

EXERCISE: ILLUSTRATING THE GAP IN 3RD GRADE READING

Time: 5-8 minutes

Purpose: The purpose of this activity is to illustrate how the gap in 3rd grade reading grows as children have or do not have: 1) access to high quality preschool programs, 2) regular preschool and school attendance and 3) summer learning opportunities.

- 1) **Begin by asking** for three volunteers to stand next to each other. (Note: Before you start the exercise, take a quick look around to make sure that volunteers will have room to walk eight steps backwards and about 20 steps forward.)
- 2) **Ask the volunteers** to share their names then announce to the room, "This is ____, ____ and _____. They are all five years old. This is their first day of kindergarten. Hurray!!! Let's all give them a big hand for this exciting day!"
- 3) **Then, point to Volunteer A**, and say, "But unfortunately Volunteer A (insert his/her name) did not have a chance to participate in one of our very high quality preschool programs. So, (name of Volunteer A), please take eight steps back to represent the about eight to nine months of learning that you didn't get a chance to gain in the year before kindergarten."
- 4) **Then point to Volunteer B**, and say, "(insert name of Volunteer B), got into a great program but after a couple of months, things got tough with his/her family. Her dad lost his job, the family car broke down, so (name of Volunteer B) started missing a lot of preschool. After another couple of months, the preschool program told him/her, we are sorry but we need to give your slot to a child who will show up regularly. (Name of Volunteer B), please take four steps back because you only got partial benefit from the preschool learning experience."
- 5) **Then point to Volunteer C**, and say, "Here we have (insert name of Volunteer C), she/he is excited and ready to go."
- 6) **Now, direct all three volunteers** to walk forward eight steps. Share that this represents a year of learning in kindergarten. Instruct the volunteers to take the same sized steps because they all got an equally wonderful, high quality kindergarten teacher.
- 7) **But, then turn to Volunteer A again**, and say, "Unfortunately, because Volunteer A never went to preschool, she/he not only missed out on learning but his/her family also lost out on the opportunity to get into the practice and habit of getting to school every day. Since this was the first time being cared for by someone other than family members, she/he was so anxious that she was always complaining of stomachaches and his/her family kept him/her home on those days. In the end, she/he was what we call severely chronically absent – missing two months total of kindergarten. Turn to the volunteers and say, "Please take two steps back to represent those two months of missed days plus another two months to represent the day that you came back but weren't sure what was happening."
- 8) **Turn to Volunteer B** and say, "She/he also had some challenges getting to school but it wasn't as bad as (name of Volunteer A). She/he missed a month of school." Then say to all of the volunteers, "Take one step back and then another step back to represent the confusion on the days you returned but were lost since you missed the instruction."
- 9) **Now, say to all three volunteers**, "Let's take eight steps forward to represent 1st grade, Okay—the patterns continue, Volunteer A—take four steps back, Volunteer B, take two steps back."
- 10) **Stop the exercise**. Say to the room, "Imagine the pattern continues into 2nd and 3rd grade." Ask the room, "Who will be reading by the end of 3rd grade?"
- 11) **With volunteers still standing**, ask for volunteers from the group to share the thoughts they had or have as they look at the gap. Solicit a few answers.
- 12) **If time allows, ask the room**, "What would it take to close the gap?" or say, "It's important that we see the gap and take action to make sure A and B catch up."
- 13) **Thank the volunteers** for participating and ask them to return to their seats.