



## City's First Readers

An initiative of the New York City Council

**Equity begins with early literacy!** Thank you to the more than 50 advocates and allies that joined Literacy Inc. (LINC) and other members of the New York City Council's Early Literacy Initiative, **City's First Readers\*** for a dynamic panel discussion on June 11, 2020. The panelist remarks illustrated what **City's First Readers** partners have known for years: support for early literacy programs is not discretionary, it is essential.

New York City is at a critical crossroads. The health and economic crisis of the coronavirus pandemic coupled with the recent protests against racism and social injustices both highlight the disparities that exist in Black and brown communities. As budget decisions are made, policy makers must decide how they will ensure that Black Lives Matter, and even more importantly as opening speaker Andre Eaton (ParentChild+) articulated, that Black Lives are equal.

One way to do this is with equity in early literacy. Panelist Tracy Jenkins (JCCA) reminded us that 90% of brain development occurs during the first five years of life. If we view the achievement gap for children growing up in poverty as an opportunity gap then there is no denying that investment in high quality early literacy programs for children is a solution. Beyond the moral imperative to work toward equity, research has proven time and again that this is also a sound financial investment - an investment that is necessary now more than ever.

As panelist Dr. Alan Mendelsohn (Video Interaction Project) articulated so well:

*Even though children have been somewhat spared from the disease itself, the COVID-19 pandemic is a catastrophe for families with very young children... Parents already under stress from poverty and racism are now under even more stress from COVID, making it even harder for young children to have the experiences of being read to and played with, that are critical for early development and school readiness. COVID will therefore widen gaps that were large before the pandemic, resulting in even lower educational attainment, lower incomes, and even more health and mental health problems that will persist for children's entire lives, long after the acute crisis recedes.*

Throughout the ongoing health and justice crisis **City's First Readers** partners did not give up on the more than 1 million families served by the initiative annually. The New York City Council should not give up on them either. In libraries, pediatric offices, childcare centers and throughout the community **City's First Readers** creates equity through early literacy.

\***City's First Readers**, coordinated by Literacy Inc. (LINC), is a collaboration of 12 non-profit organizations and libraries united to develop and deliver effective early literacy programs. **City's First Readers** partners empower parents, teachers, caregivers and community institutions and offer the necessary tools to ensure that all children, regardless of their social economic backgrounds, have a solid foundation to start school successfully, thrive academically, and have the opportunity to succeed beyond their school years.

***Equity Begins with Early Literacy*** can be viewed online anytime by clicking [here](#)

For more information about **City's First Readers** please contact Emily Gertz at [egertz@lincnyc.org](mailto:egertz@lincnyc.org).



Repair the world  
child by child





# City's First Readers

An initiative of the New York City Council

## Equity Begins with Early Literacy

### Moderator and Panelists

**Andre Eaton, LMSW, MDIV**, is the New York State Director at ParentChild+. In his role, Andre coordinates program expansion, program support, staff development, and training for all 25 New York ParentChild+ sites. Andre also develops new public and private funding streams, fosters relationships with local partner agencies and state and local policy makers, and enhances partnerships with business and other literacy and early childhood programs. Andre was selected in 2017 to be a member of the NYS Family Engagement Coalition Steering Committee and is also currently a member of the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council. Before coming to ParentChild+, he was the Southeastern Regional Director for Jumpstart for Young Children, Inc. and was Executive Director of Covenant House Georgia. Andre holds a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Master of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University.



**Rachel G. Payne** is the coordinator of early childhood services at Brooklyn Public Library where she leads the award-winning *First Five Years* initiative, manages new early childhood initiatives, develops new programs, and facilitates professional development. Previously, she ran the Early Childhood Resource and Information Center of The New York Public Library. She was a contributor to *Reading with Babies, Toddlers, and Twos* (Sourcebooks, 2013) and *Library Services Birth to Five* (Facet, 2015). Rachel has written about early literacy, children's books, and library services to young children in *School Library Journal* (where she co-authors the "First Steps" column), *Library Trends*, *Kirkus*, and *The Horn Book*. She has served on the Caldecott Award Selection Committee and chaired the 2016 Committee. She has presented on early literacy at the American Library Association Conference, Bank Street Infancy Institute, Young Child Expo and Conference.



**Tracy Jenkins, LMSW** is the Assistant Vice President for Leadership, Advancement and Achievement Pathways at JCCA. Tracy combines her passion and commitment to diversity, equity, and educational advancement of minorities with more than a decade of experience and knowledge of child welfare, behavioral health, educational and career advancement, youth and peer advocacy and youth development services to oversee the education and youth development services at JCCA. Before achieving a Master of Social Work degree from Fordham University, she earned a bachelor's degree from Brooklyn college and attended Kindergarten - 12th grade in the NYC public school system.



**Leora Mogilner, MD** has served as the Medical Director of Reach Out and Read of Greater New York since 2010. She is an Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Director of Pediatric Advocacy at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai where she oversees resident training in Advocacy and Community pediatrics and is also Associate Program Director for the Pediatric Residency program. She founded Reach Out and Read at Mount Sinai in 1997 and is also a member of the Board of National Reach Out and Read. She is a member of the National AAP Early Literacy

Subcommittee, and is a founder and co-director of the NYS Pediatric Advocacy Coalition a consortium of pediatricians and community organizations in NY State dedicated to improving resident training in Advocacy and Community Pediatrics and advocating on behalf of children's health in the state.

**Angie Carias** is an Early Literacy Coach at the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families (CHCF). Motivated by her personal experience, Angie has been in the early education field for over 12 years. As a young mother she noticed how much her daughter was struggling in the early childhood setting. Angie sought to understand from a professional point of view how to develop a stronger partnership with her daughter's teachers and how to continue the progress taking place in her daughter's classroom at home. Before joining the team at CHCF, Angie worked in early childhood centers as an infant/toddler teacher and as a nanny for families in NYC. Angie holds an Associates degree in early education from the University of Phoenix and is currently on track to obtain her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology in the Spring of 2021 from CUNY School of Professional Studies.



**Alan Mendelsohn, MD** is the Director and Principal Investigator at Video Interaction Project. He is an Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Population Health and a developmental-behavioral pediatrician at NYU Grossman School of Medicine and NYC Health+Hospitals/Bellevue. In addition, he is the Director of Research for the Divisions of General and Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics, Co-Director of Biostatistical Analysis Coursework for the NYU Clinical and Translational Science Institute - Masters of Science Program in Clinical Investigation, and member of the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Early Childhood, the Academic Pediatric Association Child Poverty Task Force, and the NIH/NICHD Biobehavioral and Behavioral Sciences Subcommittee. His research has been funded by the National Institutes of Health. And he has received national recognition for his work which has focused on poverty-related disparities in critical child outcomes including child development, obesity and chronic disease. Dr. Mendelsohn's studies have demonstrated the potential role for the pediatric primary care setting as a universal platform for promotion of school readiness.



**Emily Gertz, MPH** (moderator) is the Director of Strategic Initiatives at Literacy Inc. (LINC). Her work ensures the greatest impact for children and families in NYC. To accomplish this goal Emily leads city-wide and neighborhood focused collective impact projects engaging more than 20 partners; she facilitates LINC's internal strategic planning in collaboration with staff and the Board of Directors, and she analyzes and makes recommendations regarding partnerships to scale LINC programming. Emily is a collaborative leader with expertise in program and project management, development, and non-profit operations. She is committed to social justice, advocacy and empowerment and has spent nearly two decades working toward equity for all communities with a focus on women's reproductive health and rights, HIV, and criminal justice. Emily earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and a Master of Public Health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



The Committee for Hispanic  
Children and Families, Inc.



New York  
Public  
Library



Hunts Point  
ALLIANCE  
for  
CHILDREN



ParentChild+  
Equal Possibilities From the Start



QUEENS  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY

JCCA

Repair the world  
start with child

JCCA

Jumpstart  
Children First



Reach  
Out  
&  
Read



NACI  
National  
Academy  
of  
Child  
and  
Family  
Institutes



Video  
Interaction  
Project