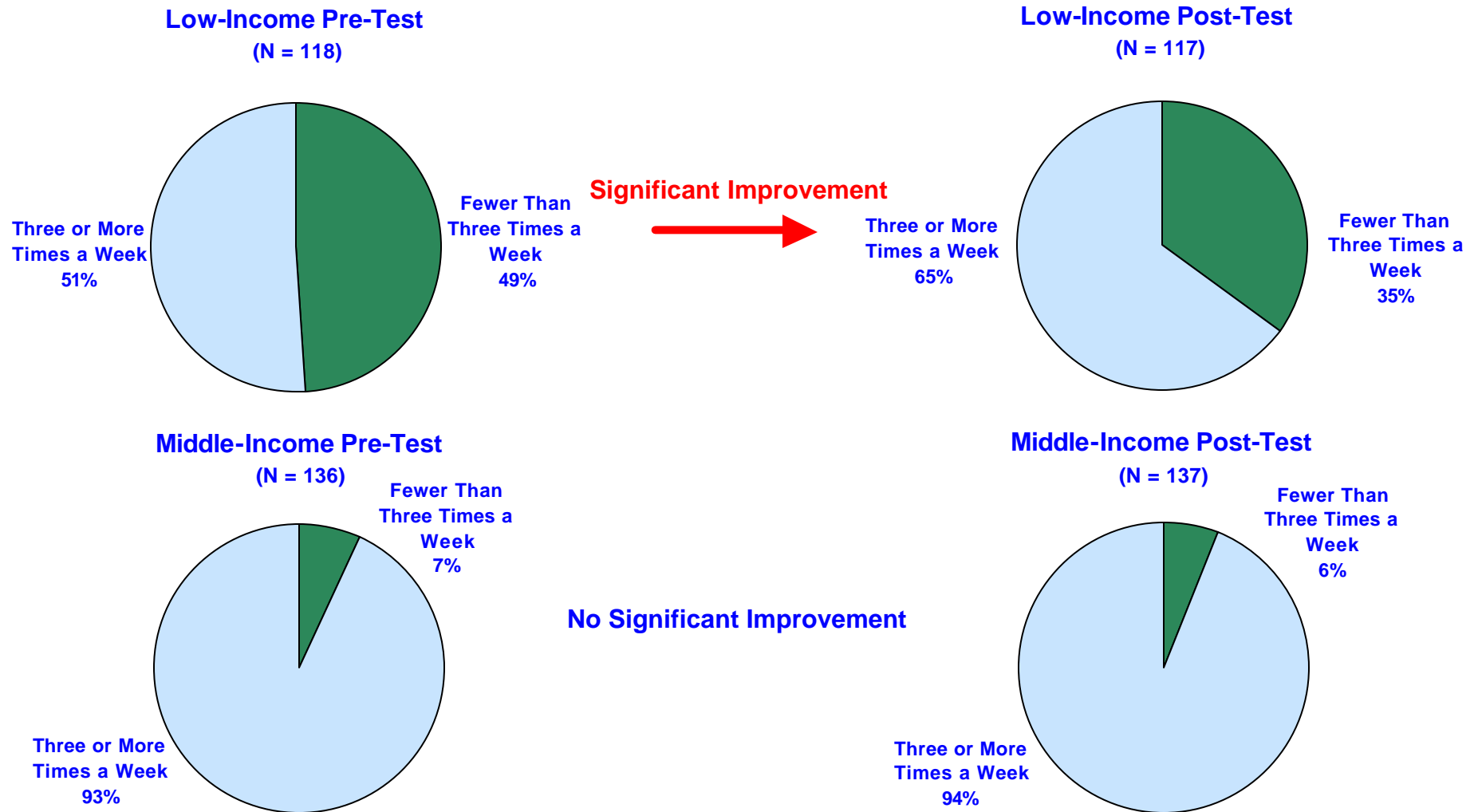
In a typical week, I (or another adult in the home) read or tell stories to my child:



Note: This significant improvement primarily reflects an increase in the number of times per week that the mother/stepmother reads to the child. The number of times that the father/stepfather, grandparents, siblings, or friends and relatives read to the child did not increase significantly.

# Read or Tell Stories to Child: Low and Middle-Income

- The overall improvement is driven by an improvement in the low-income households. There was little room for improvement in the middle-income households.



Note: The significant improvement primarily reflects an increase in the number of times per week that the mother/stepmother reads to the child.

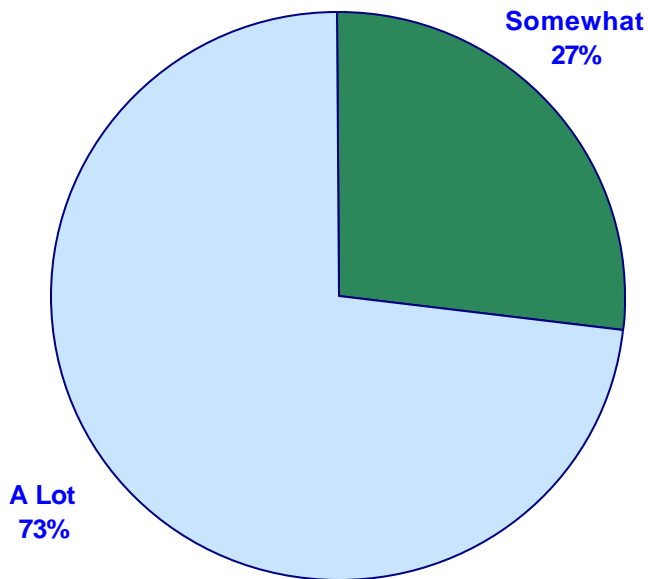


# Enjoy Reading to Child: Overall

I enjoy reading to my child:

Pre-Test

(N = 265)

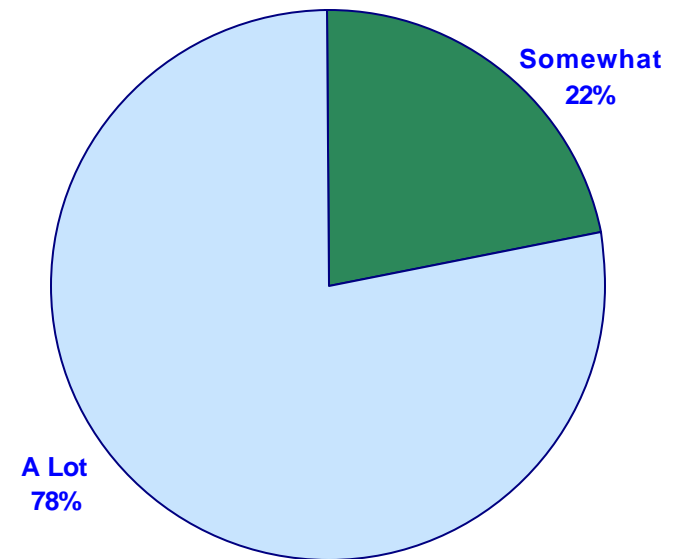


Somewhat Significant Improvement



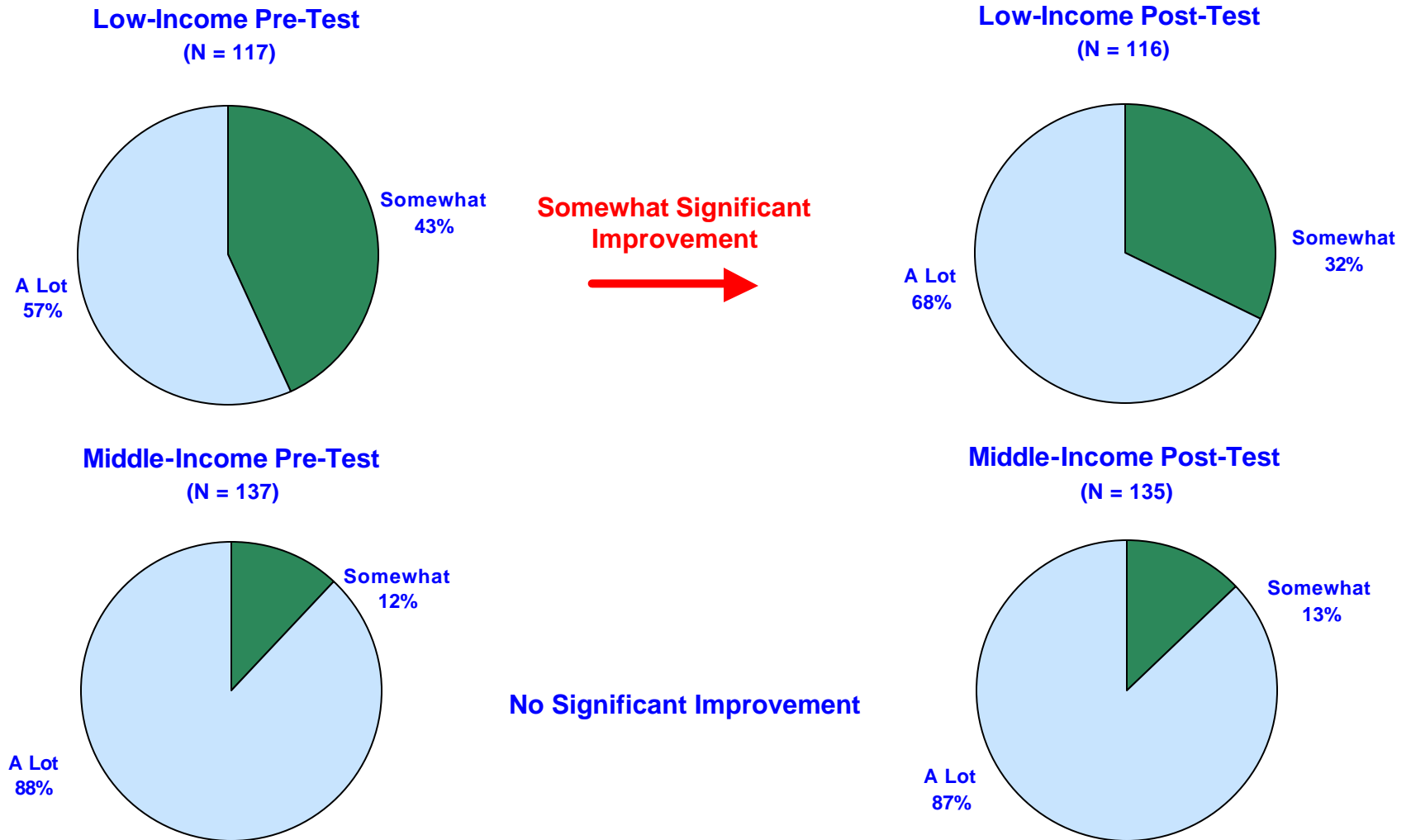
Post-Test

(N = 261)



# Enjoy Reading to Child: Low and Middle-Income

- The overall somewhat significant improvement is driven by an improvement in the low-income households. Again, there was little room for improvement in the middle-income households.

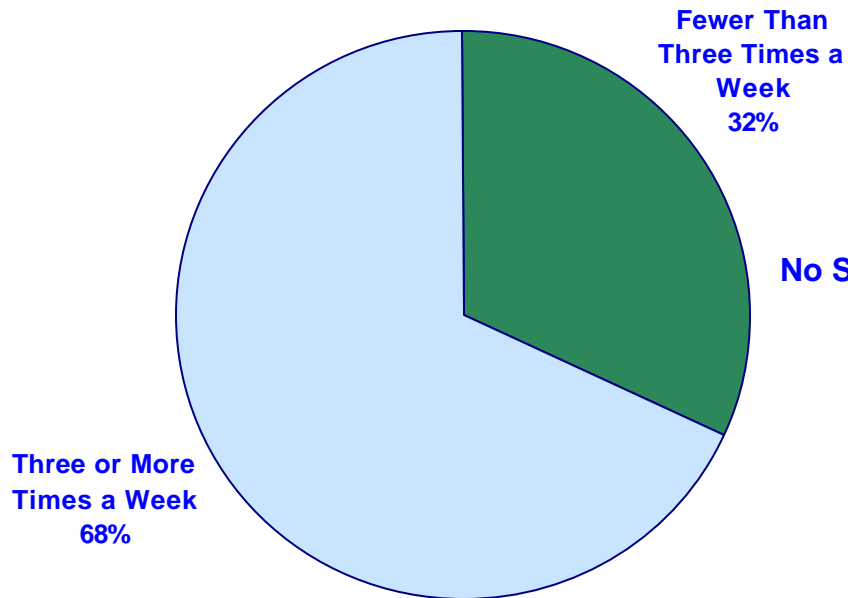


# Child Reads or Tells Stories: Overall

In a typical week, I see my child reading, “pretend reading,” or telling stories from a book:

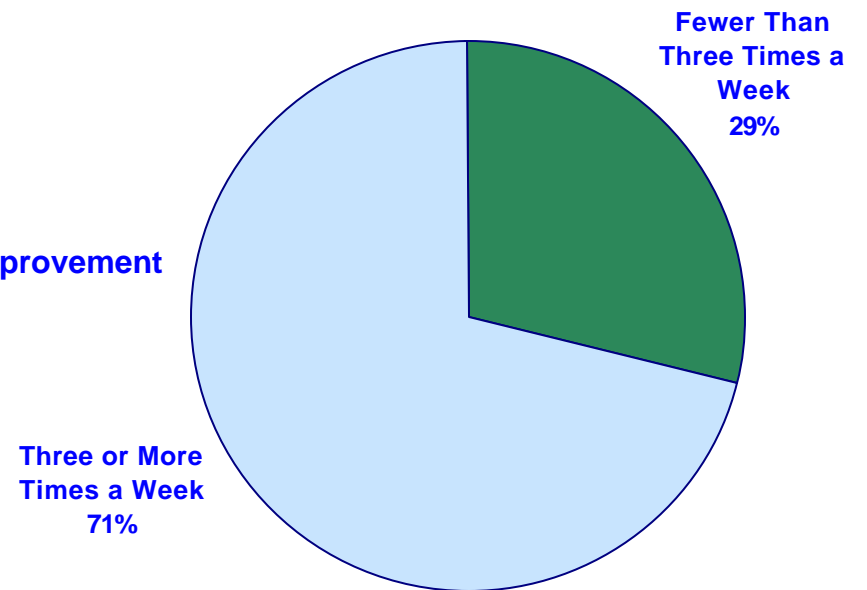
**Pre-Test**

(N = 265)



**Post-Test**

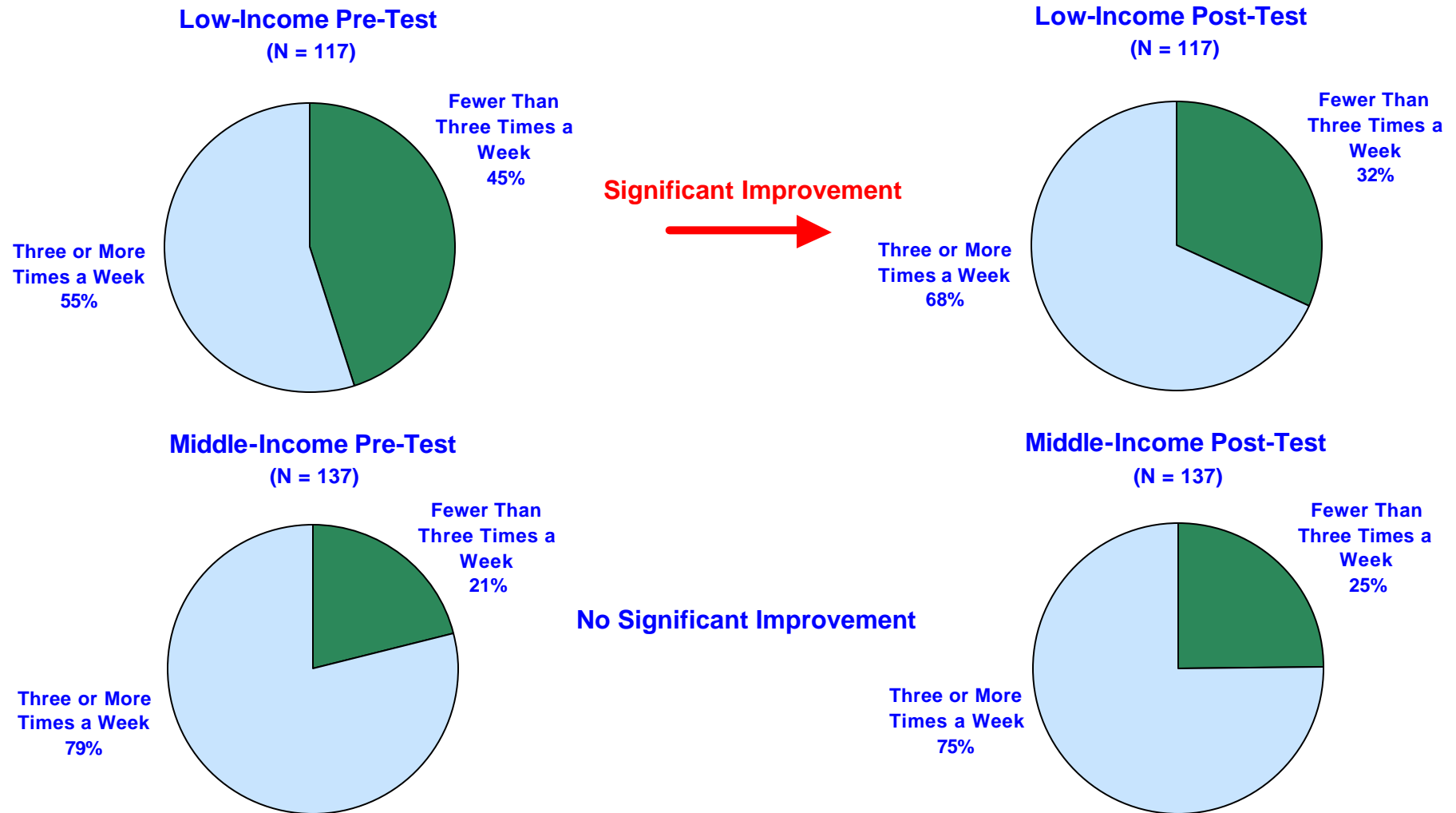
(N = 264)



No Significant Improvement

# Child Reads or Tells Stories: Low and Middle-Income

- Although there was no significant improvement in the reading or telling stories in the overall group, there was a significant improvement for the low-income children.



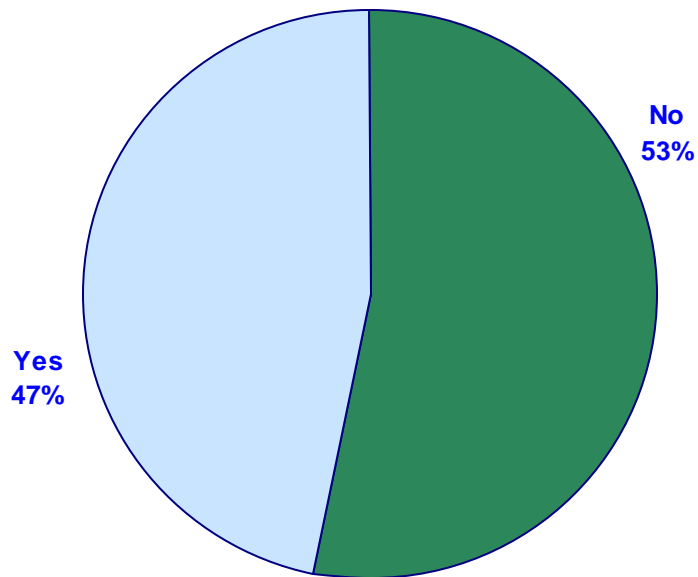
# Reading Routine at Home: Overall

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Does your child have a “reading” routine at home each day:

**Pre-Test**

(N = 252)

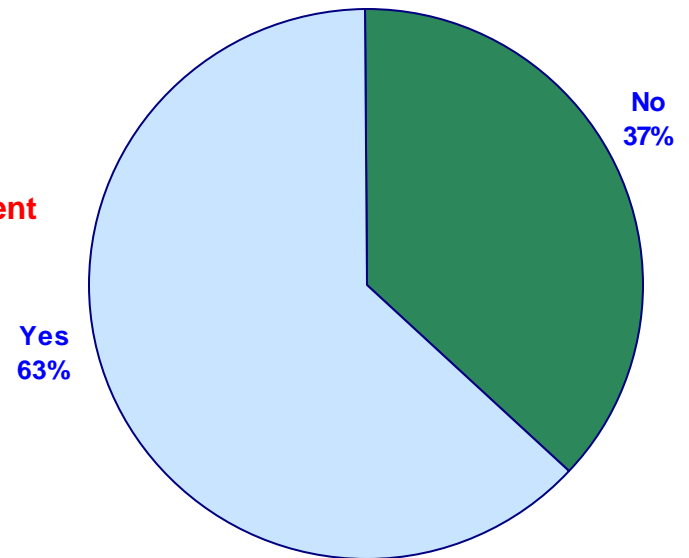


**Significant Improvement**



**Post-Test**

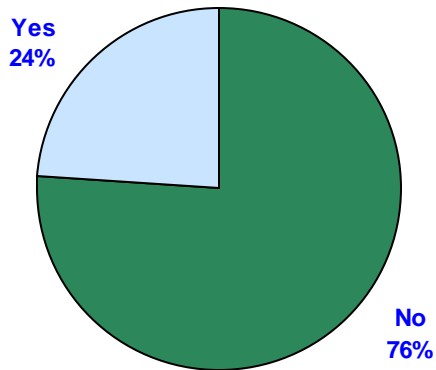
(N = 245)



# Reading Routine at Home: Low and Middle-Income

- The overall improvement reflects an improvement in both the low-income households and the middle-income households.

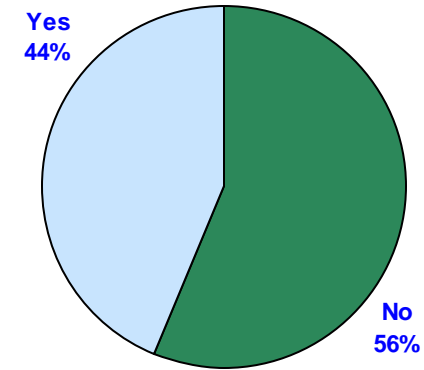
Low-Income Pre-Test  
(N = 109)



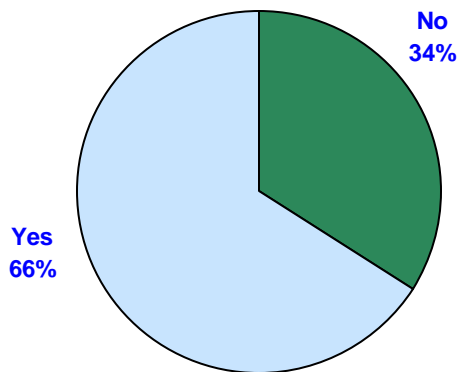
Significant Improvement



Low-Income Post-Test  
(N = 110)



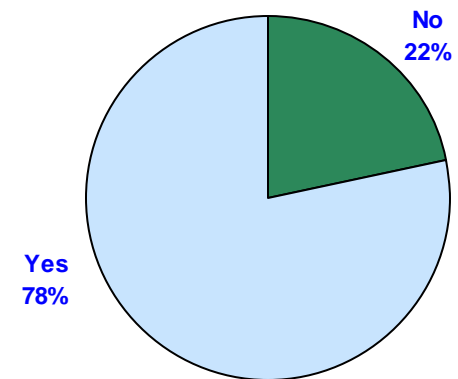
Middle-Income Pre-Test  
(N = 133)



Significant Improvement



Middle-Income Post-Test  
(N = 125)

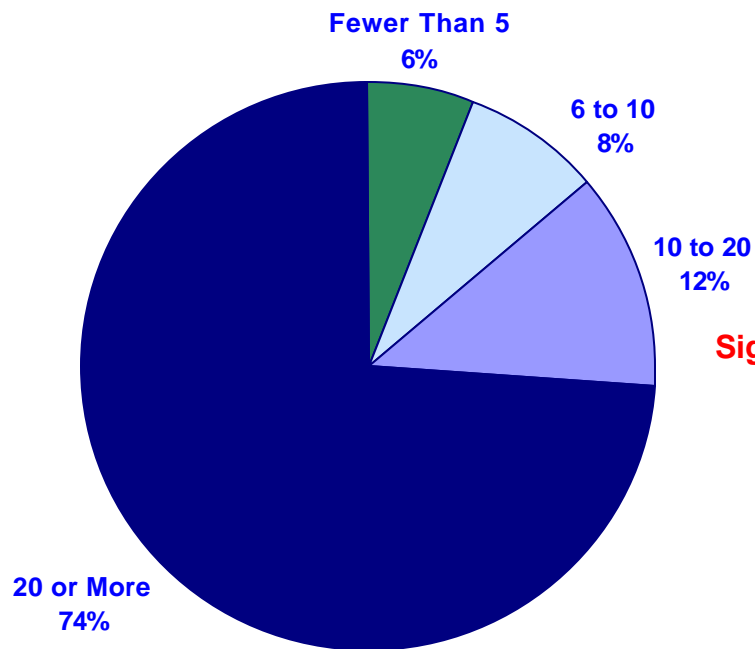


# Children's Books in Home: Overall

How many children's books are there in your home:

**Pre-Test**

(N = 265)

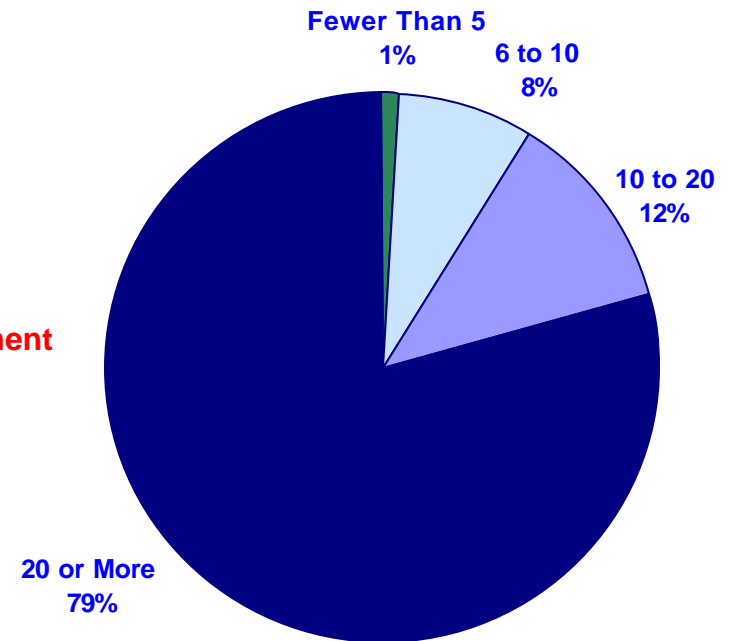


**Significant Improvement**



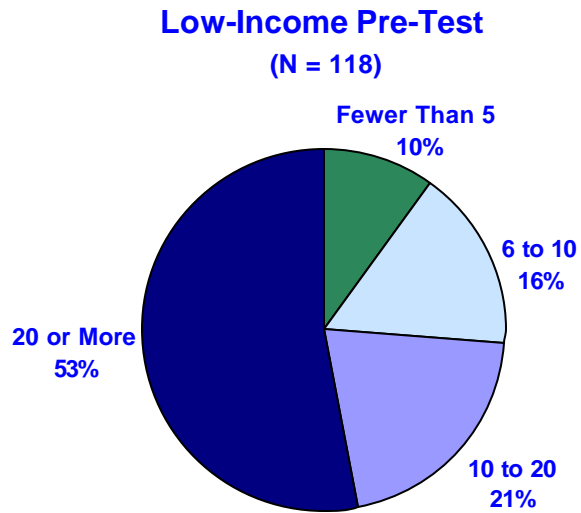
**Post-Test**

(N = 263)

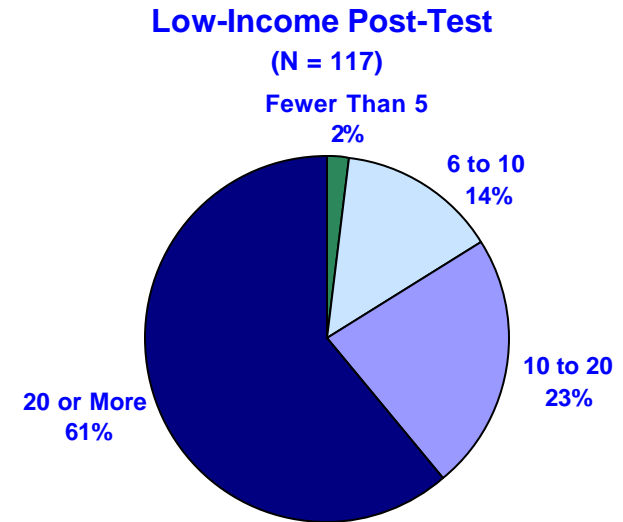


# Children's Books in Home: Low and Middle-Income

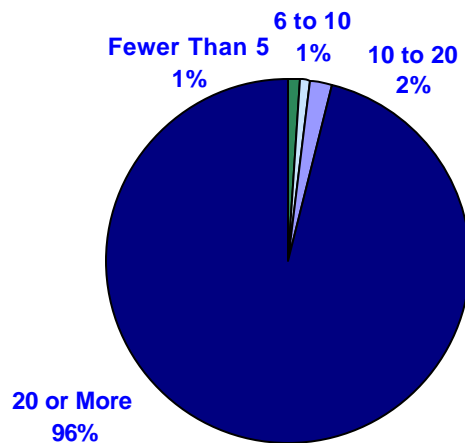
- The overall improvement is driven by an improvement in the low-income households. There was little room for improvement in the middle-income households.



**Significant Improvement**

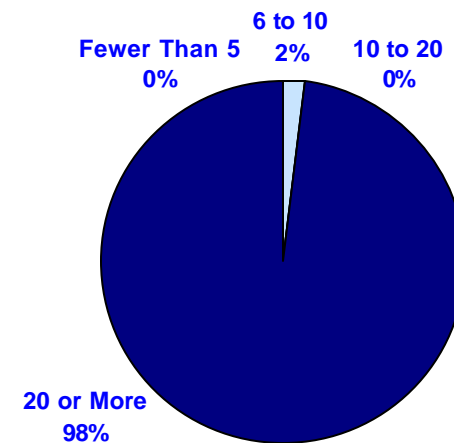


**Middle-Income Pre-Test**  
(N = 137)



**No Significant Improvement**

**Middle-Income Post-Test**  
(N = 136)



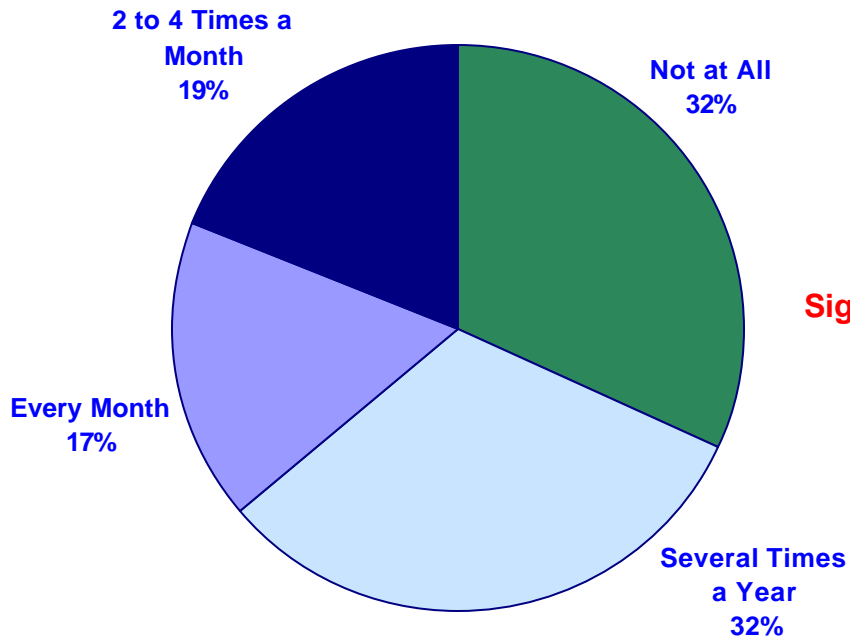


# Take Child to Library: Overall

I take my child to the library:

## Pre-Test

(N = 260)

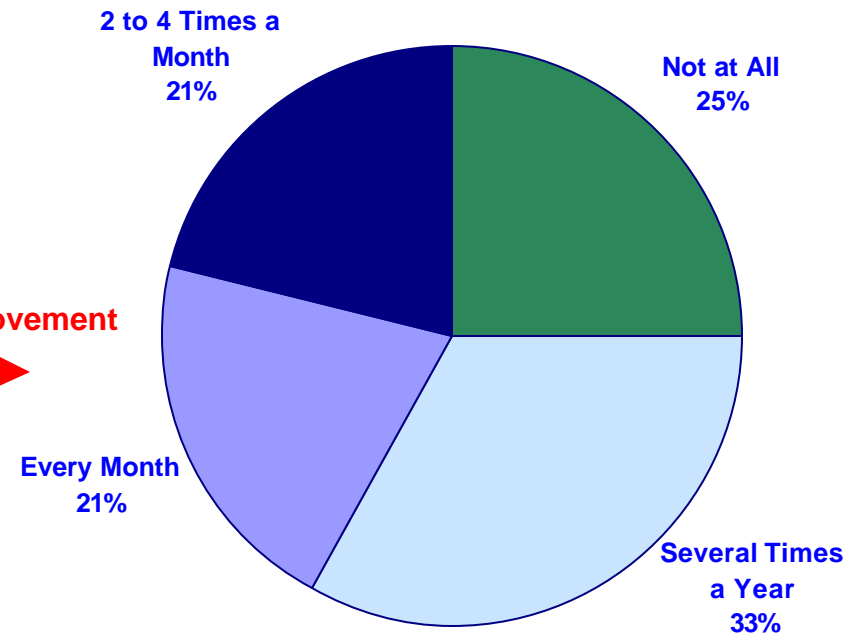


Significant Improvement



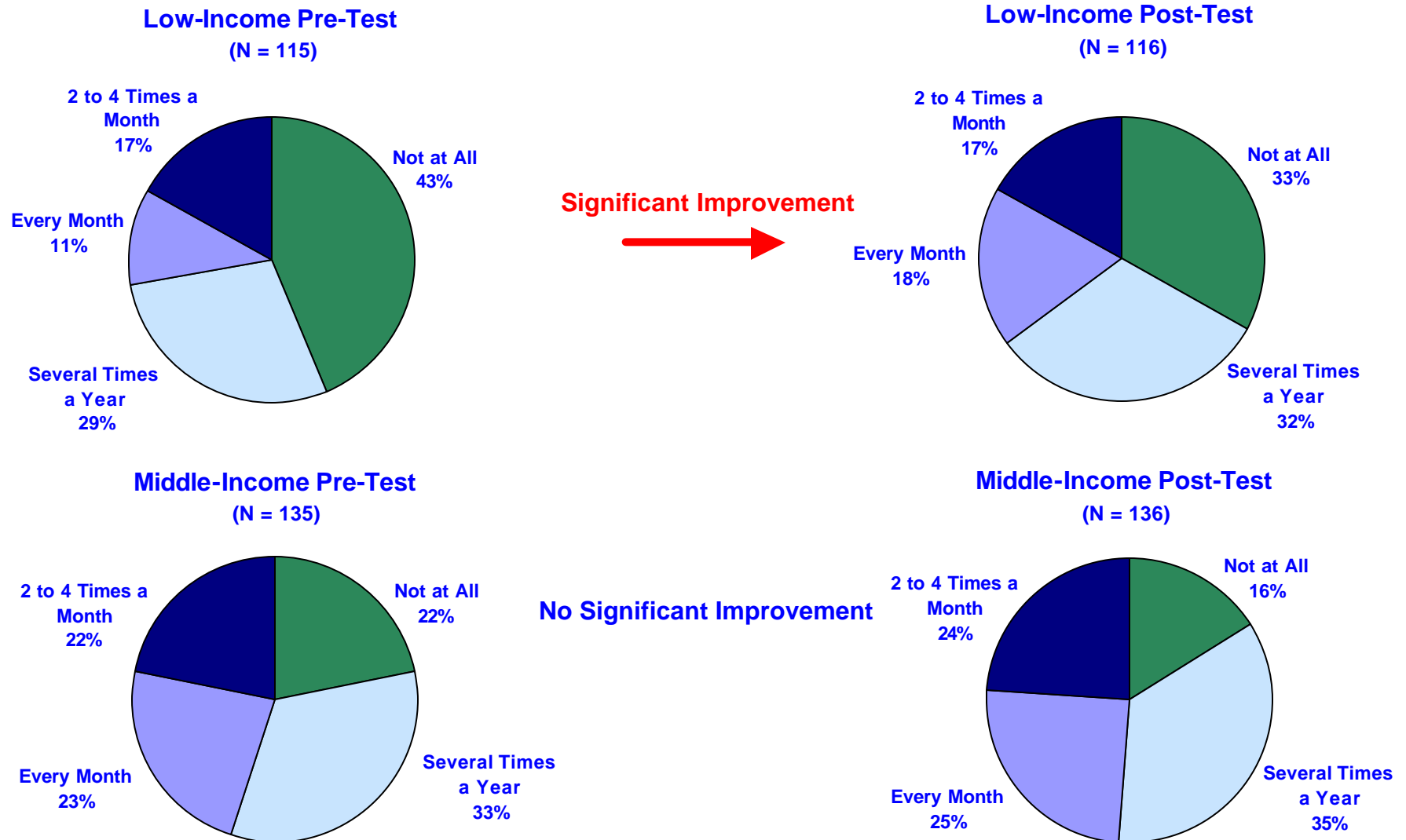
## Post-Test

(N = 261)



# Take Child to Library: Low and Middle-Income

- The overall improvement is driven by an improvement in the low-income households. There was a slight increase in the middle-income households even though they tend to have many books at home.

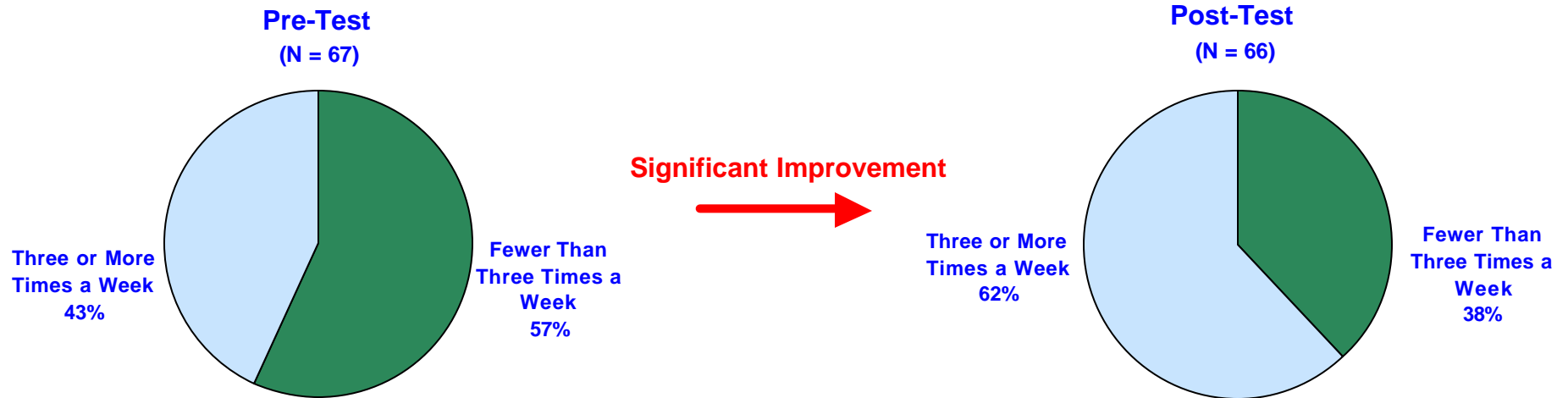


## **Reading Behaviors: Spanish Speakers**

# Spanish Speakers' Reading Behaviors

- 97% of all Spanish-speaking respondents are low-income.

## Read or Tell Stories to Child

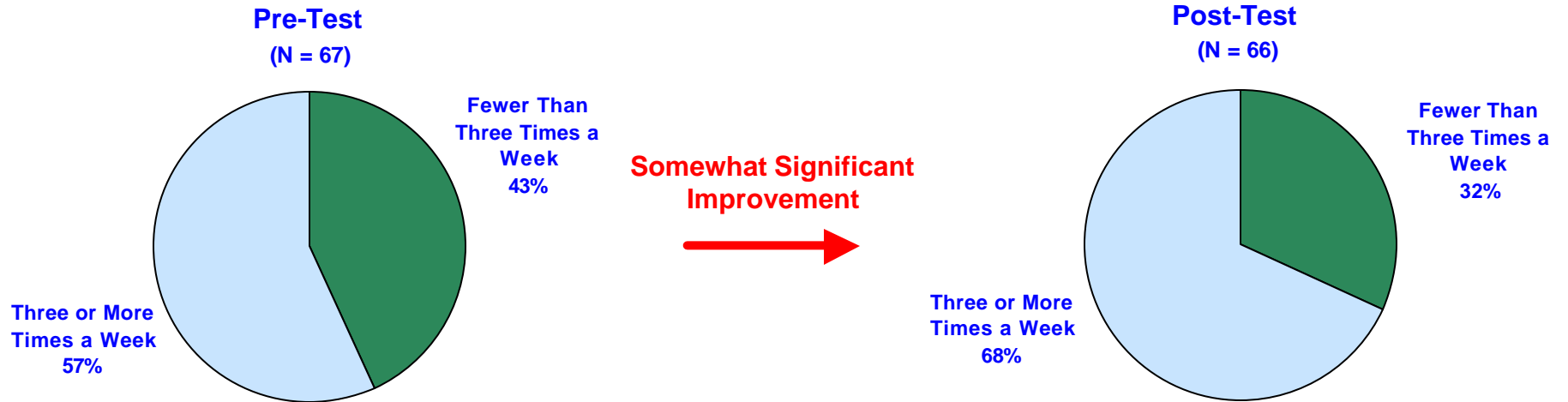


## Enjoy Reading to Child



# Spanish Speakers' Reading Behaviors

## Child Reads or Tells Stories

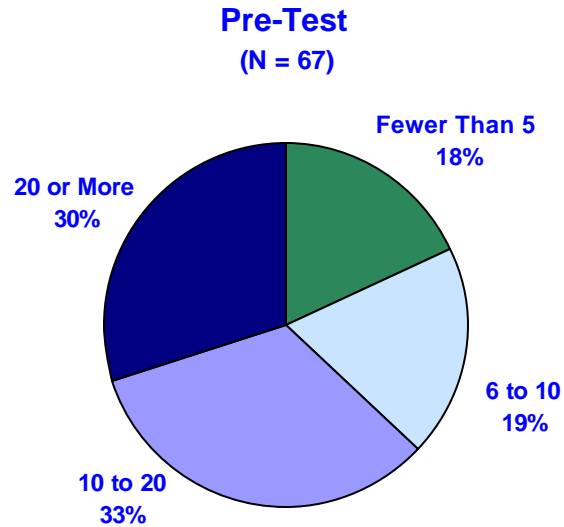


## Reading Routine at Home

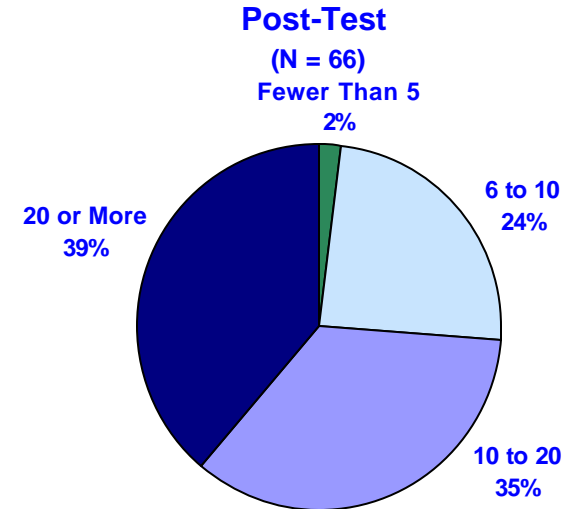


# Spanish Speakers' Reading Behaviors

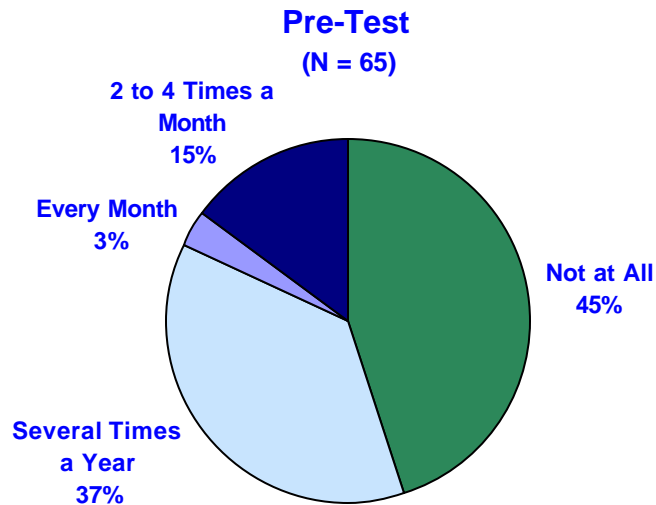
## Children's Books in Home



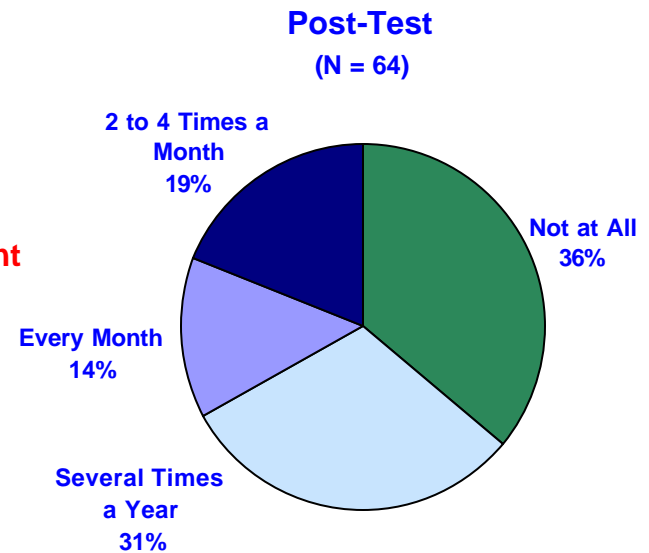
**Significant Improvement**



## Take Child to Library



**Significant Improvement**





## **Reading Behaviors: Classroom and Center**

# Improvements by Classroom

- Only those classrooms with at least one somewhat significant improvement are included in this table. Children's Center C had too few respondents to be included in this analysis.
- All of the low-income classrooms included in this analysis showed at least one significant improvement. The only mixed-income (low and middle) classroom that showed a significant improvement was Thumbelina, and the only middle-income classroom that showed significant improvement was Mrs. K's House.
- This analysis should be interpreted with caution because of the low sample sizes in each classroom.

| Classroom  | Reading Behavior                        |                        |   |                                     |                                    |                       |
|--|---|------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
|  | Number of Times Read to Child Each Week | Enjoy Reading to Child | Number of Times Child Reads to Self Each Week | Child Has a Reading Routine at Home | Number of Children's Books in Home | Take Child to Library |
| <b>FSA/Plaza Site</b><br>(Low Income, N = 22)                | ★                                       | ★                      |   | ★                                   |                                    |                       |
| <b>Belle Haven A</b><br>(Low Income, N = 11)                 |   |                        | ★   |                                     | ★                                  |                       |
| <b>Belle Haven B</b><br>(Low Income, N = 15)                 |   | ★                      |   |                                     |                                    |                       |
| <b>Children's Center A</b><br>(Low Income, N = 15)           |   | ★                      | ★   |                                     | ★                                  |                       |
| <b>Children's Center B</b><br>(Low Income, N = 16)           | ★                                       |                        | ★   |                                     |                                    |                       |
| <b>Thumbelina</b><br>(Mixed Income, N = 19)                  |   |                        | ★   |                                     |                                    |                       |
| <b>Mrs. K's House</b><br>(Middle Income, N = 24)             | ★                                       |                        |   | ★                                   |                                    |                       |
| <b>Carlmont Parents Nursery A</b><br>(Middle Income, N = 18) |   |                        | ★   |                                     |                                    |                       |
| <b>Carlmont Parents Nursery B</b><br>(Middle Income, N = 24) |   |                        |   |                                     |                                    | ★                     |



 = Significant improvement (at the 95% confidence level) in reading behavior following intervention  
 = Somewhat significant improvement (at the 90% confidence level) in reading behavior following intervention



# Improvements by Child Care Center

- Only those child care centers with at least one somewhat significant improvement are included in this table. For some of the centers, the evaluation included only one classroom and for others it included two to four classrooms.
- All of the low-income child care centers showed at least one significant improvement. The only mixed-income center that showed a significant improvement was Thumbelina. The only middle-income centers that showed a significant improvement were Carlmont Parents Nursery and Mrs. K's House.
- This analysis should be interpreted with caution because of the low sample sizes in most child care centers.

| Child Care Center*   | Reading Behavior                        |                        |   |                                     |                                    |                       |
|--|---|------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
|  | Number of Times Read to Child Each Week | Enjoy Reading to Child | Number of Times Child Reads to Self Each Week | Child Has a Reading Routine at Home | Number of Children's Books in Home | Take Child to Library |
| <b>FSA/Plaza Site</b><br>(Low Income, N = 22)              | ★                                       | ★                      |   | ★                                   |                                    |                       |
| <b>Belle Haven</b><br>(Low Income, N = 27)                 |   |                        |   | ★                                   | ★                                  |                       |
| <b>Children's Center</b><br>(Low Income, N = 53)           | ★                                       |                        | ★   | ★                                   | ★                                  |                       |
| <b>Thumbelina</b><br>(Mixed Income, N = 19)                |   |                        | ★   |                                     |                                    | ★                     |
| <b>Mrs. K's House</b><br>(Middle Income, N = 24)           | ★                                       |                        |   | ★                                   |                                    |                       |
| <b>Carlmont Parents Nursery</b><br>(Middle Income, N = 43) |   |                        |   |                                     |                                    | ★                     |
| <b>Kindercourt</b><br>(Middle Income, N = 30)              |   |                        | ★   |                                     |                                    |                       |

 = Significant improvement (at the 95% confidence level) in reading behavior following intervention  
 = Somewhat significant improvement (at the 90% confidence level) in reading behavior following intervention

## **Comments from Parents**

# Positive Comments from Parents

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- “The book program has helped to establish responsibility as well as a continued love of reading for my child. Thank you!”
- “We love getting the books. They are so accessible.”
- “My children and I really enjoy the books. They look forward to the new book every week, and after I read them, they have fun flipping through the pages on their own. Thank you again.”
- “I think reading to my child has been a great experience for both of us. I see her grow as I read to her.”
- “I think this is a very good program. My daughter loves getting a bag with new books each week.”
- “I think this is a wonderful program. We have enjoyed sampling many books, and then I purchase the ones we liked best.”
- “This is a great program. My kids are learning a great respect for other people’s books.”
- “I like the book bag program even though we already read together. It has introduced us to some great books! A child cannot have too many books, and it is great to have things I do at home reinforced at school and at the homes of other friends and family. Thank you!”
- “The books help my son enjoy reading more.”
- “Both my daughter and I enjoyed the program. The choice of books and their groupings are excellent.”
- “The Raising A Reader™ program has noticeably enhanced my son’s interest in reading! He has always loved books, but the joy of getting a red book bag, especially with books containing Spanish words (he never knew other languages had written words), has created a sense of responsibility in him to try to read.”
- “I have found that this program has greatly increased the reading time in our home.”
- “I think this is a great program. It gives parents the reminder that you have to read to your children. For people who do not go to the library, you are giving them books to read with their child. Bottom line, it is very positive.”
- “I think the program is great. The obligation to finish the book in time forces us to read.”
- “Reading has become a habit for them every day. The picture books are easy for them to understand. Thank you for encouraging them to read a book every day.”
- “I think that the program is a great idea because it helps parents keep their children disciplined about reading. It is a good habit to get into, and I hope you continue the program.”
- “I am happy with the program because my son reads a lot, and he is able to take different books home.”
- “Everything about the program is good. I like it very much because we are spending more time reading to our children.”

# Suggestions for Improvement from Parents

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- **Almost all of the comments written by parents were positive; however, there were some suggestions for improvement.**
- **The suggestions for improvement fell into three categories: difficulty reading all of the books, the level of the books selected, and the language of the books selected. Below are some sample comments:**
  - “I found it hard to read all three books in the bag between the books we have at home, those we get at the library, and those we get at my daughter’s school library.”
  - “The books in the bag were too easy and short to hold out my son’s interest. We read them once, and that was enough. (He is almost five and-a-half).”
  - “We love the program. A few more difficult books for my four year old would be helpful.”
  - “I would like to see more interesting books (stories) sent home with my child.”
  - “You should provide more English reading material in the book bags.”
  - “The books are only in Spanish. There should be other languages too.”
  - “I would like to request more books in Spanish because I do not speak English.”

## **Appendix A: Questionnaire**