

**Reach Out and Read
TRANSCRIPT**

Airdate: November 8, 2012

Duration: 6:50 min

Produced by: Cat McGrath, David Wald

JEFFREY BROWN: And now, a prescription for succeeding in school. It comes from pediatricians making their patients' reading skills a part of regular examinations.

The NewsHour's special correspondent for education, John Merrow, has the story.

JOHN MERROW: Today, 2-year-old Shadman Uddin (ph) is here for his routine check up.

DR. CINDY OSMAN, Pediatrician, Bellevue Pediatric Clinic: Good job.

JOHN MERROW: His pediatrician, Dr. Cindy Osman, checks his eyes, ears and heart, but that's not all.

DR. CINDY OSMAN, So, tell me what kinds of things he says these days.

WOMAN: Juice, water.

DR. CINDY OSMAN: Great. Does he ever put words together?

WOMAN: Yes.

DR. CINDY OSMAN: Perfect. Give me some examples of times he puts words together.

WOMAN: Say mommy.

DR. CINDY OSMAN: Oh, so he's doing great with his language. Perfect.

My role is to help parents parent more effectively, how to connect with their kids more effectively, what kinds of activities they can do that will better stimulate their cognitive development and get them better prepared for doing better in school.

JOHN MERROW: She's a new breed of pediatrician, part doctor, part teacher.

DR. CINDY OSMAN: You can see a lot in how they handle a book. You can check out their fine motor skills. So I'm both checking their development, and I'm getting a sense of how frequently they're read to.

What sound does a train make?

What is he saying?

WOMAN: Go, go, go.

Learning Matters, Inc.

DR. CINDY OSMAN: Yes.

JOHN MERROW: Dr. Osman works in the pediatric primary care clinic at Bellevue Hospital in New York City. It's part of a national literacy program called Reach Out and Read.

Books are given to children 6 months to 5 years old and parents are encouraged to read them aloud.

MAN: He tried to started to read, to say little things.

JOHN MERROW: Why the doctor's office? Because that's the one place where all children, including those most at risk, go regularly before they enter school.

Without some school experience before first grade, most low-income children are almost guaranteed to begin school behind everyone else.

And we are talking about a lot of children here; 5.1 million American children under the age of 5 are growing up in poverty. So what are states doing to get these kids ready for first grade? See for yourself.

Only 10 states and the District of Columbia tell schools they must provide full day kindergarten; 34 states require half-day programs, and six states do not require any kindergarten at all.

Preschool programs like Head Start reach about one-third of 3- and 4-year-olds. And in spite of their proven success, early education programs are now being cut.

That leaves it to programs like Reach Out and Read to pick up the slack. About 11,000 children a year come through the clinic at Bellevue. All are from low-income homes and, for most, English is their second language.

CLAUDIA ARISTY, Reach Out and Read: Most of the families that we serve are immigrants. And a lot of them didn't -- were not able to finish school. Some of them were not even sent to school ever.

JOHN MERROW: Here in the waiting room, the flat-screen televisions are turned off, and the books are open. Volunteers like Esther Akinwunmi read stories to the children.

ESTHER AKINWUNMI, Reach Out and Read volunteer: My goal and my approach is to let them have fun while they're reading, so that they don't -- they don't feel like, I'm reading a book, or I'm hearing a boring story, something that is interesting to them, so that it encourages them to read.

JOHN MERROW: Volunteer Elizabeth Kasowitz is a former New York City school principal.

Learning Matters, Inc.

ELIZABETH KASOWITZ, Reach Out and Read, volunteer: I'm always looking up to see whether the parents are engaged. And very often, I see them with an ear kind of tilted towards what I'm reading.

ESTHER AKINWUNMI: I think, sometimes, parents may not know how to engage their children in reading. So my hope is how I present a book to a child, a parent will be able to emulate that and do the same for them when they're at home.

JOHN MERROW: The Reach Out and Read program can be found in 5,000 medical centers across the country. It touches almost four million mostly low-income children, at a cost of \$10 per child, per year. Bellevue's program is one of the largest.

CLAUDIA ARISTY: So, here it tells you the skills that he should be developing and how you can help him develop those skills by playing with him.

JOHN MERROW: Program director Claudia Aristy often talks with families while they wait.

CLAUDIA ARISTY: One of the ideas that I share with her is that she can be reading a book aloud to her 11-month-old while he's walking in the room, just putting language out there for him.

We want to just bombard those brains with a lot of words. So we tell the parents just describe everything you see.

JOHN MERROW: Families are likely to pay attention to advice given at the doctor's office, especially when it comes from their pediatrician.

DR. CINDY OSMAN: We help them through difficult times, whether it's, you know, a kid with temper tantrums or a kid who's up all night and is having trouble sleeping.

We have an opportunity to -- to bond with families and make some suggestions that hopefully work. Families do turn to pediatricians for more than just prescriptions. That's for sure.

JOHN MERROW: In this program, a child will have 10 regular checkups between the ages of six months and five years. That's just 10 books, just 10 opportunities for the doctor to stress the importance of reading. Is it enough?

DR. CINDY OSMAN: There's solid research that shows that just that intervention of handing a family a book, giving them a couple of age-appropriate pieces of advice about how to read with their kid, and just encouraging reading, they -- those kids will do better in school.

JOHN MERROW: The research she refers to showed that children served by Reach Out and Read had a six-month developmental edge over their peers in the preschool years.

Learning Matters, Inc.

With the introduction of the Common Core, a new set of standards being adopted in most schools nationwide, children entering first grade will be expected to be able to read and comprehend simple text.

For those who haven't gone to kindergarten or who aren't being raised in homes filled with books, school will be even tougher.

JUDY WOODRUFF: And a sad postscript to John's story. The Reach Out and Read program at the pediatric primary care clinic at New York's BellevueHospital lost thousands of books last week in the storm.