

Sample Pitch Angles for Media, Addressing Families

- Testimonials from families about how the program has changed their child's life.
 - Teachers would be a good place to start to find these, as they know which children have made improvements and are most likely in contact with their families.
 - Look for interesting stories, like the child who took up an entirely new hobby or joined a new club because of improved literacy.
 - Use these testimonials on the school's social media sites and encourage followers to share their own.
 - See if a family would be willing to write an op-ed for the local paper. While you cannot dictate the content in this scenario, look for families who would authentically help further key messages.
- Stories from families who had low literacy but were inspired by their children and found ways to learn together.
 - GED classes might be a good place to start looking for these stories.
 - When gathering information from families be sure to ask:
 - How learning together brought them closer to their children
 - How improving their own literacy helped at work
 - Biggest hurdles they had always experienced with regards to literacy and how they finally overcame them (beyond the support of their child)
- The importance of reading to young children—comments from experts, statistics and recommended guidelines for how to encourage early childhood literacy through dialogic reading and other techniques.
 - Statistics and resources:
 - America ranks 16 out of 23 for literacy, 21 out of 23 in math and 17 out of 19 in problem solving, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2013/10/08/america-tests-below-the-international-average-on-oecd-tests>
 - More than 50% of students at four-year post-secondary schools and more than 75% at two-year colleges lacked the skills to perform complex literacy tasks. In addition, almost 20% of students pursuing four-year degrees had only basic quantitative skills. –The National Survey of America's College Students
 - The performance advantage among students whose families read to them in their early school years is evident regardless of the family's socioeconomic background. –PISA-OECD
 - Family involvement is a more significant factor in children's academic

performance than the qualities of their school. –NC State University

- A single year of family education has a greater impact on the likelihood of a son or daughter attending a post-secondary institution than does \$50,000 in family income. –Seeds of Literacy
- Family involvement is directly tied to student performance and has a sustained impact—15-year-old students whose families often read books with them during their first year of primary school show markedly higher scores in Program for International Student Assessment than students whose families read with them infrequently or not at all.
- Links to NAEYC documents on reading aloud with young children with tips
<https://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200303/ReadingAloud.pdf>
<http://families.naeyc.org/everyday-steps-to-reading-writing>
- “I have always believed that, for oral language development, Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* was right: ‘There’s no place like home.’” - Lucy Calkins, *Raising Lifelong Learners*
- Along with reading talking to children is key to develop oral language and vocabulary. The Meaningful Differences study is generally cited to reinforce this. Here is a summary of that study:
 - This study of ordinary families and how they talk to their very young children is no ordinary study at all. Betty Hart and Todd Risley wanted to know why, despite best efforts in preschool programs to equalize opportunity, children from low-income homes remain well behind their more economically advantaged peers years later in school.

Their painstaking study began by recording each month—for 2-1/2 years—one full hour of every word spoken at home between family and child in 42 families, categorized as professional, working class, or welfare families. Years of coding and analyzing every utterance in 1,318 transcripts followed. Rare is a database of this quality. “Remarkable,” says Assistant Secretary of Education Grover (Russ) Whitehurst, of the findings: By age 3, the recorded spoken vocabularies of the children from the professional families were larger than those of the families in the welfare families. Between professional and welfare families, there was a difference of almost 300 words spoken per hour. Extrapolating this verbal interaction to a year, a child in a professional family would hear 11 million words while a child in a welfare family would hear just 3 million.

The implications for society are staggering: Hart and Risley’s follow-up studies at age 9 show that the large differences in the amount of children’s language experience were tightly linked to large differences in child outcomes. And yet the implications are encouraging, too. As the authors conclude their preface to the 2002 printing of *Meaningful*

Differences, “the most important aspect to evaluate in child care settings for very young children is the amount of talk actually going on, moment by moment, between children and their caregivers.” By giving children positive interactions and experiences with adults who take the time to teach vocabulary, oral language concepts and emergent literacy concepts, children should have a better chance to succeed at school and in the workplace.

- Break recommended guidelines down into 3-5 tips. Remember that list formats are very popular with media – “The Top 5 Ways,” etc.
- Make sure your experts are credentialed or credible sources, e.g., Ph.D., child psychologist, school professional.
- Reach out to TV media and offer an in-studio interview with your expert. Tie appearance with messaging about the school’s program and ways families can complement those efforts at home.
- How to build a balance of reading with use of computers, games and other non-traditional sources (e.g., reading guides on how to play video games more effectively, finding other engaging subject matter).
 - Consider pitching 3-5 ways families can improve their child’s literacy using surprising and fun activities.
 - Connect to timely events. For an April or May pitch, consider offering tips related to summer activities, e.g., read a summer movie review together before attending the summer blockbuster like *Avengers: Age of Ultron*.
 - Challenge families via social media to share the unique ways they have used these types of activities to engage their children.
- Create list of 3-5 easy things families can do at home to improve their child’s literacy (e.g., nightly reading, read before TV, etc.)
- Create social media engagement opportunity by encouraging families to visit school and/or media outlet social media page to post how they have been successful at getting their kids to read more.
- Partner with local family blogger(s) or other media outlet to host a Twitter party or [Google Hangout On Air](#) with a relevant and engaging topic for families like, “How to get your child interested in reading” or “Summer reading tips and tricks.”
 - If using Google Hangout On Air consider putting together a panel of teachers, families and students. Ask a media personality to serve as the “host.”
 - Advertise event on school’s social media websites and send event alert to TV, radio and newspaper. Have host and panel members promote through their channels.
 - Offer giveaways (e.g., local business gift certificates, school t-shirts, event tickets) throughout the party to encourage participation. You could also host this on Facebook.