



Connecting Caregivers to Libraries Using Text Messages for Early Learning: Text and Learn for Kindergarten (TALK) Process and Outcome Evaluation

In partnership with Ypsilanti District Library

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Executive Summary

In 2017, Ypsilanti District Library (YDL) launched Text and Learn for Kindergarten (TALK), a text messaging service that allows libraries to share age-appropriate activities directly with families of children 5 and under to raise the frequency and quality of adult child interactions. The TALK pilot study reached 1,100 families, including families that are often underrepresented at the library. Findings from the TALK pilot study indicated that families enjoyed receiving notifications and parents expressed increased confidence that the daily interactions were helping their children learn. After implementing the service in Washtenaw County, Michigan, YDL was ready to scale the project first to all libraries in Michigan, then to Indiana, and ultimately nationally.

In 2020, YDL requested the support of HighScope Educational Research Foundation (HighScope) to evaluate bringing TALK to scale. HighScope agreed to conduct the evaluation free of charge as a community service from 2020 to 2023. Specifically, HighScope would conduct a process evaluation to support scaling TALK across the state of Michigan and an outcome evaluation to better understand how TALK might change caregiver mindsets and behaviors to increase and improve adult-child interactions.

During the first year of the evaluation, HighScope collected process data from test libraries in Michigan that recently launched TALK and shared findings with YDL to support Michigan's statewide launch of TALK. Shortly after the Michigan statewide launch, HighScope collected additional process information from participating Michigan libraries using TALK. Applying lessons from prior launches with test libraries and the Michigan statewide expansion, TALK recently launched in Indiana.

During the final year of the evaluation (2022–2023), HighScope designed and distributed a survey to caregivers to learn about their experiences with and perceptions about TALK. Findings showed that sampled caregivers read TALK text messages, implement TALK activities at least once a month, and 92% of sampled caregivers strongly agreed or agreed that they were more aware of activities to build their children's literacy skills because of TALK. Sampled caregivers that receive TALK event messages (about local resources or events taking place at their library) were also more likely to perceive that their engagement with their local library increased. Differences also emerged when examining changes in the frequency and quality of adult-child interactions based on caregivers reported characteristics (such as community type, annual household income, and highest level of education attainment). Currently, 235 libraries are participating in TALK, 4,157 children are registered, and 682 children graduated from TALK.

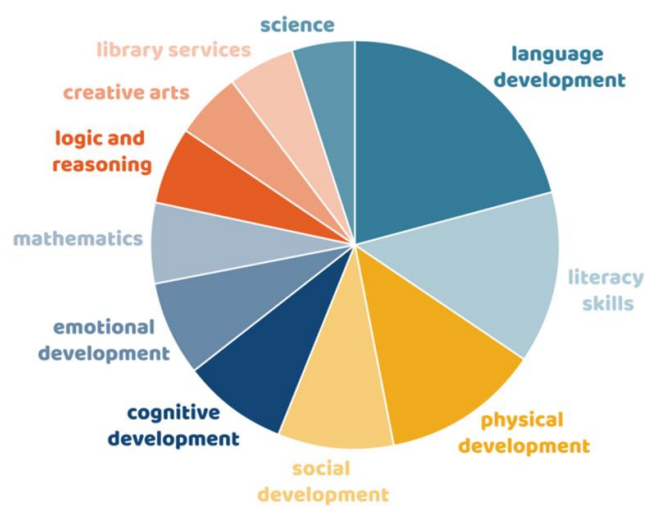
Introduction

Libraries are trusted institutions available to many communities in the nation, and are therefore ideally situated to partner with families to improve school readiness and educational outcomes. Ypsilanti District Library (YDL) embraced this opportunity when they launched Text and Learn for Kindergarten (TALK), a text messaging service for caregivers of children 5 and under.

TALK sends participating caregivers text messages each week with age-appropriate activities based on the library early literacy model Every Child Ready to Read 2.0. In total, the program consists of 650 messages leveled by child’s development that are automatically sent twice a week based on a child’s birthdate. Participating libraries can also choose to send two additional messages per month to subscribers in their service area about free events and resources.

Texts were specifically designed to help adults prepare their little ones for school success through a variety of activities and by connecting them to the library. TALK messages were first developed by youth staff at libraries and were then reviewed by experts for readability and by caregivers for accessibility and cultural sensitivity. For example, a specific piece of feedback was that texts did not always apply to the child, especially for texts designed for caregivers with babies. YDL refined the text messages so that they aligned with the ages and stages recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Messages were also reviewed by early childhood specialists at HighScope Educational Research Foundation. The final version of TALK text messages offered small bits of developmentally appropriate and usable information to improve the frequency and quality of adult-child interactions to support children’s school readiness skills and future success (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: TALK messages by content category



Rationale for and Motivation to develop TALK

Singing, reading, talking, and playing daily with young children has a proven positive impact on brain development, but not all families are aware of the importance of these activities in preparing their child for school success (Bohlander et al., 2017). Fletcher and Wolfe (2016) found a difference in non-cognitive skills based on family income and that the difference grows over time. Additionally, Fernald et al. (2013) found that children from low-income households were six months behind their peers in language development by age two, which can contribute to the kindergarten readiness gap (Fernald et al., 2013). These gaps, along with the passage of the Michigan Read by Grade Three law, were the motivation behind YDL's decision to develop TALK to mitigate the possibility that large numbers of children may be held back based on a standardized measure outlined in the law. This law mandates that any child who is not proficient in reading based on state assessments, or who is identified as “at-risk” of reading failure, can be held back in third grade (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). In 2016, 80% of black children and 60% of Latino children were not proficient in reading by third grade in the state of Michigan (McVicar, 2016). Without equity-driven community support, Michigan's Read by Grade Three policy posed the potential to yield new gaps — between children moving on to grade four and children held back in grade three.

YDL designed TALK specifically to reach under-served families most likely impacted by this new law. Reardon & Portilla (2016) found that parents who do engage in “cognitively enriching activities” with their children improve achievement for children from low-income households and contribute to modest narrowing of the school readiness gap. Text messaging services have the capability to reach many families (given the widespread use of cellphones). York and Loeb (2014) evaluated a similar text messaging service, Ready4K, which showed strong evidence that a parent messaging service can increase parental involvement in their young child's education. The use of text messages allows libraries to reach families anywhere and anytime, even those who do not regularly come to the library.

TALK Pilot Study

During the pilot study, TALK successfully reached families who are often underrepresented at the library. During the pilot, 21% of users identified as African American, compared to 13% of Washtenaw County's population, and 40% of users reported an annual household income less than \$40,000. Data was also collected to learn and improve through surveys, phone interviews, and focus groups. Survey and focus group findings indicated that families enjoyed receiving notifications and that parents expressed increased confidence that the daily interactions were helping their children learn. Library events promoted through TALK demonstrated a marked improvement in attendance and at the end of year two of the pilot study, data showed an overall satisfaction rate of 8.28 on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing the most satisfied.

TALK Evaluation

After successfully implementing the service with libraries in Washtenaw County, Ypsilanti District Library was ready to scale the project first to all libraries in Michigan, then to Indiana, and ultimately nationally. YDL sought partnership with HighScope Educational Research Foundation (HighScope), which has over 50 years of experience in early education research and evaluation, to evaluate the next stage of this work with the following project goals and evaluation outcomes in mind:

Project Goals

- Provide libraries in Michigan and Indiana the ability to use text messaging to connect parents in their service areas with free resources and events that promote early learning at the library.
- Offer a toolkit of high-quality resources and professional development materials that any local, state, or national library organization can use to implement TALK at an affordable rate in communities throughout the United States.
- Increase the frequency of skill-building interactions between parents or caregivers and children ages 0–5 in Michigan and Indiana by providing accessible activity suggestions based on Every Child Ready to Read 2.0 in English and Spanish.
- Expand libraries' capacity to reach underserved families by sharing an effective model for building partnerships with pediatricians, law enforcement agencies, schools, WIC, and other key early learning advocates in their communities.

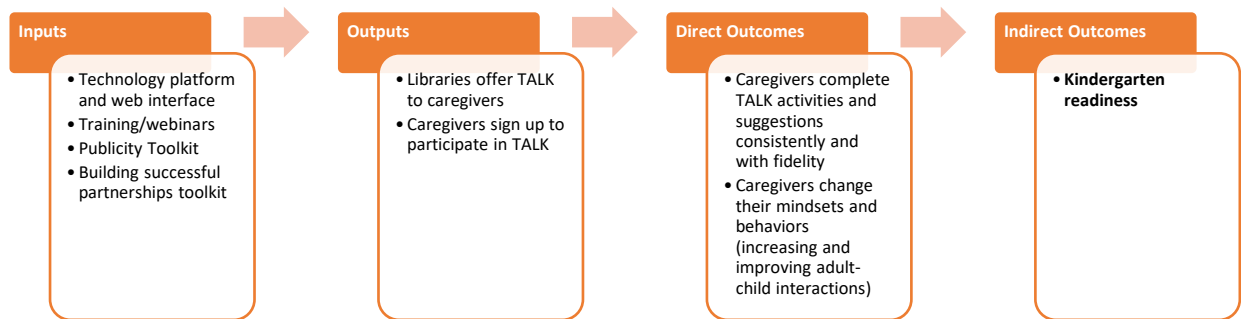
Evaluation Outcomes

1. Gather usability data (on the new technology platform and web-interface) using surveys and interviews with test libraries to monitor and guide the project.
2. Gather effectiveness data on the TALK training webinars and TALK toolkits used by libraries to reach patrons in their service areas using document analysis, surveys, and interviews with test libraries to monitor and guide the project.
3. Examine TALK's reach (including both the number of libraries that choose to offer TALK to families and the number of caregivers that sign up to participate in TALK) using tech platform data and data from an optional participant form.
4. Examine the direct outcomes of TALK (increasing and improving adult-child interactions) using a caregiver perception survey.
5. Develop a roadmap to share findings to monitor and guide the project.

To meet evaluation outcomes, HighScope planned to conduct both a process and outcome evaluation. The purpose of the process evaluation was to understand how test libraries used resources developed by YDL to implement TALK (technology platform, trainings and webinars, a publicity toolkit, and a partnership toolkit). Data gathered from this evaluation would be used for continuous improvement to ensure that TALK inputs were usable and feasible ahead of the Michigan statewide expansion.

HighScope also planned to conduct an early outcome evaluation after the Michigan statewide expansion to examine TALK’s direct outcomes (See Figure 2, TALK Logic Model). The early outcome evaluation would specifically explore whether caregivers were reading TALK text messages and using the TALK activities with their child(ren) and, if so, if caregivers perceived that they had improved the frequency and quality of adult-child interactions. Given the motivation for the creation of TALK, the process evaluation would also explore if there were differences between perceived changes in adult-child interactions based on caregivers reported household income and education levels.

Figure 2: TALK Logic Model



Process Evaluations

While HighScope Educational Research Foundation (HighScope) planned to conduct one process evaluation with test libraries (libraries that launched TALK prior to the Michigan state-wide expansion), HighScope and YDL later decided to conduct two process evaluations based on what was learned during the first process evaluation with test libraries. Process evaluations focused on evaluation outcomes 1–3 to understand libraries’ perceptions of the usability and effectiveness of TALK inputs and examine TALK’s reach to adults with young children living in Michigan.

Initial Process Evaluation: Test libraries experience launching TALK

In the spring of 2021, HighScope sent a survey to test libraries (libraries that launched TALK prior to the Michigan statewide expansion) to learn about their experiences with TALK. The survey asked libraries about the perceived usefulness of TALK inputs and test libraries’ experiences launching TALK.

The survey had a 72% response rate from main contacts at test libraries (n=13). At the time of the survey, 100% of sampled test libraries were already using TALK or planning to offer TALK to their patrons that year. Most sampled test libraries (85%) had recently launched TALK at their library in March or April of 2021. Libraries that had not yet launched TALK cited 3 reasons: staffing, customizing promotional materials, and missed the TALK training.

Perceived usefulness and effectiveness of TALK inputs

A majority of test libraries found the resources used to launch TALK at their library usable and feasible, and more importantly, *helpful* to launch TALK at their library (See Table 1).

Table 1: Test libraries experience with TALK inputs

TALK Input	% of sampled test libraries reported	Usability, feasibility, and effectiveness indicators from sampled test libraries
TALK Trainings	77% had attended a TALK training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the information in the training was easy to understand. 100% reported that they feel more confident offering TALK to their patrons because of the TALK training.
TALK Tech Platform	77% had used the TALK Tech Platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% agreed or strongly agreed that they found the TALK tech platform easy to use. 100% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt confident using the MCLS site to offer TALK to their patrons.
TALK Toolkits	92% had used a TALK Toolkit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% agreed or strongly agreed that they used the materials in the promotion toolkit to offer TALK to their patrons.

Test libraries experiences launching TALK

Sampled test libraries reported using a variety of materials from TALK Toolkits to launch TALK (see Figure 3 and Figure 4 below). Most reported that they found flyers and social media ads the most useful tools in the Publicity Toolkit and TALK trainings most useful to launch TALK.

Figure 3: Promotional TALK materials perceived as most useful according to Test Libraries

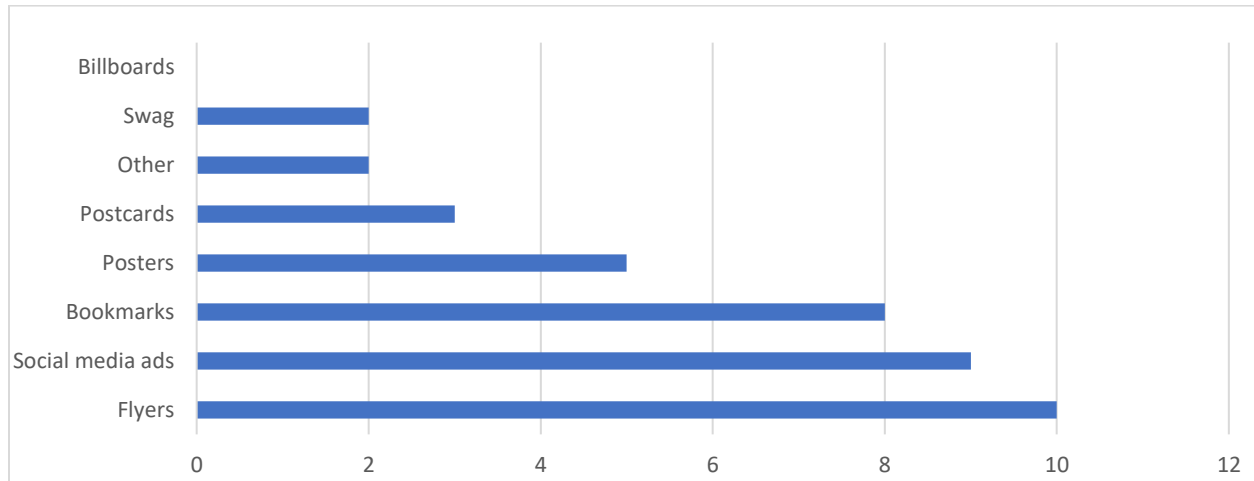
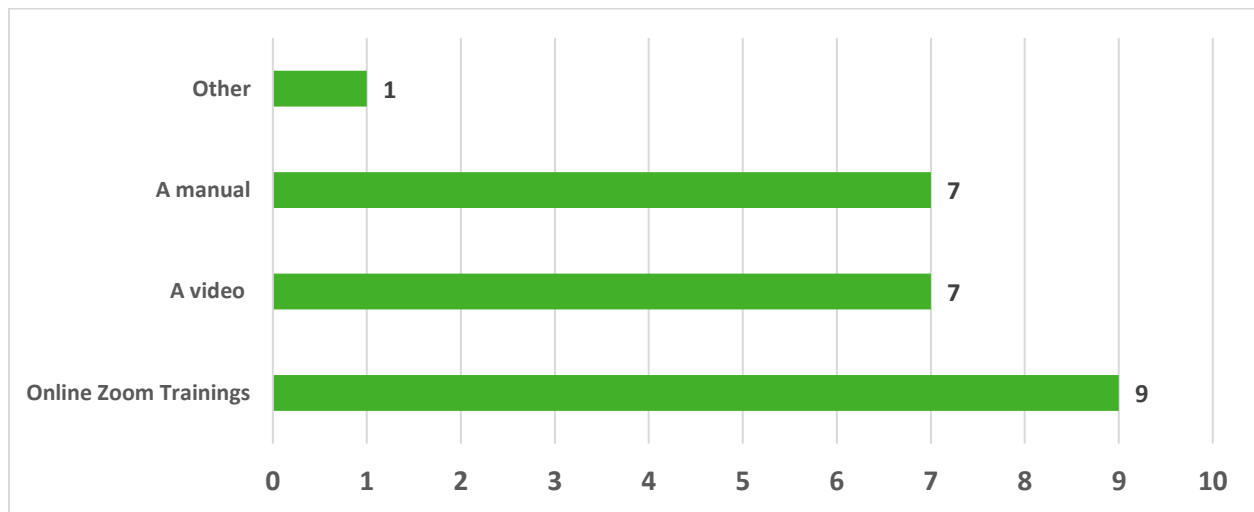


Figure 4: Resources reported most helpful to launch TALK



At the time of the survey, only one library had used the Spanish materials while about half reported that they planned to use them later. Most test libraries reported that they did not see a need to provide TALK materials in another language.

Patrons that sign up for TALK receive TALK activity messages and TALK messages from their local library about free events and resources. At the time of the survey, while most test libraries planned to send personalized text messages about their library's events or resources, only 1 test library had already sent them. While the partnership toolkit encouraged partnering with a variety of stakeholders to promote TALK (local government agencies and civic organizations, local businesses, medical professionals, laundromats, etc.), most test libraries (n=8) reported partnering with education and daycare providers to promote TALK.

“I think this will provide us a direct line to the families of young children and allow us to directly share information and programs of value to them.”

Sampled test libraries demonstrated that they understood the purpose and potential of TALK (specifically to expand their reach with patrons with young children and to provide an early childhood service), however they also cited barriers to promote and launch TALK. Sampled test libraries cited lack of time and resources and the pandemic as the two main barriers to implementing TALK. At the same time, sampled test libraries described how TALK provided a way to connect with patrons during the pandemic. For example, while one test library said that the program allowed them to “reach patrons that can’t make it to story time,” another test library shared that the program allowed them to “offer more learning tips even when we can’t meet in person.”

At the time of this evaluation, we also examined TALK output — specifically, how many patrons and children were participating in TALK, had graduated from TALK, or opted out of TALK. At the time of this evaluation, 69 patrons were registered for TALK, 95 children were registered, and 5 children graduated. Once signed up for TALK, users could opt out of TALK or stop receiving TALK text messages. Very few patrons (4) and children (5) from test libraries had chosen to opt out after participating in TALK.

First process evaluation findings and recommendations

HighScope shared the following findings with Ypsilanti District Library (YDL) in the form of a roadmap in the summer of 2021 ahead of the Michigan statewide expansion:

Finding 1: TALK provided a means to connect with families with young children during the pandemic.

Finding 2: Libraries may need additional support to send personalized text messages (about their libraries resources and events for young children) using the TALK tech platform.

Finding 3: Additional resources (video and manual) may support the implementation of TALK.

Finding 4: Many test libraries had only recently started to use TALK.

Based on these findings, HighScope recommended that, ahead of the Michigan state-wide expansion of TALK, YDL:

Recommendation 1: Move forward with creating a TALK training video with a manual for libraries that want to participate but cannot or did not attend the TALK in-person training. Provide a resource for main library contacts to share with their staff, and support libraries in providing individualized text messages about early childhood programming at their library.

Recommendation 2: Within these new resources, HighScope recommended that resources specifically included information about how to send personalized text messages (including sample text message scripts that libraries could use) and feature how other libraries launched TALK by partnering with a variety of community partners as opposed to just educational partners.

In addition to program recommendations, HighScope suggested conducting another process evaluation early into the Michigan statewide expansion because sampled test libraries reported that they had only recently started using TALK (approximately 1–3 months prior to completing the survey). The second process evaluation would help to better understand the launch process and after libraries had more time to use TALK inputs.

Ahead of the second process evaluation, YDL changed how they provided support to TALK libraries. They focused on 4 main types of support: (1) Regular Zoom training opportunities, (2) Recorded videos of trainings, (3) a TALK manual, (4) Regular newsletters with bits of information and tips.

Second Process Evaluation: Libraries' experiences after Michigan statewide expansion of TALK

In February 2022, after the Michigan statewide expansion, HighScope launched a second survey. The survey asked libraries about the perceived usefulness and effectiveness of TALK inputs and test libraries' experiences launching TALK. We also planned to interview libraries to learn more about their experiences launching and using TALK inputs. Unfortunately, after contacting libraries several times, we were unable to schedule interviews with libraries participating in TALK. All information below comes from a survey launched following the Michigan statewide expansion of TALK. For comparison purposes, we refer to our survey with test libraries occurring during Year 1 of the evaluation and our survey with libraries following the statewide expansion occurring during Year 2 of our evaluation.

The Year 2 Survey had a 31% response rate (n=52) from libraries participating in TALK after the Michigan statewide expansion. Most of the sampled libraries (77%) had launched TALK in the summer or early fall (approximately 7 to 8 months prior to the survey), giving them more experience with TALK than earlier sampled test libraries. Libraries that had not launched TALK again cited internal reasons, such as the need for more staff or not enough time to launch.

Most libraries in our Year 2 sample that participated in TALK after the Michigan statewide expansion had also attended a TALK Training/Webinar and perceived the information useful for launching TALK (see Table 2).

Table 2: Comparison of libraries’ experiences with TALK training

	Year 1: Sampled Test libraries	Year 2: Sampled libraries post MI statewide launch
Attended a TALK Training/Webinar	77%	83%
The information in this training was easy to understand	100% agreed or strongly agreed	95% agreed or strongly agreed
I feel more confident offering TALK to my patrons because of this training	100% agreed or strongly agreed	86% agreed or strongly agreed

Most libraries in our Year 2 sample (79%) were using the TALK tech platform and felt comfortable using it to offer TALK to their patrons (see Table 3). We also asked how libraries were using the TALK tech platform. A little under half (42%) of our sampled libraries were using the data feature to track TALK participation for their reporting or to increase participation.

Table 3: Comparison of libraries’ experiences with TALK tech platform

	Year 1: Sampled test libraries	Year 2: Sampled libraries post MI statewide launch
Used the TALK platform	77%	79%
Found the tech platform easy to use	100% agreed or strongly agreed	92% agreed or strongly agreed
Feel confident using the MCLS site to offer TALK to patrons	100% agreed or strongly agreed	90% agreed or strongly agreed

Most libraries from the Year 2 sample (73%) reported that they had used the TALK Toolkits and found them useful to promote TALK to patrons and to partner with community organizations.

Libraries’ experiences launching TALK during Year 2

Libraries from our Year 2 sample again reported using a variety of materials from the publicity toolkit to launch TALK and again reported that they found flyers and social media ads to be most useful to promote TALK with their patrons (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). Additional recommendations for resources included a list serv to connect TALK libraries and a resource to help navigate all TALK resources.

Figure 5: Comparison of promotional materials perceived as most useful (*Year 1 test libraries v. Year 2 Post MI statewide launch libraries*)

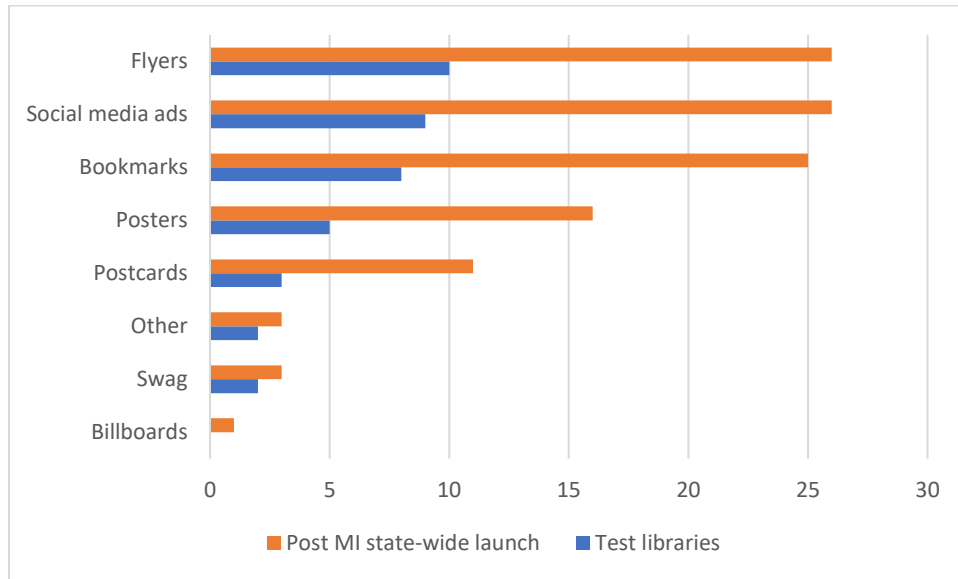
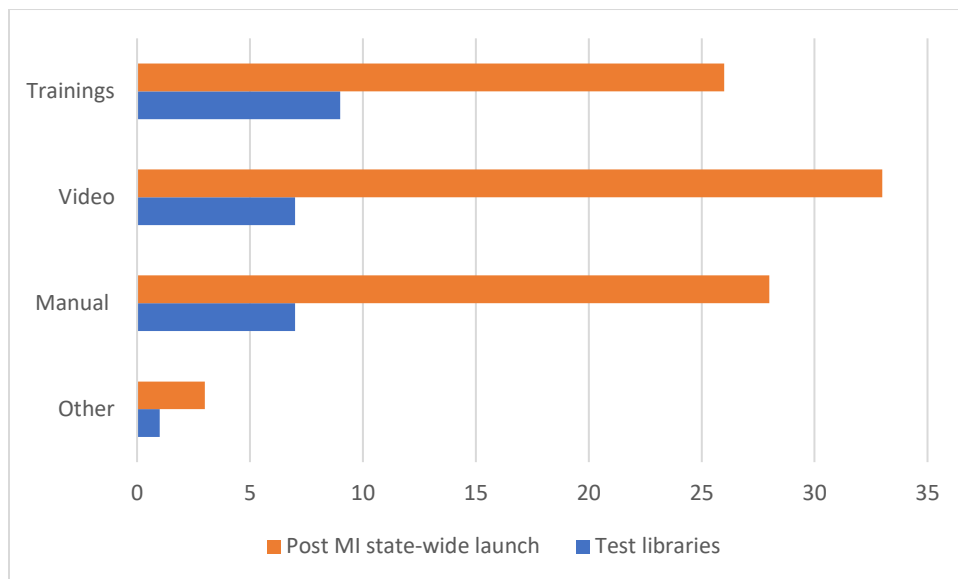


Figure 6: Comparison of resources perceived as most helpful to launch TALK (*Year 1 test libraries v. Year 2 Post MI statewide launch libraries*)



Compared to Year 1 sampled test libraries, more sampled libraries from Year 2 had sent personalized text messages using the TALK platform or were planning to send personalized text messages about their libraries’ programs and services (65%) demonstrating an increase in the number of libraries using this TALK feature. This may be a result of YDL providing differentiated resources and including information specifically about how to use this feature. Approximately a third of libraries from Year 2 reported that they either had used the Spanish TALK materials (10%) or planned to (21%). Another 17% thought that it would be helpful for the TALK materials to be provided in another language, with 4 libraries reporting that TALK materials in Arabic would be helpful to serve their patrons. Like sampled test libraries, most sampled libraries from Year 2 reported that they partnered with education and daycare providers to launch TALK. Again, most sampled libraries from Year 2 found flyers, social media ads, and bookmarks most useful for promoting TALK at their library (See Figure 5).

Again, sampled libraries from Year 2 cited time and resources as a barrier to launching and implementing TALK at their library. However, libraries following the state-wide expansion also noted that time spent navigating resources and competing early childhood programming (Bright by Text, Ready Rosie, and Books for K) impacted experiences promoting and launching TALK.

Year 2 libraries also demonstrated a clear understanding of the purpose of TALK, in terms of both of TALK’s outcomes to improve adult-child interactions and library engagement (for examples, please see Table 4).

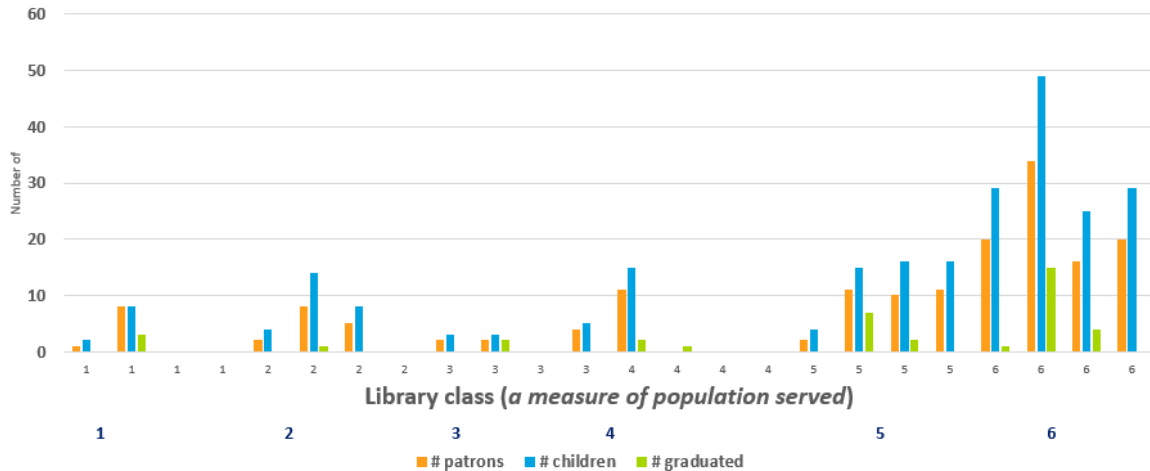
Table 4: Libraries perceived TALK outcomes from Year 2

<p>Perceived changes in caregivers’ mindsets and behaviors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“More confidence and knowledge in being their child’s first teacher.”</i> • <i>“We hope parents who use it will start to make talking opportunities more instinctively.”</i> • <i>“Create stronger bonds between child and caregiver.”</i>
<p>Perceived changes in caregivers’ interactions with library</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“More visits to the library, more people aware of the services that the library offers.”</i> • <i>“They [families] will have a resource and communication with the library.”</i> • <i>“Increase number of patrons that attend programs.”</i>

When exploring TALK output, or the number of patrons and children signed up for TALK, we explored whether output was related to library class (or size of the community the library served). As expected, there was an observed relationship between library class and TALK users in that libraries that serve more patrons had more users participating. There were,

however, a few outliers in which libraries from a smaller class had more TALK users (See Figure 7).

Figure 7: A random sample of Year 2 output by library class



Second process evaluation findings and recommendations

HighScope shared the following findings as a roadmap for future work with libraries with Ypsilanti District Library (YDL) in the summer of 2022:

Finding 1: Sampled libraries from Year 2 again recognized and understood TALK’s outcomes.

Finding 2: Internal barriers existed to participate in TALK and the TALK evaluation (*for example, time to schedule and participate in an interview about their experiences with TALK*).

Finding 3: Sampled libraries from Year 2 continued to use a variety of resources to launch, engage with, and monitor TALK at their library.

Based on these findings, HighScope made the following recommendations to support libraries currently participating in TALK and for libraries that might participate in the future:

Recommendation 1: To support libraries using TALK, provide a one-page guide to navigate all TALK resources (video, manuals, toolkits, etc.) to support the launch of TALK and continued engagement with TALK.

Recommendation 2: Provide a clear overview of how to differentiate TALK from other programs aimed at caregivers with young children.

Recommendation 3: Provide examples of community partnerships to promote TALK outside of educational partnerships. For example, investigate libraries in areas

with a high number of TALK subscribers and showcase their strategy to promote TALK with a variety of community partners.

Recommendation 4: Provide specific support for smaller library communities to promote TALK with their patrons. For example, showcase the success of a library that serves a smaller population and how they engaged with a variety of community partners.

HighScope also made recommendations for future evaluations that examined TALK's process, including offering incentives for TALK libraries participating in evaluation surveys and interviews to increase response rate, and examining TALK data by set intervals after a state-wide launch to explore how TALK promotion is maintained over time.

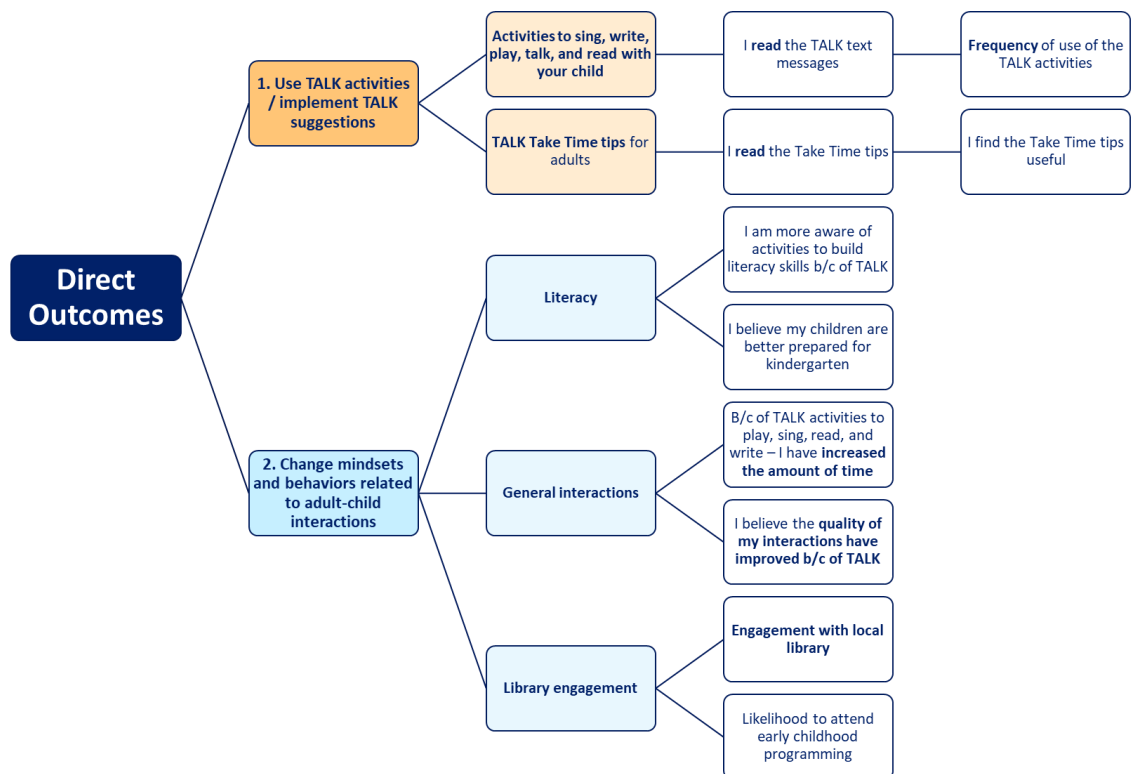
In response to these findings and recommendations, YDL made changes to better organize tools to launch and engage in TALK. They developed an index to help libraries more easily navigate TALK resources and a 6-step guide to TALK success with short videos for each step.

Early Outcome Evaluation

From December 2022 through January 2023, HighScope sent a survey to caregivers that subscribed to TALK to explore their perceptions of the program. To ensure that the survey was accessible to all TALK users, caregivers could choose to complete the survey in English or Spanish.

The survey was distributed to 2,700 caregivers participating in TALK and had a 20% response rate, meeting our ideal sample size with a margin of error of 5%. Survey items asked about TALK’s two direct outcomes: (1) using TALK activities consistently and (2) changes in caregiver mindsets and behaviors. Given the purpose of TALK, to prepare children for kindergarten, we also included questions related to this purpose and questions about TALK activities to build children’s literacy skills. For a more detailed visual of how the survey explored TALK outcomes, please see Figure 8.

Figure 8: Measuring TALK outcomes



The survey also asked questions about caregiver’s background and characteristics to explore differences in outcomes based on reported characteristics. This included caregiver reported race/ethnicity, caregiver household income, caregiver community type (urban, suburban, rural), and highest level of education.

The end of the survey included questions related to caregiver’s satisfaction with TALK (for example, “would you recommend TALK to another caregiver with young children?”) and one

open-ended question asking if there was anything else they would like to share about their experiences with TALK.

Sample of caregivers using TALK

We surveyed caregivers after the statewide expansion of TALK. Consequently, we heard from TALK users from across the state of Michigan. Figure 9 shows a map of Michigan TALK libraries (indicated by different shades of blue) and survey response density (density indicated in red).

Most TALK libraries were in Southeast Michigan, and most of the TALK users we heard from were from this region. Figure 10 provides an additional view, with TALK libraries indicated by a yellow circle and responses received from TALK users in orange.

Figure 9: Michigan TALK libraries and survey responses

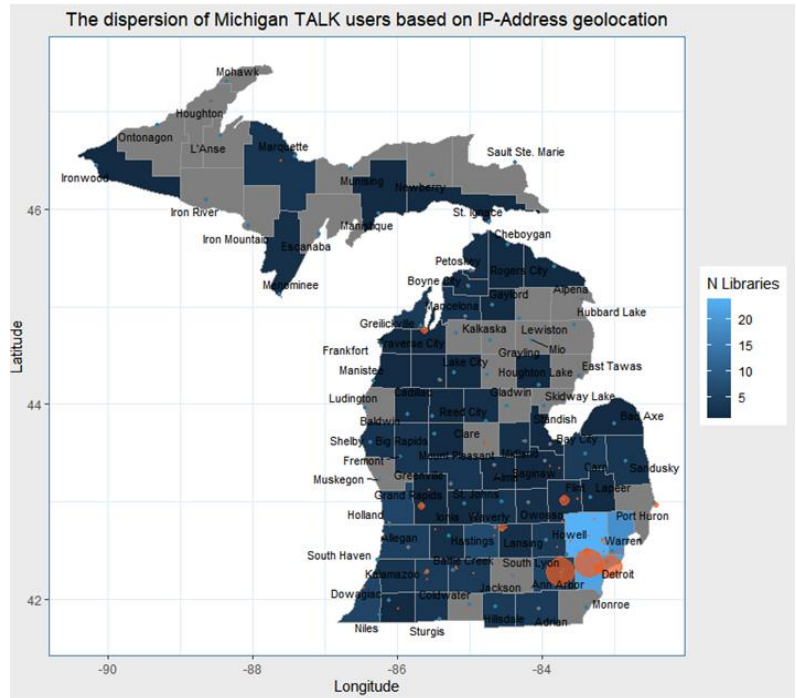
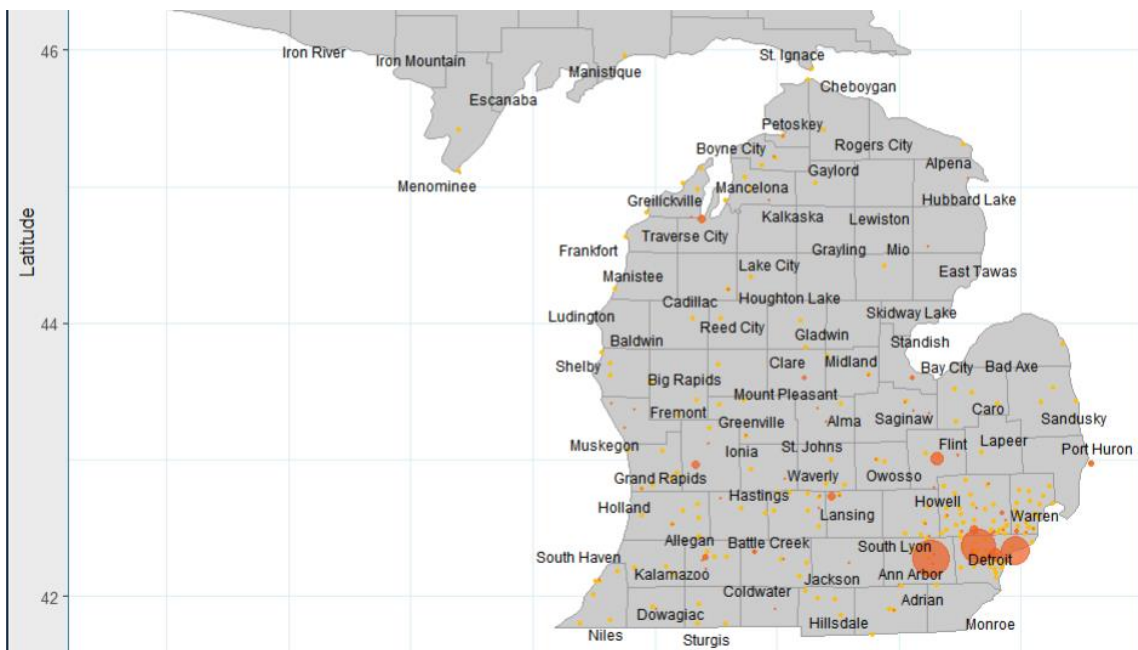


Figure 10: Michigan TALK libraries and survey responses



Figures 11-13 display caregiver characteristics from our survey sample. Note that caregivers always had the option to select “prefer not to say.” Most caregivers reported that their primary language was English. Sixteen other primary languages were reported by caregivers with Spanish (n=10) and Arabic (n=5) reported as the most common.

Figure 11:
Reported caregiver race/ethnicity

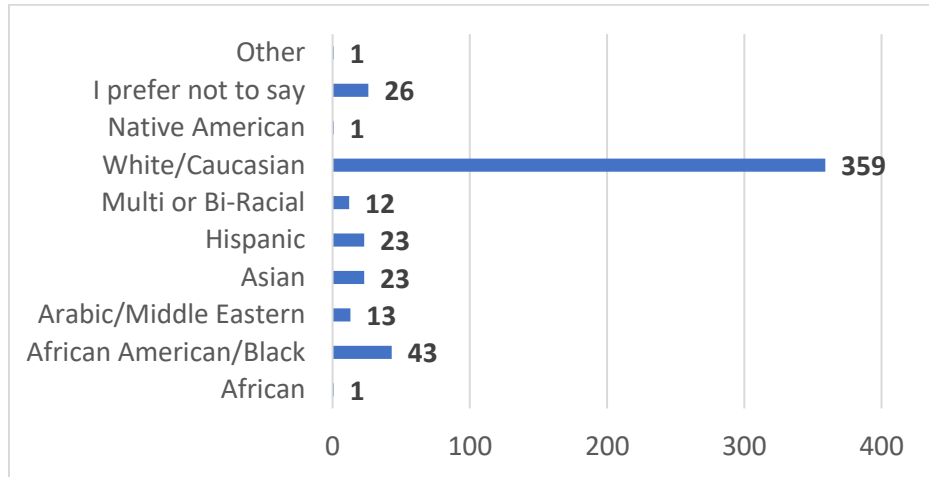


Figure 12:
Reported caregiver community type.

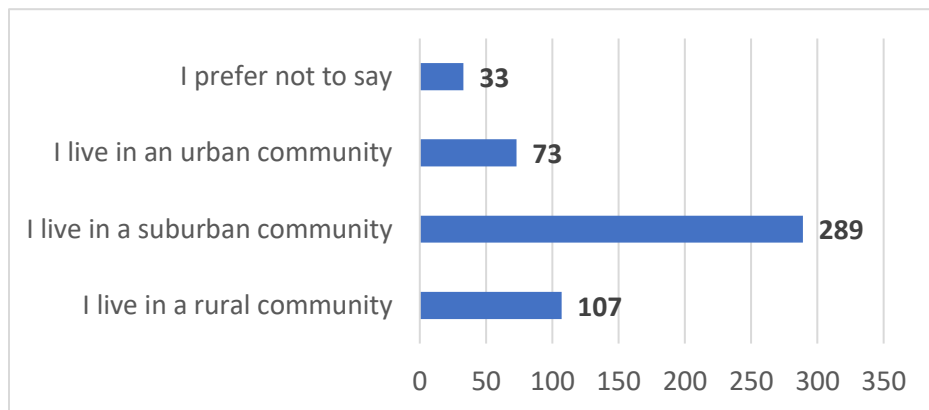
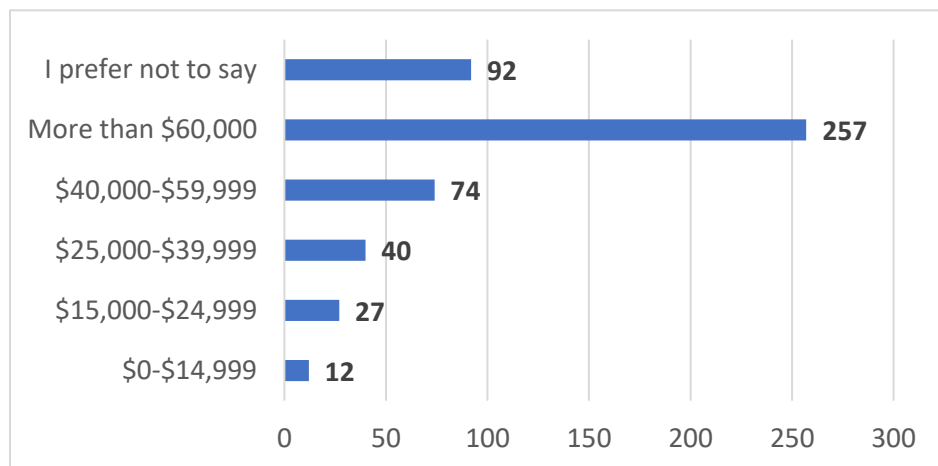


Figure 13:
Reported caregiver annual household income



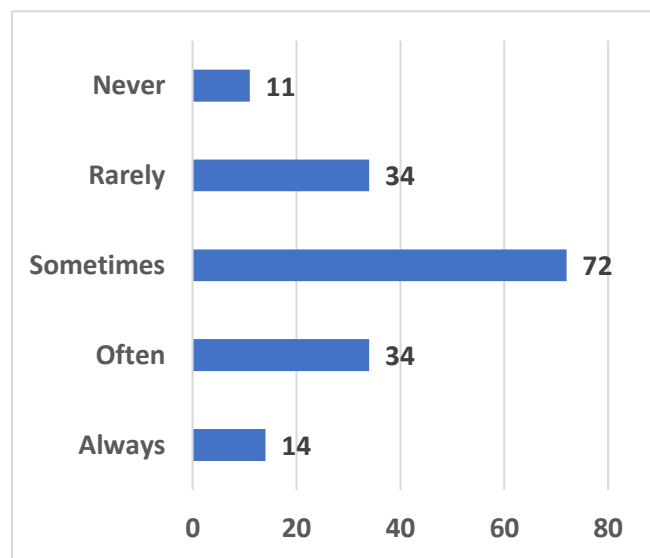
Outcome 1: Reading and using TALK messages

Most sampled TALK users reported that they read every TALK text (81%) and use TALK activities at least once a month (92%). We also inquired specifically about the TALK Take Time Tip messages, which contained tips for adults. Most sampled TALK caregivers again indicated that they read the TALK Take Time tips and 91% agreed that they find these messages useful.

Outcome 2: Changes in caregivers' mindsets and behaviors

About a quarter of sampled TALK users reported that they believed engagement with their library increased because of TALK. However, a little less than a third (32%) of sampled TALK users reported that they receive TALK event text messages from their local library (for example about an upcoming library event or resource). At the same time, caregivers who received TALK messages from their local library reported reading the message. After receiving a TALK event text message, a range of responses were reported for whether sampled caregivers attend a library event after receiving a TALK event message with "sometimes" being the most frequent response (See Figure 14).

Figure 14: How often do you attend a library's programming after receiving a TALK message?



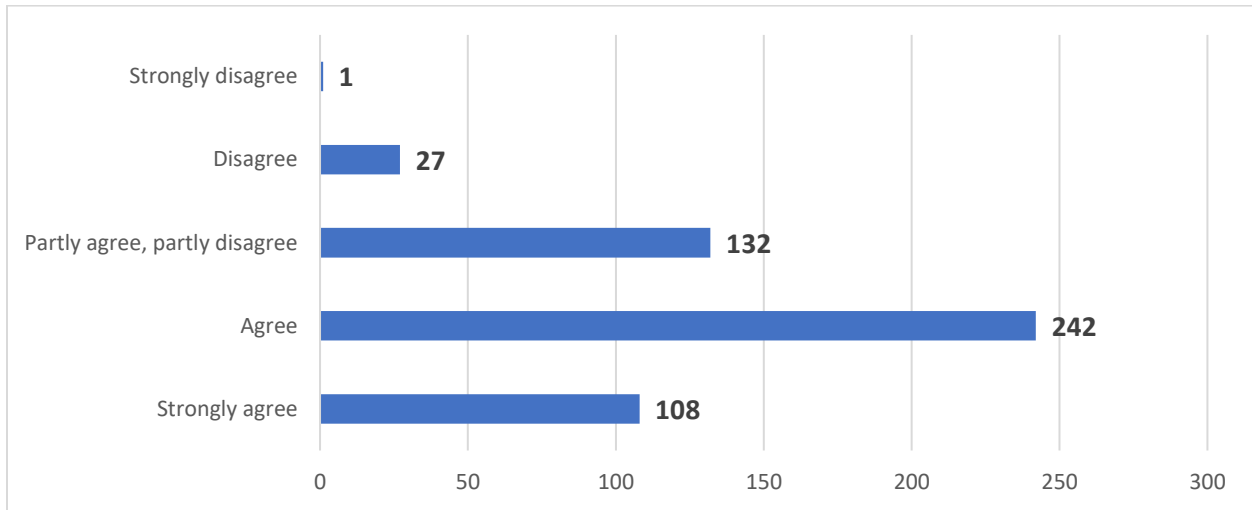
Most sampled caregivers reported positive changes in their mindsets and behaviors when it came to their child based on their participation in TALK. This included changes in the frequency and quality of caregiver-child interactions and a change in awareness of activities to build their children's literacy skills (see Table 5).

Table 5: Sampled caregivers perceived changes because of TALK

<p>60% of sampled caregivers agreed or strongly agreed that because of TALK activities to play, sing, read, and write with children I have increased the amount of time I interact with my child(ren).</p>
<p>72% of sampled caregivers agreed or strongly agreed that they believe TALK activities have improved the quality of their interactions with their child(ren).</p>
<p>92% of sampled caregivers agreed or strongly agreed that they are more aware of activities to build their children's literacy skills because of TALK.</p>

While this evaluation did not measure the overall goal of TALK (kindergarten readiness), we asked caregivers if they believed that their children were better prepared for kindergarten because of their use of TALK. Again, most sampled caregivers agreed or strongly agreed that their child was more prepared for kindergarten because of their participation in TALK (See Figure 15).

Figure 15: I believe my children are better prepared for kindergarten because of TALK



Differences in perceived outcomes based on caregiver characteristics

We also explored how the outcomes described above differed based on sampled caregiver reported characteristics. Differences emerged based on reported community type, household income, highest level of attained education, and if caregivers reported that they receive event text messages from their local library.

Sampled caregivers from rural communities perceived more changes in the frequency and quality of adult-child interactions because of TALK

Figure 16: Increased quality

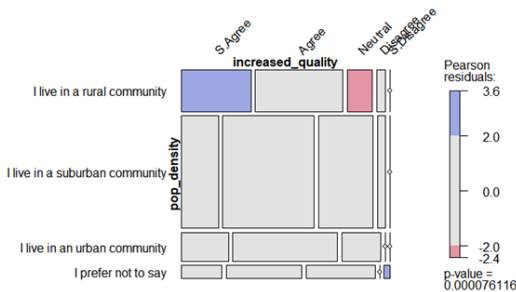
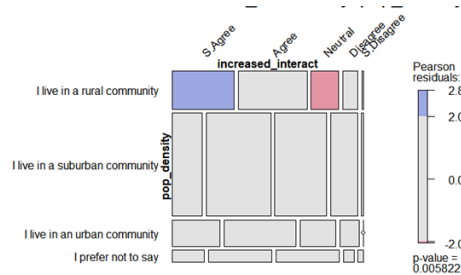


Figure 17: Increased frequency



As demonstrated by Figure 16 and 17, statistically significant differences ($p=0.00$ and $p=0.01$) emerged for caregivers who reported that they lived in a rural community and their perceived changes in the quality and frequency of their adult-child interactions because of TALK. In other words, sampled caregivers from rural communities were more likely to agree or strongly agree that they increased the quality and frequency of adult-child interactions because of TALK. This may be because cultural or public institutions offering activities or resources for young children may be more difficult to travel to for those living in rural communities. Thus, TALK text-messages provided a resource for young children without having to travel.

Sampled caregivers living in urban communities were more likely to attend their library’s early childhood programming after participating in TALK

Sampled caregivers who reported that they live in an urban community were statistically significantly more likely to agree or strongly agree that they were more likely to attend early childhood programming after signing up for TALK ($p=0.01$). This complements the aforementioned finding related to reported community type in that if libraries are easier to access or travel to TALK event text-messages are particularly meaningful to increase participation at a library’s early childhood programming.

Figure 18: More likely to attend

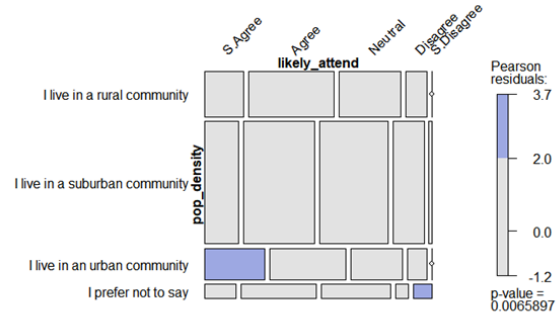


Figure 19: Increased frequency
(Differences based on reported income)

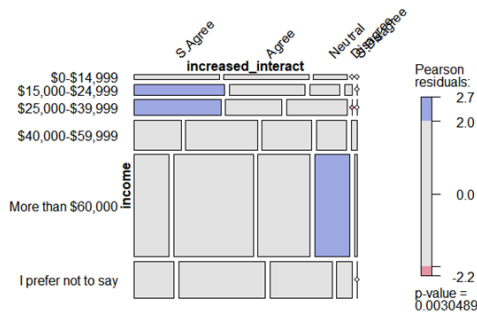
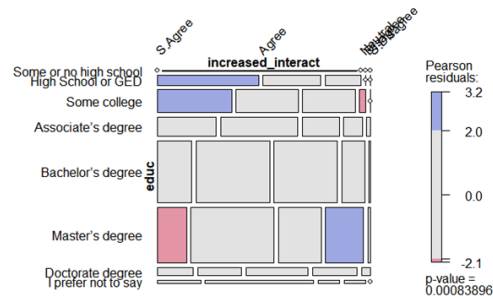


Figure 20: Increased frequency
(Differences based on reported education)



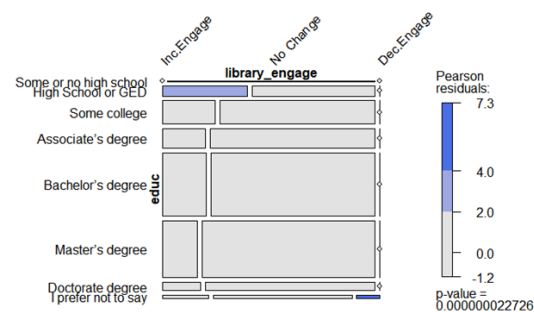
Differences emerged between sampled caregiver subgroups (income and education) and perceived changes in the frequency of adult-child interactions because of TALK

As demonstrated by Figure 19, statistically significant differences ($p=0.00$) emerged for caregivers who reported a household income between \$15,000–\$39,999 and their response to perceived changes in the frequency of adult-child interactions because of TALK. Statistically significant differences ($p=0.00$) also emerged for caregivers who reported that their highest level of education was high school or GED or some college and perceived changes in frequency of adult-child interactions because of TALK (See Figure 20). This suggests that TALK activities may be especially useful for caregivers that identify with these sub-groups to increase the frequency in which adults interact (play, sing, read, and write) with their children.

Sampled caregivers responded differently about changes in library engagement based on reported education and if they receive TALK library event messages.

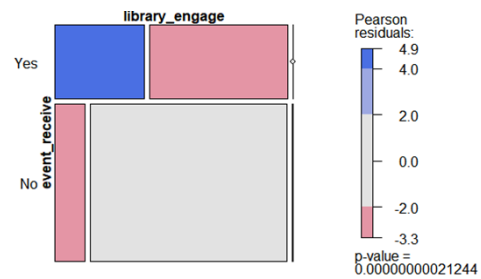
Another difference based on reported education emerged regarding library engagement. Statistically significant differences ($p=0.00$) were observed for sampled caregivers who reported that their highest level of education was high school or GED and if they perceived that their library engagement increased because of TALK. This suggests that for libraries hoping to reach this population, TALK provides a meaningful resource to improve library engagement.

Figure 21: Increased library engagement
(Differences based on reported level of education)



As demonstrated by Figure 22, statistically significant differences ($p=0.00$) regarding library engagement also emerged for caregivers who reported that they receive TALK event text messages from their local library. This finding highlights the importance of this feature, in that when TALK event text messages are used there may be an increase attendance and participation at library programming for caregivers and their young children.

Figure 22: Increased library engagement
(Differences based on receiving TALK event messages)



Additional findings and praise for TALK

Most caregivers reported that they learned about TALK from their local library (61%) although a variety of ways were reported by sampled TALK users. For example, the second most common response to this question was “other” and the third “social media.” Analysis of open-ended responses submitted with “other” revealed that caregivers were also learning about TALK through recommendations from a family member or friend.

This complements the finding that 95% of sampled TALK caregivers reported that they were likely or very likely to recommend TALK to a family member or friend with young children. Without prompting, sampled caregivers praised TALK. Based on a theme analysis from open-ended responses to the question, “is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experiences with TALK?”, caregivers praised TALK in supporting child development and learning, because of its ease of use, and as a resource for activities. We heard from parents, grandparents, and educators about the usefulness of TALK (See Table 6 below).

Table 6: Praise for TALK

<p><i>“I think it’s a great program and all parents would benefit from it, especially new parents.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I have found “TALK” to help generate more opportunities as a Grandmother to be part of my grandchildren’s education. Using your ideas have helped me understand the importance of communication in reading, writing, listening, watching the world around us to improve language - thank you!”</i></p>	<p><i>“As a retired early elementary educator (for over 40 years) I think the TALK ideas are great! My grandson and I enjoy following their suggested activities.”</i></p>
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Limitations and Future Evaluations

While we reached out to TALK users who opted out of TALK, we did not receive responses to better understand why caregivers who originally chose to participate later decided to opt out of TALK. This evaluation did not measure the goal of TALK, to prepare children for kindergarten.

Further evaluation efforts may focus on further expansion and scaling of TALK as states join the program. For an evaluation to measure the impact of TALK (kindergarten readiness) some steps below are recommended:

1. Develop a well-defined logic model and theory of change. This is crucial to understand how the TALK program would have an impact on children's readiness for kindergarten. Additional considerations include recommended dosage (or the amount of participation from caregivers to observe an impact) as well as clearly defined measures for “kindergarten readiness.” There is no consensus on the best tool to measure “kindergarten readiness” and the term can encompass more traditional academic skills (such as basic letter and number recognition), physical well-being and motor development, and approaches to learning (such as creativity and independence). If feasible, for caregivers that report a high dosage of TALK usage, it might be interesting to capture how TALK impacts not only the caregiver’s relationship with their local library, but the child’s future engagement with their local library in addition to kindergarten readiness.
2. Partner with an external evaluator to determine an appropriate research design to measure TALK impact. Factors to consider include if a control group (or group of children whose caregivers are not participating in the TALK program) is necessary for the research design. Because the program does not work directly with children, in that caregivers are responsible for implementing TALK activities consistently, the causal effect of the program on children’s outcomes will be difficult to establish without longitudinal measurements and a control group.
3. Develop a plan to carry out the investigation driven by the theory of change and research design. Plan for logistics and funding to carry out all components of the study including data collection, analysis, and incentives for participants.
4. Establish a partnership with a community that can support the research design and agrees to participate in all forms of data collection. One specific consideration includes if the community already measures kindergarten readiness at their school and if their measure aligns with TALK’s theory of change.

Conclusion

A summary of overall findings from the 3 evaluations conducted by HighScope organized by the 4 goals of the TALK Program is presented below.

Provide libraries in Michigan and Indiana the ability to use text messaging to connect parents in their service areas with free resources and events that promote early learning at the library.

As of October 2023, 235 libraries are currently participating in TALK. As of October 2023, 4,157 children are participating in TALK and 682 children have graduated from the TALK program (meaning that they turned 5 and thus have aged out of the developmentally appropriate text range). Table 7 contains a breakdown of participation by state.

Table 7: TALK Output by State (*October 2023*)

	Michigan	Indiana
Libraries	202	33
Children participating	3,822	335
Children who have graduated from TALK	671	11

Offer a toolkit of high-quality resources and professional development materials that any library, state library, or national library organization can use to implement TALK at an affordable rate in communities throughout the United States.

Sampled libraries during both process evaluations reported that they used TALK inputs (tech platform, trainings, and toolkits) to launch, engage with, and monitor TALK. Survey items from Year 1 and Year 2 indicated that libraries not only found the inputs easy to use, but that they found them helpful to implement TALK.

Following both process evaluations, Ypsilanti District Library (YDL) made improvements to TALK inputs to support future libraries engagement with TALK. Sampled libraries from Year 1 and Year 2 cited internal barriers to launch and engage in TALK, specifically not enough time, or resources (such as staff). Following the first process evaluation, YDL offered various materials (training, manual, videos, newsletters) for libraries to use based on their needs to implement TALK. After the second process evaluation, YDL developed an index for libraries to reduce time navigating TALK resources and a 6-step guide to successfully use TALK.

Increase the frequency of skill-building interactions between parents or caregivers and children ages 0–5 in Michigan and Indiana by providing accessible activity suggestions based on Every Child Ready to Read 2.0 in English and Spanish.

Sampled caregivers perceived TALK as a valuable and easy-to-use resource to support their child’s development. Most sampled caregivers read TALK text messages and implement

activities at least once a month. 92% of sampled caregivers agreed or strongly agreed that they were more aware of activities to build their children’s literacy skills because of TALK.

While 60% of sampled caregivers agreed or strongly agreed that because of TALK activities to play, sing, read, and write with children they have increased the amount of time they interact with their child(ren), for some sub-groups a change in frequency in interactions was more pronounced. Sampled caregivers who reported that they live in a rural community, have a household income less than \$40,000, or highest level of educational attainment was high school, GED, or some college, were more likely to strongly agree or agree that they increased the frequency of their adult-child interactions (playing, singing, reading, and/or writing) because of TALK.

Expand libraries’ capacity to reach underserved families by sharing an effective model for building partnerships with pediatricians, law enforcement agencies, schools, WIC, and other early learning advocates in their community.

TALK’s toolkits provided resources and examples for building partnerships with various stakeholders. While most sampled libraries partnered with educational or childcare providers to promote TALK, they also indicated partnerships with other community agencies. Sampled caregivers reported that they most often learned about TALK through their library, but also reported learning about TALK from a variety of sources (at their doctor’s office, a community organization, or by word of mouth).

Analysis also revealed that TALK improved library engagement for caregivers who reported that they live in urban community and caregivers who reported that their highest level of education was high school or GED. Sampled caregivers who reported that they live in an urban community were more likely to agree or strongly agree that they were more likely to attend early childhood programming after signing up for TALK ($p=0.01$). Sampled caregivers who reported that their highest level of educational attainment was high school or GED were also statistically significantly more likely to perceive that their library engagement increased because of TALK. Caregivers who received TALK event text messages from their local library about resources or events for young children were also statistically significantly more likely to report that their library engagement had increased.

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