

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## NOW SERVING ONE OUT OF EVERY TWO CHILDREN UNDER AGE FIVE, TENNESSEE'S IMAGINATION LIBRARY IMPROVES SCHOOL PREPAREDNESS

*Pre-K, Kindergarten Teachers Report Imagination Library Participants Start School Better Prepared to Learn*

**NASHVILLE, TENN.** – With just over half of Tennessee's population of under-five children currently registered in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library –and over 80,000 Tennessee five-year-olds who have "graduated" from the statewide program since 2004– the Tennessee Board of Regents has completed the first large-scale study on the Imagination Library's impact on the learning preparedness of children now enrolled in public schools.

In 2007, the Governor's Books from Birth Foundation commissioned the TBR to solicit kindergarten and pre-kindergarten teachers' professional judgments on the readiness and performance of students who had participated in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library – a program that mails a new, age-appropriate, hardcover book every month to registered children, from birth until age five, at no cost to the family and regardless of income.

Responding kindergarten and pre-K teachers collectively affirmed that children who had participated in the Imagination Library were "better prepared" than students who had not participated in the program. On average, Imagination Library participants also exceeded teacher expectations: Forty-eight percent of kindergarten teachers and 64 percent of pre-K teachers stated that Imagination Library participants performed "better than expected" or "much better than expected" than students from previous classes – as compared to only ten percent of kindergarten teachers and 11 percent of pre-K teachers reporting that *non*-participants performed "better than expected" or "much better than expected."

"This research underscores how reading to a child early and often improves their ability to succeed right from the start of their formal education," said Governor Phil Bredesen. "I hope these promising results will encourage all Tennessee families with children under age five to register for the Imagination Library and make a commitment to read with a child every day, starting at birth."

Administered in partnership with the Tennessee Department of Education last fall, the Web-based survey contained questions related to overall learning preparedness (reading, thinking, listening and social skills) for two groups of students in a teacher's class: those who had participated in Tennessee's Imagination Library, and those who had not. Teachers were asked to consider all students in each group as a whole, and used a five-point rating scale of expectations for assessing readiness, performance, and comparison to previous classes. Nearly 320 kindergarten teachers and over 150 pre-kindergarten teachers responded.

"Through a major study sponsored by the Dollywood Foundation in 2003, we knew the Imagination Library significantly improved household literacy habits among participating families," said GBBF President Lady Bird. "But to have evidence on how this program has improved school preparedness *in Tennessee* is very exciting – and particularly validating for our volunteers across the state, who work so hard to make sure children in their communities have access to these wonderful books."

### **Additional highlights from the TBR study's findings:**

- Teachers believed that Imagination Library participants enjoyed learning new stories more than non-participants –especially at the pre-kindergarten level– and that the Imagination Library fostered creativity.
- Open-ended comments were highly positive: Teachers applauded the fact that the Imagination Library provides books to children who might not otherwise be able to own any books, and that the books were useful classroom learning tools. Many teachers said they made sure to register their own children in the program.

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- Some teachers thought that the Imagination Library would be even more effective if parents and communities would take *full* advantage of it (i.e., registration of any and *all* children under age five).
- *Experienced* teachers agreed that the Imagination Library has aided preparation for pre-K and kindergarten.
- Although survey responses could not be controlled for extraneous factors in early childhood development such as intervention from other programs (i.e., *Voluntary Pre-K for All* or Head Start), student backgrounds, or number of years enrolled in the Imagination Library, the survey still allows for understanding the *probable* effects of Imagination Library participation on literacy and early childhood learning as an aggregate.

"We are optimistic that these teachers' assessments will help with our biggest challenges going forward – finding and registering the other 50 percent of Tennessee's under-five children, and raising adequate funds to support these additional children," said Bird.

According to 2000 U.S. Census results, 52 percent of the state's total population under age five –almost 194,000 children– are registered to receive a free book in the mail this month. With over 80,000 Tennessee five-year-olds having already "graduated," Tennessee's Imagination Library has served more than 274,000 children, and delivered over 5.1 million books, since Gov. Bredesen established the GBBF in 2004.

### ***About Tennessee's Imagination Library:***

Dolly Parton created the Imagination Library in 1996 as a gift to the children in her hometown of Sevierville, Tenn. The cost of purchasing and delivering books –\$28 per child, per year– is split evenly between a non-profit sponsoring organization in every Tennessee county, and a State budgetary allocation administered by the non-partisan, not-for-profit Governor's Books from Birth Foundation®.

A blue ribbon committee of early childhood education experts selects the books for the Imagination Library, which includes such beloved classics as *The Little Engine That Could*®, *Spot Goes to the Farm*, *The Snowy Day*, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, and *Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten*.

Any child in Tennessee under age five can be enrolled in the program. Registration forms are commonly available at local public libraries, and online registration is available in participating counties at [www.ImaginationLibrary.com](http://www.ImaginationLibrary.com).

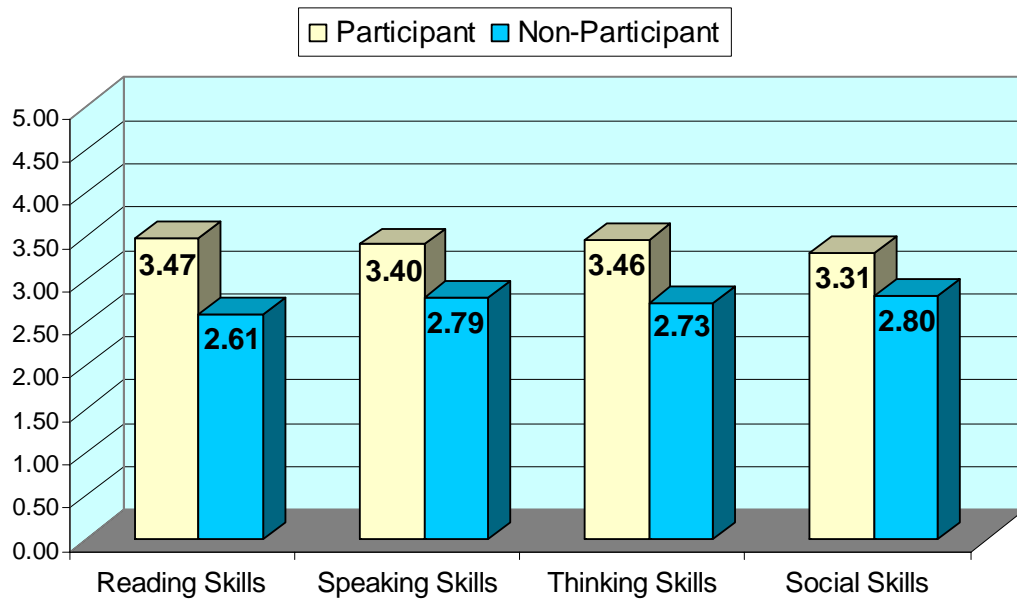
To learn how you can support the Imagination Library in *your* county, or for information on registering a child, visit [www.GovernorsFoundation.org](http://www.GovernorsFoundation.org), or call toll-free, 1-877-99-BOOKS.

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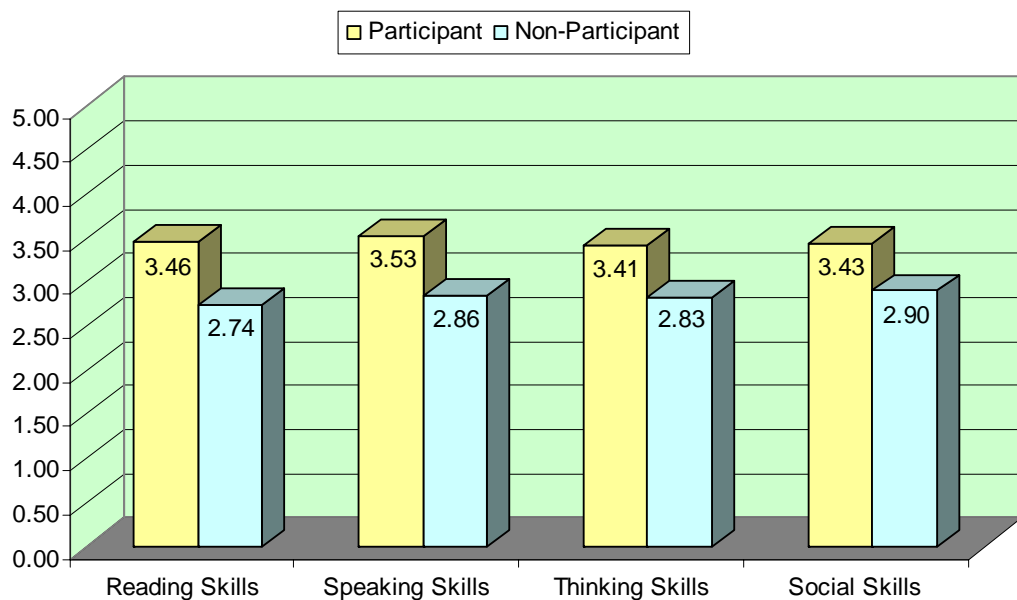
Impact of Tennessee's Imagination Library  
on Pre-K and Kindergarten Students  
from a Fall 2007 Survey of Teachers  
Administered by the Tennessee Board of Regents



Average Scores of Pre-Kindergarten Survey Population:  
Selected Skills



Average Scores of Kindergarten Survey Population:  
Selected Skills





## Teacher Comments

"I inform everyone I know about the Imagination Library, including my own family members. I cannot thank you enough for this program! By the time the children start school, they are ready to learn about the early elements of literature and print. You don't have to teach them how to hold the book, that print has meaning, or how to 'read the pictures' to tell a story. You also see it in their writing skills – they can plan and create their own stories. I hear, 'But, I don't know what to write!' a lot less often."

"Lap time and story reading prior to entering kindergarten is directly related to how well a child will read in the future."

"Students are proud of their books and bring them to school for me to read."

"I noticed, after getting the data together for this survey, that my [more competent] kids participated in the Imagination Library."

"I've seen greatly increased skills in concepts of print and prediction of what will happen in a story."

"This is a wonderful program and I hope it will continue to be funded. There are very low-income children in our school and some [parents] may not be able to buy books for their children."

"The students are excited about the books and they are learning to take care of the books that they receive."

"I think that once the Imagination Library students who are enrolled from birth [for the full five years of the program] begin school, the results of this survey will have even greater ranges than this one."

"I am a pre-school teacher and an elementary librarian. The books are not only good stories, but popular titles. Many of my children will tell me that they have these [Imagination Library] books at home."

"I tell my parents, I can always tell when a kindergarten student enters my room for the first time, whether or not that child has been read to daily. Reading builds vocabulary, comprehension skills, fluency, sentence structure, knowledge, sequencing – and I could go on and on! As a kindergarten teacher, I feel reading is the foundation of our program. The Imagination Library is to be praised for helping the children of East Tennessee prepare for kindergarten."

"This is a wonderful program. These children need books put into their hands at birth, and need to be read to on a consistent basis. We can really tell a difference between those children that are read to all of the time, and those that are not."

"I think the program is wonderful and wish that all of my children and parents participated. I do believe that the more children are read to before entering school, the better student they are, and the better prepared they are for formal instruction."