



Community Campaign: “Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing”

Overview

Too Small to Fail, an initiative of the Clinton Foundation, promotes the importance of early brain and language development and supports parents with tools to talk, read, and sing with their young children from birth. Today, almost 60 percent of children in the United States start kindergarten unprepared, lagging behind their peers in critical literacy skills. To help children succeed in school and beyond, *Too Small to Fail* works at the national and local levels to reach parents and caregivers by strategically using media, building national partnerships and implementing the “Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing” community campaign across the country.

“Talking is Teaching” Community Campaign

Launched in the flagship cities of Oakland, CA and Tulsa, OK in 2014, “Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing” is a public awareness and action campaign that aims to motivate parents and caregivers to talk, read, and sing more with their young children. “Talking is Teaching” takes a place-based approach to supporting early brain and language development and motivates behavior change by meeting parents where they are. The campaign leverages three key strategies:

- *Trusted Messengers* such as librarians, pediatricians and faith leaders, who share campaign messages with parents
- *Environmental prompts* in the spaces that families go, including bus shelters, playgrounds, laundromats and grocery stores, as well as paid and social media, including local public television, billboards, and text messaging
- *Tools to facilitate change* such as developmentally appropriate books; clothing with action prompts; tip sheets; and activity books.

In 2017, we created our [Talking is Teaching Community Campaign Guide](#), which includes open source creative assets, training materials, parent handouts, and key research, to share what we’ve learned at no cost.

Talking is Teaching Communities

Too Small to Fail is working with communities across the country to boost early brain and language development. Today, there are **32** Talking is Teaching communities across the U.S. and **2** Statewide campaigns in Michigan and New York.

In each community, *Too Small to Fail* works with an “anchor partner,” a local community-based organization that leads the campaign. *Too Small to Fail* provides technical assistance, in addition to the campaign guide and resources.

Current Talking is Teaching communities include:

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| ▪ Brownsville, NY | ▪ Little Rock, AR | ▪ Oakland, CA | ▪ Syracuse, NY |
| ▪ Chippewa Valley, WI | ▪ Livingston County, MI | ▪ Paterson, NJ | ▪ Tampa, FL |
| ▪ Columbia County, NY | ▪ Los Angeles, CA | ▪ Portland, ME | ▪ Tulsa, OK |
| ▪ Detroit, MI | ▪ Miami, FL | ▪ Portland, OR | ▪ West Central Minnesota, MN |
| ▪ Elgin, IL | ▪ Minneapolis, MN | ▪ Saginaw, MI | ▪ Watertown, NY |
| ▪ Fresno, CA | ▪ Napa, CA | ▪ Salt Lake City, UT | |
| ▪ Greater Lehigh Valley, PA | ▪ New Orleans, LA | ▪ San Francisco, CA | |
| ▪ Kalamazoo, MI | ▪ New York City, NY | ▪ Stanford, CA | |
| ▪ Lake Placid, NY | ▪ Northern Michigan | ▪ Stony Brook, NY | |



Talking is Teaching in Michigan

“Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing” was first brought to Michigan in 2018 through the Great Start Collaborative Wayne (GSC Wayne). While the target area for GSC Wayne was initially the City of Detroit, the campaign began to expand and grow. Rachel Pritchard, Great Start Programs Specialist for the Michigan Department of Education was invited to a meeting with GSC Wayne and representatives from *Too Small to Fail* in Detroit to learn more about how they were implementing Talking is Teaching within the community. Around the same time, Livingston County, Saginaw Great Start Collaborative and COOR-Iosco Great Start Collaborative were also starting to implement Talking is Teaching in their communities. The success and momentum of the GSC Wayne campaign, the growing interest across the other Great Start Collaboratives and the availability of Preschool Development Birth-5 (PDG B-5) funds focusing on early literacy and family engagement made the timing right to launch in more communities through a statewide campaign.

In October of 2019, with the use of PDG B-5 funds, 14 Great Start Collaborative/Great Start Parent Coalitions sent 29 staff and Trusted Advisors from within their communities to receive the Talking is Teaching Trusted Messengers training. The training was provided by the national Talking is Teaching staff and included an overview of *Too Small to Fail*, an initiative that assists communities in implementing Talking is Teaching; building the capacity and skills of trusted messengers within local communities; and interactive and hands on ways to share the key messages and importance of talking, reading and singing to children every day. Trusted messengers, high-quality materials, and environmental prompts are the three components of Talking is Teaching and having a successful campaign. Trusted messengers build on their relationships with parents and caregivers to affirm and support how talking, reading, and singing positively impacts the growth and development of the children in their lives. Whether it is at the laundromat, the barbershop, the WIC office, or the school office everyday moments can incorporate literacy for children right from birth through the use of high-quality materials and environmental prompts in addition to those trusted messenger relationships.

Too Small to Fail has evaluated the impact of Talking is Teaching in a variety of community settings, including pediatricians at Children’s Health Center at the Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital who shared messages about early brain development and early literacy activities and a “Talking is Teaching” toolkit with parents of children birth through three years and at UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland shared messages about early brain development and an early math kit with parents of 2-5 year-olds. When utilizing these pediatricians as trusted messengers, about two-thirds of parents - 65% in Oakland and 63% in San Francisco - agreed that they planned to interact differently with their baby after meeting with their pediatrician about the importance of early literacy. Latino and Spanish-speaking parents were mostly likely to say they learned something new.^{1,2}

Another evaluation focused on laundromats in three New York City locations who created child-friendly reading spaces and hosted visits by local librarians to encourage families to read while visiting. Parents who visited laundromats with the “Laundry & Literacy” space for families reported that they appreciated the opportunity to read with their child, spending less time on tablets or phones during their visit. Families who visited laundromats that implemented the “Laundry & Literacy” kits engaged in 30 times more literacy-related activities than those without a child-friendly reading area. (One hundred thirty-eight observed interactions compared to three at similar laundromats without a literacy area.)³

¹ Too Small to Fail, *Talking is Teaching Intervention at UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland*. July 2016.

² Too Small to Fail, “Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing” Early Literacy Intervention at Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital, September 2018.

³ Laundry Literacy Coalition, *Creating Literacy-Rich Spaces in Laundromats: Pilot Evaluation Findings, Executive Summary*, Spring 2019.

In the past month, again through the utilization of PDG B-5 funds, staff from *Too Small to Fail* was able to hold three virtual trainings to train an additional 100 participants from all over Michigan, including MDE staff, Great Start Parent Liaisons, Great Start Collaborative partners and local trusted messengers to be able to train other Trusted Messengers in their local communities.

Over the past year, through 44 out of the 54 Great Start Collaboratives and Parent Coalitions, Talking is Teaching is in the planning stages or full implementation in 69 out of the 83 counties in Michigan. Each campaign may look a little different because each community in Michigan is different. The success of each campaign depends on knowledge of where families and caregivers with young children are visiting and the connections that businesses, agencies and community partners have with their local Great Start Collaborative and Parent Coalition in order to have the privilege of being integrated into their local Talking is Teaching Community Action Plan.

Talking is Teaching aligns with not only the early childhood outcome that children are prepared to succeed in fourth grade and beyond by reading proficiently by the end of third grade, but also with the Top 10 Strategic Plan goals of expanding early childhood opportunities, improving early literacy achievement. Both are achieved by utilizing trusted messengers, environmental prompts, and tools to create a continuum of awareness, attitude, and behavior change that is incorporated into the lives of families with young children in everyday situations within their community, as well as within early learning and care environments.