Form P

Template for Task Force Final Reports

Date: May 21, 2018

To: ALSC Board of Directors

From: Melissa Depper and Marisa Connor on behalf of the Every Child Ready to Read
               Oversight Committee

Subject: Final Report and Recommended Next Steps

Task Force Charge: Develop recommendations from the ECRR Oversight committee for any specific directions or actions ALSC might consider to ensure continuity of and building on the ECRR practices.

Overview of Task Force Work Plan: Following the decision of the ALSC Board at the 2018 Midwinter Meeting to "conclude Every Child Ready to Read as an active initiative, retaining the existing product and identifying or establishing working group(s) to preserve the five practices and to make recommendations on current areas of need in early literacy," ALSC President Nina Lindsay invited ECRR Oversight Committee Chair Marisa Connor and committee member Melissa Depper to develop recommendations for next steps. Marisa and Melissa together created a list of exploratory questions and invited replies from both current ECRR Oversight Committee members and a selection of early literacy library leaders nationwide. They received over a dozen responses, representing front-line children's librarians, children's department managers, outreach librarians, district youth services coordinators, library consultants, and early literacy librarians, which informed this report. This report, which outlines recommendations for next steps, concludes the work of the task force.

Summary of Task Force Findings:

Early literacy librarians see the conclusion of Every Child Ready to Read as a potential window of opportunity for bringing more flexibility and energy to specific early literacy library initiatives, programs, and services, which perhaps can be more tailored to individual community needs. They are excited about a variety of potential growth areas including support for social/emotional development messaging, whole child development, school/community partnerships, and parent/family engagement.

However, there are great concerns about the conclusion of ECRR as an active initiative, and the impact on advocacy, research, messaging, training, and future initiatives. Without a flagship research-based set of resources and tools as a foundation, children's librarians worry they may be less able to advocate effectively to directors and boards, pitch to stakeholders, or apply for

grants. ECRR helped libraries "speak the same language" as early childhood educators and made it easier for educators to see that libraries could "sit at their table."

Librarians agree that one of the great outcomes of ECRR was to synthesize and disseminate current early literacy research to libraries that did not have the capacity to perform their own literature reviews. Early literacy research is not static and librarians are concerned that the information provided in the ECRR toolkits will inevitably become dated, and would appreciate a mechanism that would allow the library world to maintain an awareness of current findings going forward, and to update and preserve the understanding not just of the ECRR2 practices mentioned in the Board decision but of the critical ECRR1 skills that underpin the practices as well.

Librarians celebrate that ECRR has definitely "moved the needle" on early literacy awareness for many libraries and communities, and at the same time the reality that ECRR has been implemented, understood, promoted, and applied in a great variety of ways, leading to a lack of consensus about what ECRR "is" (Is it the toolkit? Is it the broader research-based practice of supporting parents and caregivers?) which can make it difficult to assess, compare, and contrast usage and rates of adoption across libraries. There is a need then for extremely clear messaging going forward about what it means that ECRR is being concluded as an active initiative, so that front line staff, librarians, coordinators, and directors alike understand there is both an ongoing need to support early literacy programs and services in libraries, that ALSC continues to be committed to providing that support, and that the end of "ECRR" does not mean that the work of early literacy in libraries is "done".

Outside of the evaluation of the ECRR toolkit, there is a growing body of research on early literacy practices in public libraries, which needs to be highlighted and promoted to children's librarians because, in order to advocate successfully, children's librarians need to know about and understand research that is based on their own work, instead of just relying on research emerging from other fields (Stooke and MacKenzie 2011). VIEWS2 was the first wide scale study to demonstrate the positive early literacy impact of public library storytimes (Campana et al 2016; Mills et al 2018). In addition to VIEWS, a variety of other public-library based studies have contributed to our understanding of early literacy/learning practices in the public library (Campana 2018; Prendergast 2018; Prendergast 2013; Clark 2017; McKechnie 2006; McKenzie, Stooke, & McKechnie, 2007; Stooke & McKenzie 2009). Finally, the body of research focused on early literacy in library settings is continuing to grow as Dr. Maria Cahill at the University of Kentucky has just begun an IMLS-funded study examining school readiness and the language environments of public library storytimes.

Understanding and promoting early literacy research based in libraries is critical, along with early literacy research from other fields, as the body of early literacy research is not static. In addition, the pool of children's librarians is constantly in flux, with new librarians and staff joining children's departments, experienced librarians retiring or moving into management, and staff with limited budgets asked to shoulder extra responsibilities. There are always new staff who need training on the basics and experienced staff who need to step up their understanding and skills. The ECRR toolkits helped fill this need and in their absence other tools will be necessary. One such program that has already seen widespread adoption is OCLC's

Supercharged Storytimes. Based on the VIEWS2 research, it trains storytime providers on being intentional and interactive with early literacy content in their storytimes. Since ECRR was launched in 2004, a number of early literacy/early childhood programs and projects have been introduced or expanded, including Family Place Libraries, Supporting Parents in Early Literacy through Libraries (SPELL) from the Colorado State Library, the Washington County Cooperative Library Services (OR) and OregonASK program in development Fostering Grade Level Reading, LENA technology and workshops, and even DEMCO's Very Ready Reader Program, to name a few. In addition, some libraries without the resources to purchase the toolkit or train staff on ECRR have worked independently to support early literacy in their communities through strategies such as coordinating their early childhood programs with state educational standards. The Bringing Literacy Home report examined current ECRR practice, but the reality is that today's early literacy librarians have a wealth of resources at their disposal and any new initiatives to be adopted by ALSC should take these alternate resources into account in assessing needs and identifying gaps.

In conclusion:

- Early literacy librarians see the conclusion of Every Child Ready to Read as a potential window of opportunity for bringing more flexibility and energy to specific early literacy library initiatives, programs, and services, and are excited about a variety of potential growth areas. These areas include but are not limited to all of the recommendations of the Bringing Literacy Home report, plus exploring new community and national partnerships, developing nontraditional programming in and out of the library, providing stronger whole-child support of babies 0-3, and training staff on literacy development in children 5-8.

- There is a lack of consensus around the language used to describe or define ECRR in the field (eg, as a practice/toolkit/initiative/program, etc), a lack of consistency in implementation, as well as a lack of total agreement with the ALSC Board's description of ECRR as foundational to libraries' work in early literacy. Early literacy leaders have expressed doubt that the use of ECRR tools and/or practices is as widespread or as robust as the Board indicates.

- Early literacy librarians believe there is much work yet to be done to support the early literacy development of young children and their families, especially in high-need, English Language Learning, and underserved communities, and are concerned that the conclusion of ECRR as an active initiative will mean a marked decrease in attention, priority, and support from ALSC for early childhood learning and early literacy library services, and a consequent reduction of early literacy programs and services in libraries.

Task Force Recommendations:

Based on our discussions with early literacy library leaders, we recommend the following (*insert as many recommendations as developed by task force*):

Recommendation #1: That ALSC formalizes a commitment to continue their work supporting early literacy library initiatives by one of the following: A) the creation of a new ALSC committee to replace the ECRR Oversight committee, with a broader charge of collecting, synthesizing, and promoting new research in the field of early literacy; creating and disseminating tools for local, state, and national early literacy advocacy efforts; partnering with local, state, and national early childhood advocacy organizations; and developing ongoing early literacy training support for new and experienced youth services librarians and staff; OR B) expanding the charge of the current Early Childhood Programs and Services committee to explicitly include language relating to early literacy research, advocacy, partnerships, and training as listed above; OR C) expand the charges of several existing ALSC committees (such as Advocacy and Legislation, Early Childhood Programs and Services, Library Service to Underserved Children and Their Caregivers, Building Partnerships, Children and Technology, Managing Children's Services) to individually include language relating to early literacy research, advocacy, partnerships, and training, as relevant to each committee, as listed above.

- The Early Childhood Programs and Services committee chair, Stephanie Prato, was consulted and believes that expanding the early literacy responsibilities of the ECPS committee would be a "natural fit," since "many of our initiatives utilize and promote" early literacy, including recent and planned webinar series and the Babies Need Words Every Day campaign.

Recommendation #2: Prior to committing to and to further inform new initiatives such as those proposed in the Bringing Literacy Home report and/or the ALSC Early Literacy Next Steps document and/or the Summary of Task Force Findings in this report, that ALSC consider a broad survey of public library children's services departments and MLIS programs nationwide, to determine a more complete overview than provided by the Bringing Literacy Home report, of current early literacy library best practices, partnerships, programs, staffing, services, and of training needs.

Action to Be Taken: The Task Force asks the ALSC Board adopt the two recommendations.

Thank you for your consideration. Member(s) will be present at your Board meeting at Annual Conference.

List of the Task Force Members:

Marisa Connor
Melissa Depper

ECRR Committee Members and Early Literacy Leaders consulted:

Current and former ECRR Oversight Committee Members
Sue McCleaf Nespeca

Judy Nelson
Maren Ostergard
Sarah Stippich

Early Childhood Programs and Services Committee
Stephanie Prato, Chair

Early Literacy Library Leaders
Amy Commers
Lisa Dengerink
Kendra Jones
S Bryce Kozla
Marge Loch-Wouters
Mari Nowitz
Katie Salo
Lori Romero
Stephanie Smallwood

Research Consultant
Katie Campana