

Reading
Is Fundamental

until every child reads

SURVEY: COVID-19
Impact on Children's Literacy
February 2021

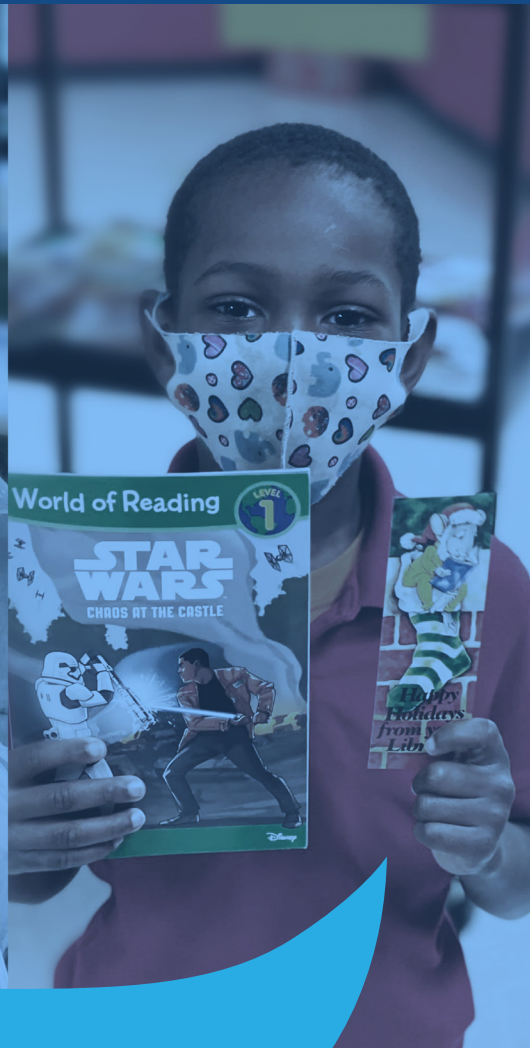


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	i
Background.....	1
Section 1: Impacts of COVID.....	1
Section 2: Need for Support.....	2
Free Response Key Findings	4
Open Ended Question 1	4
Open Ended Question 2	5
Appendix: Open-Ended Responses	7

Executive Summary

Educators and caregivers are deeply concerned about the negative impact of Covid-19 on children's reading skills

Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) surveyed nearly 1,000 teachers, parents and caregivers to understand their concerns around the impacts of COVID-19 on children's literacy development and to understand what RIF can do to support our community. The implications of the coronavirus pandemic are far-reaching and the learning losses students are experiencing are alarming. In particular, we know that students of color and those in high-poverty communities have been particularly affected over the past year¹. These survey findings sound the alarm and demonstrate the urgent need to address the nation's literacy crisis.

Children Need Books Now

Almost **94%** of respondents indicate it is important or highly important to **get print books into the hands of children** right now.



Reading Motivation is Lacking

Over **96%** of respondents indicated they are concerned or very concerned about **how to motivate students to read** during this time, and parent and educators need resources to support this.



Parents Need Support

Over **96%** of respondents indicate it is important or highly important to get resources to help parents to **engage children in reading at home**.



Independent Reading Needs Attention

Ranked among the top three areas needing support from RIF are resources to foster independent reading during the pandemic. Over 93% of respondents indicate it is important or highly important to **encourage independent reading at home** during virtual learning.



Emotional Well-Being Is At Risk

The social and emotional well-being of children was also raised as a concern especially the lack of social interactions, feelings of isolation and declining social skills.



As the nation recovers from the pandemic, in the months and even years ahead, RIF is committed to elevating national awareness and supporting the learning crisis during COVID-19 and its long-term implications for children's literacy. The need for investment and action is clear and with our partners nationwide, we are committed to being part of the solution.

¹Source: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-learning-loss-disparities-grow-and-students-need-help#>

Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) COVID-19 and the Literacy Landscape Survey

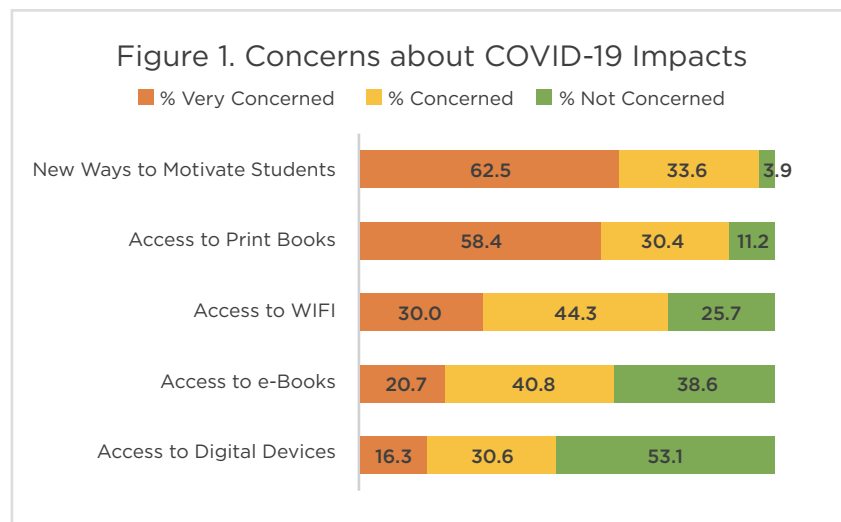
BACKGROUND

RIF fielded an online survey asking respondents to report their biggest concerns around children’s literacy and the resources that RIF could provide to support students during the pandemic. Overall, 998 individuals responded from November 19 through December 13, 2020. Of those, the vast majority (86%) identified as educators; 7% of respondents were a family member¹.

This report documents key findings from that survey. Sections 1 and 2 provide findings from the close-ended questions. Section 3 provides highlights of the two open-ended (free response) questions. In addition, missing responses are removed from each question when percentages are shown. In cases where two questions are “cross-tabulated” (such as when analyzing concerns about books among those with and without a home library), percentages are based on respondents who answered both questions.

SECTION 1: IMPACTS OF COVID

The first section of the survey asked about the impacts of COVID-19 on reading and literacy. Respondents were asked to report their level of concern regarding five statements. Figure 1 shows that **respondents’ biggest concern was finding new ways to motivate students to read while learning at home**. However, this topic was followed closely by concerns about getting students access to print books.



Additional analyses revealed that concerns about getting access to print books were nearly universal among those who did not have a home library (94% of those respondents). However, that concern was also held by **74% of respondents who did have a home library**. Notably, the majority of respondents to the survey (76%) reported not having access to a home library.²

¹ These respondents included those who listed themselves as “Parent,” “Grandparent,” or “Relative.”

²There was a significant difference in reports of having a home library between family members and educators. Among the 73 family members who responded, 74% said their students did have access to a home library; among the 831 educators, only 19% reported their students having access. Finally, 30% of “other” respondents reported having access.

Next, we explored variation in these responses according to whether the respondent self-identified as an educator or family member³. Interestingly, Table 1 shows that **educators were more concerned than family members about every potential issue**. In particular, the biggest difference was for access to print books, where only 8.7% of educators were not concerned, as compared to 42.5% of family members – a difference of 33.7 percentage points (as shown in the right most column of Table 1). One note of caution here is that the number of family members responding is much lower, meaning that statistics on their concerns are likely to be less stable. It is unclear why family members are less concerned than educators about these issues, and the data do not support definite conclusions about these differences.

Table 1. Concerns among Educators and Family Members

	Educators			Family			Diff. in Not (ppt.) (7)
	% Very Concerned (1)	% Concerned (2)	% Not Concerned (3)	% Very Concerned (4)	% Concerned (5)	% Not Concerned (6)	
New Ways to Motivate Students	63.5	33.3	3.3	46.6	41.1	12.3	9.1
Access to Print Books	60.1	31.2	8.7	31.5	26.0	42.5	33.7
Access to WiFi	29.0	46.8	24.2	27.0	20.3	52.7	28.5
Access to eBooks	20.1	42.0	37.9	14.9	25.7	59.5	21.6
Access to Digital	15.2	30.1	54.6	16.2	24.3	59.5	4.8

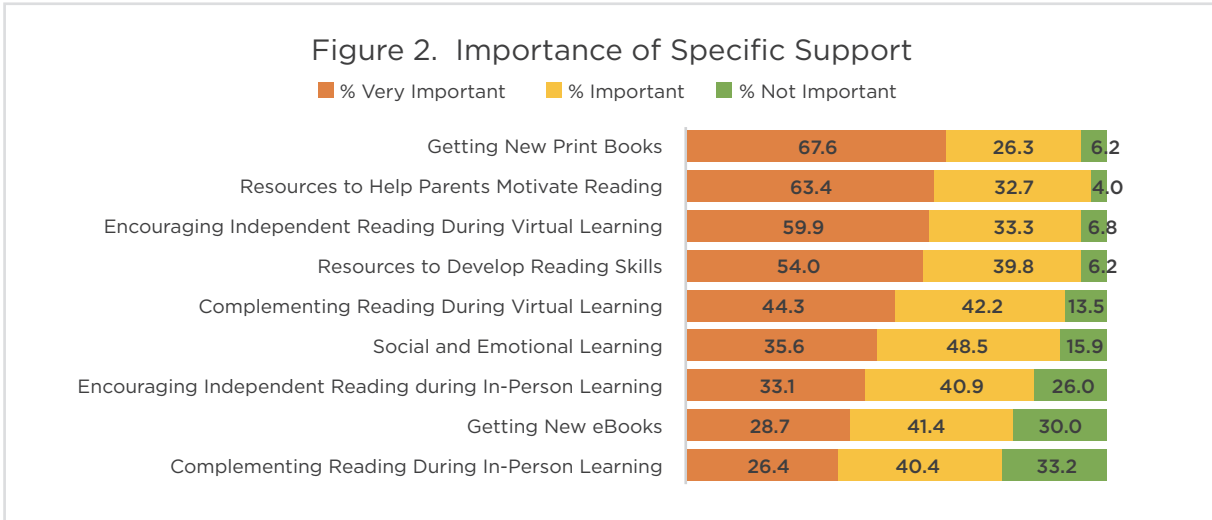
Note. Column (7) shows the percentage point difference in the rate of “not concerned” responses between family members and educators. For instance, the first row shows that the proportion of family members who were not concerned was 9.1 percentage points higher than educators (i.e., $9.1 = 12.3 - 3.3$, the difference between columns 6 and 3). Due to rounding error, figures may not sum exactly.

SECTION 2: NEED FOR SUPPORT

In the second section of the survey, respondents were asked how RIF could best support them during the pandemic. The results in Figure 2 show that, consistent with the first part of the survey, **getting new print books, resources to help parents motivate reading, and resources to encourage independent reading were the highest items in terms of importance of getting support**.

This section also shows that **on the whole, respondents find it more important to receive resources for use during virtual learning than in-person learning**. For instance, respondents report being more concerned about literacy-based resources to encourage independent reading during virtual learning than during in-person learning. They are also more concerned about obtaining resources for complementing reading during virtual learning than for in-person learning. In addition, the results show that **respondents find it more important to get support with encouraging independent reading** than complementing reading, regardless of whether instruction is expected to occur virtually or in person.

³Initial analyses found no systematic differences between educators and those who reported an “other” category, so “other” respondents are not discussed further.



Finally, we analyzed differences between educators and family members. In contrast to the results from the first half of the survey, family members were sometimes less concerned, and sometimes more concerned than educators with obtaining the various types of literacy support surveyed. **In particular, family members tended to be more concerned with getting resources to use during in-person learning than educators.** Notably, differences in the level of concern by learning style did not reflect aggregate differences in how respondents reported their students were learning; in both groups, approximately 19-20% of students were full-time in the classroom, 42-50% full-time at home, and 24-33% in hybrid learning.

Table 2. Importance of Support from RIF among Educators and Family Members

	Educators			Family			Diff. in Not (ppt.) (7)
	% Very Important (1)	% Important (2)	% Not Important (3)	% Very Important (4)	% Important (5)	% Not Important (6)	
Getting New Print Books	69.3	26.2	4.6	45.9	28.4	25.7	21.1
Resources to Help Parents Motivate Reading	64.6	32.6	2.8	45.9	37.8	16.2	13.4
Encouraging Independent Reading During Virtual Learning	61.2	32.7	6.2	52.8	31.9	15.3	9.1
Resources to Develop Reading Skills	54.2	40.9	4.8	44.6	32.4	23.0	18.1
Complementing Reading During Virtual Learning	44.4	41.8	13.7	45.2	39.7	15.1	1.3
Social and Emotional Learning	34.3	49.4	16.3	43.1	41.7	15.3	-1.0
Encouraging Independent Reading during In-Person Learning	32.2	40.9	26.9	40.8	38.0	21.1	-5.7
Getting New eBooks	28.8	42.3	29.0	25.0	26.4	48.6	19.6
Complementing Reading During In-Person Learning	25.4	40.3	34.3	35.6	41.1	23.3	-11.0

Note. Column (7) shows the percentage point difference in the rate of “not important” responses between family members and educators. For instance, the first row shows that the proportion of family members who responded “not important” was 21.1 percentage points higher than educators (i.e., $21.1 = 25.7 - 4.6$, the difference between columns 6 and 3). Due to rounding error, figures may not sum exactly.

SECTION 3: KEY FINDINGS: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS (FREE RESPONSE)

Note that this section is not analyzed by audience but rather provides a general summary of key findings overall by all respondents. Attached in the Appendix are a sample of quotes pulled from these open-ended responses.

OPEN-ENDED QUESTION 1:

“What is your biggest concern right now about the impact of COVID-19 on your student(s)’ learning?”

- The biggest concern among respondents is the lack of access to books, mostly print books and literacy materials. This was the largest concern mentioned by almost a quarter of the respondents. It was mentioned frequently the challenges of losing access to school and public libraries, little to no books in homes, students missing a print rich classroom, limited to no books for leveled reading, lack of diversity of options and ultimately limiting children’s opportunities for at home independent reading. There were some responses regarding concerns for digital books, but given internet issues and virtual fatigue, these were less frequently mentioned.

“I feel like many of my students do not have access to books or the tools to enable them to read at home. I’m worried that I am losing my students who loved borrowing materials from our school library and do not have that ability now that they are losing interest.”

“I have many concerns. However, what I think mostly about, all the time, is students having access to print leveled books in their hands. Not books to read on a computer screen. I teach 2nd grade. They need to hold books, read them, jot their thinking down. If I could print copies of books and email them I would.”

- The next two largest concerns were about equal in response at about 20%. There is overwhelming concern for the lack of student motivation to learn and/or read, inability to keep them engaged during remote learning with specific mentions about students being too distracted, disinterested and just not participating in instruction. Related to this are the many that also responded that they cannot provide students the quality and level of instruction needed in a remote setting which is limiting their ability to instill a love of reading, provide differentiated instruction, personalized learning and providing intervention when needed. When you added these open-ended responses to those that focus on concerns about motivation and engagement, we reach close to 30% of all answers.

“With so many distractions related to COVID, student focus and attention are limited for academics. Streaming live with those learning from home added to that distraction for all students. Teachers are not able to present material as effectively and students socially distanced in classrooms make collaboration nearly impossible. The limited access to internet access in some areas also adds to the issue.”

- About 20% also shared their biggest concern being the negative impact on learning, the widening learning gaps (especially among those already at risk or struggling readers) and just overall concern for long term learning loss. It was repeatedly stated that students are falling behind, gaps are growing, and many students are just being left behind.

“We have seen a sharp decline in academic achievements and literacy as a result of COVID-19.”

“I fear if they slip in their reading levels, they will not be able to maintain grade level work in other subject areas.”

- About 18% of the open-ended answers focused on concerns about family support, distractions at home, lack of parent involvement (often because parents have other priorities). Even when other answers were provided, many added on that they were worried their students don't have the needed family and at-home support to be successful.

"Parents are not making reading to and with their students a priority. Parents are not making sure their children are reading independently at home."

- It is worth noting that just about 10% of the respondents mentioned that their biggest concern is the social and emotional learning and well-being of their students. They are fearing for their students' social skills, feelings of isolation and just general lack of connections.

"I am very concerned about their lack of connection with their peers, the loss of playing with friends, and the loss of creative learning through the richness of many hands-on materials. All of what I noted brings joy, human connections and a chance to think outside the box and explore. These are so important for mental health. Learning via computers and virtual classes is unhealthy."

- Others consistent noticeable responses shared concerns about access to internet/devices and the inequities being witnessed whether because of rural living, poverty levels, level of support a parent can give, access to resources, etc.

"I have students from all elementary schools across Billings, Montana. Some of the student are from Title 1 schools and some are from affluent schools. I worry about students having equal access to books across the board."

OPEN-ENDED QUESTION 2:

"If there is one way RIF could support you right now what would it be?"

- Consistent with the quantitative results, over half the respondents indicated the number one thing they need help with is getting books (free) into the hands of their students. Specifically, there were consistent mentions of greatly needing more leveled reading books, books to support independent reading and decodable texts. A repeated concern was the drop in reading interest among students because of the lack of print books at home and the barrier to using books from school given closures due to the pandemic.

"I would love if RIF could get books into the hands of children at home. I have ordered each child from my classroom two books from my personal funds. I can only do so much."

"I would love to have a supply of books that I could drop off to the houses of my young beginner readers. We have 78 kindergarteners at my school. We all know that kindergarten is the foundation for building those important reading skills. Without books in hand, these students are at a total disadvantage this school year."

- The second most popular response (about 11% of the responses) asked for more educator support to motivate their students to read, more tools to support hybrid and virtual learning and reading engagement resources (including more read-alouds). Some even shared specific ideas and requested some type of reading contest/incentive they could use to drive reading at home.

"Access to materials to address literacy for all age groups. Many of our students are struggling with reading or regressing due to the limited resources available to them at home. We, as a school, are trying to make resources available to our students that will interest them in hopes they will read more."

- The third most cited response was the need for free access to online books that are high quality. Just about 10% of respondents requested this support. Among those that responded, the answers consistently asked for easy access and removing passwords – barriers – during distance learning.

“Allowing students and teachers more access to eBooks for the duration of COVID-19 closures. If they use them and like them now, we can create demand and we may be able to buy a bunch later when we get funding again.”

- The other response that stood out among a little over 5 percent of respondents was the need to provide families and caregivers with tools, resources and support to help their children with reading at home. In fact, a few actually suggested running national media campaigns to reinforce the importance of reading at home to encourage greater caregiver support in working with kids to inspire them to read.

“Bombard parents on all media how important it is that they get their children reading. Get the message hammered into their heads that their children will not make it in the coming world without a good reading level because it will affect every aspect of that child’s life. Also remind that that the teachers only have time to teach the fundamentals in classrooms, it is up to the parents to make sure the students are reading and loving it.”

- Lastly, two other responses appeared frequently enough to mention and these include needing more Spanish language and/or culturally rich books and resources and books and resources to support the social emotional needs of their students/children.

APPENDIX: OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

Below are a sample of the open-ended responses from the survey:

“What is your biggest concern right now about the impact of COVID-19 on your student(s) learning?”

They are not being reached in a way that they are developing a love of reading and an appreciation of books.

Students are not able to visit the library or any book stores.

Access to physical books so that they can continue reading and take a break from technology devices. This is also being voiced by parents.

Students are not engaged with learning due to stress, distraction, and lack of equitable resources

With the hybrid model, it is difficult for remote learners to get the level of quality literacy instruction as if they were in person. We are a high poverty country and I know that many do not have home libraries.

I have students from all elementary schools across Billings, Montana. Some of the student are from Title 1 schools and some are from affluent schools. I worry about students having equal access to books across the board.

I feel that our biggest concern at this point in time would be the lack of books that students can hold in their hands and read. They have access to online literature, but that can never take the place of being able to hold a book filled with beautiful illustrations and rich words that they can enjoy and call their own.

Lack of motivation and lack of families' abilities to assist due to work, home and personal reasons.

The inequity of at home support for learning while we are remote.

No actual hands-on printed books, the enjoyment of turning the pages or handling it. Students let behind because of individualized learning needs - no motivation to continue with online studies.

The ability to stay engaged with on-line learning with the amount of screen time they are being asked to participate in each school day.

We have now noticed that 80% of our students are now reading below grade level.

I feel like many of my students do not have access or the tools to enable them to read at home. I'm worried that I am losing my students who loved to borrow materials from our school library and do not have that ability now and that they may lose interest.

I am very concerned about their lack of connection with their peers, the loss of playing with friends, and the loss of creative learning through the richness of many hands-on materials. All of what I noted brings joy, human connections and a chance to think outside the box and explore. These are so important for mental health. Learning via computers and virtual classes is unhealthy.

With so many distractions related to COVID, student focus and attention are limited for academics. Streaming live with those learning from home adds to that distraction for all students. Teachers are not able to present material as effectively and students socially distanced in the classroom makes collaboration nearly impossible. The limited internet access in some areas also adds to the issue.

I am concerned that my students are falling behind because they don't have access to printed books.

We have a high ELL population at our school, as well as high poverty rates with our families. I am concerned that there is little or no patterning of reading for our students and that there are not physical books to be had in their homes. I am trying to share as many digital resources as I can with our teachers to then share with our students, but I don't know how effective this is.

I have many concerns. However, what I think mostly about, all the time, is students having access to print leveled books in their hands. Not books to read on a computer screen. I teach 2nd grade. They need to hold books, read them, jot their thinking down...If I could print copies of books and email them I would.

Before COVID, my students did not have parents who valued reading. They didn't have newspapers, magazines or books in their homes. Now that they are having distant learning, I worry that they will not read nor have any reading material available.

We have seen a sharp decline in academic achievement and literacy as a result of COVID-19.

Phonological awareness, applying decoding skills, overall comprehension and fluency skills.

In remote learning, there is less opportunity to read actual books and have the experience of turning pages, looking for picture clues, etc. This is a vital part of literacy development.

I am concerned students will lose their love of learning!

I fear if they slip in their reading levels, they will not be able to maintain grade level work in other subject areas.

Hands on books are so very important. It encourages students to connect with each other and share their commonalities. My biggest concern is that students are missing their connections with each other. We can Zoom and do all types of SEL activities but there is nothing like sitting next to your friend reading a good book together. Or watching students share their stories with each other.

Most of our families have no books in their homes so their children have no access to text in book form. I feel like this is so important to my first graders who need to practice reading daily.

We have students of poverty where they are already behind. The impact of not having them in the classroom with direct instruction and being at home with no structure is beyond comprehension. Trying to ensure a quality education by having them on computers virtually for long periods of time, keeping them focused and on task is mind boggling.

Being sure that students who are not face to face are still reading. Reading engagement is a huge challenge with virtual learners.

I am so worried my kiddos will not be prepared for the next grade level because of them not having books that they can read at home.

Parents not making reading to and with their students a priority. Parents not making sure their children are reading independently at home. Students who do not have access to the internet because of rural settings and low income.

The students being able to hold a book rather than staring at a computer screen all day. Being a first grade teacher at a title one school, my students are not able to be the same advantages and are making less growth then they would in a literature rich classroom. My struggling readers are falling farther and farther behind.

How can I get books into my students hands. I know many of them have very limited access to reading materials and I am worried they haven't held a books since March 13th.

The inequities that exist between students socio-economic status and access to books and materials.

“What is the most important thing RIF can do to support you right now?”

Provide hard copy books for remote learning. We have pick up days where families come pick up supplies. Many of our EL kids don't have good internet service because we ae very rural. Many of our families don't have much experience with technology largely due to the language barrier.

I have enjoyed the relationship the program has had with RIF. Being able to put books in families homes through Books for Ownership and the summer reading program that allows children to take home books. It would be beneficial to provide more books to give families at home.

I work in a library and I need to figure out a way to get books in the hands of my most neediest kids.

Please continue to send books to students in need!

Actual books for my students to keep at home. I work at a Title 1 school and many of my families can not afford actual books and or are able to connect them to the internet to set up accounts for free ebooks.

On grade level, below grade level and beginner books for students to keep at home and read. I would love for my students to experience the joy and excitement of having a brand new book at their reading level they can could call their own!

We could really use a wide variety of books right now for all school ages and particularly middle school and high school age young people.

I would love to have a supply of books that I could drop off to the houses of my young beginner readers. We have 78 kindergarteners at my school. We all know that kindergarten is the foundation for building those important reading skills. Without books in hand, these students are at a total disadvantage this school year.

Provide resources that the teacher doesn't need to buy. When you teach in a low income district, equity is determined by how much the teachers can afford to purchase for their students.

Books to distribute to students to encourage and support independent reading and the love of reading!

Please send books so we can distribute to our first graders. They would love to have their own books to read at home. I would encourage they practice reading and record themselves to share with me, their classroom teacher, the principal, grandparents, etc.

Free books for our kids to have. Something they can call their own. We can't check out books in the library. I can only afford to buy them books to keep if they are on the \$1 email for Scholastic. I only do that for their breaks or holidays.

Provide books for our impoverished, striving readers who are now reading below grade level.

I would love if RIF could get books into the hands of children at home. I have ordered each child from my classroom two books from my personal funds. I can only do so much.

Provide actual books to my 2nd grade class that I could distribute on my drive through material distribution days.

Having a RIF book distribution during this pandemic.

Good morning. Access to free books for grades K-6. So they're able to take home and enjoy so they don't fall behind on their love for reading especially books they LOVE TO READ!

More resources for parents and teachers, but more so for parents; workshops for parents on the importance of supporting their children during this crucial time whether in class or virtually learning.

We need help developing a culture of literacy by getting books into the students hands at school or at home and inspiring all students to be readers and writers.

Donation of books - laptops and computers - activity bags for families to keep with literacy based resources to encourage virtual and in school learning .

Know that educators are doing the best we can. School funding is being cut as the needs are more important than ever. The kids need print in their hands. They need support staff to meet all of their academic, social and emotional needs. Their foundation needs to be strong for future development.

Send books to title 1 schools to hand out to students that pick up free lunches.

Providing resources or funding to obtain books for my students. I need them to read, read, read!

Produce advertisements for media that stress the importance of reading at home within families!

I personally need free books to continue my literacy work in communities and properly represent RIF...It is hard to have a \$10,000 book grant taken away when the entire premise of our program is literacy.

Help me get quality books into the hands of my students and all the kids in my school. Some leveled grade, some not. I teach in a poverty stricken rural area where breakfast and lunch are free for all students. Virtual teaching without all the resources normally used in the classroom environment hinders student learning. Help the teachers with resources, books, ways to engage kids to form a love of reading to continue their growth.

Send books for my students. They need real books, not computer screens.

Establishing a network of community volunteers to listen to our students.

Even basic school supplies such as pencils and paper as well as art supplies. These are things that title one schools supply and parents don't have the money or mobility to provide. Our children don't have the basic necessities at home and getting these to them is difficult. Books they can hold in their hands - people they can discuss their thoughts with - building community.

How can you get books into the hands of children? I know they can go to their school libraries but that is difficult due to COVID. Even the public library is closed. What can be done?

As a teacher, I need more resources to allow remote learning students to read, at their levels, books for enjoyment and informational books for projects. Many of my students are unable to buy books and their parents are just making ends meet and books are not on the list of basic needs.

Access to materials to address literacy for all age groups. Many of our students are struggling with reading or regressing due to the limited resources available to them at home. We, as a school, are trying to make resources available to our students that will interest them in hopes they will read more.

Allowing students and teachers more access to eBooks for the duration of COVID closures. If they use them and like them now, we can create demand and we may be able to buy a bunch later when we get the funding again.

Bombard parents on all media how important it is they get their children reading. Get the message hammered into their heads that their children will not make it in the coming world without a good reading level because it will affect every aspect of that child's life. Also remind them that the teachers only have time to teach the fundamentals in classrooms, it is up to the parents to make the students are reading and loving it.

I need books to get to my low-income students. None of them have books at home. I have to either play one online and present it on a screen was all of my students are virtual learners.

My students were so excited coming on to Zoom to tell me they were able to pick up a RIF book at school. It meant a lot to them. This is vital to take the reading away from a machine and put it in their hands to develop a thirst for reading!

The impact that education has had on education is astounding. Even students who were once high producers are struggling, primarily due to the lack of interaction with peers and educators. One way that RIF could support this is to provide books for the younger students through grades 8 and achievement awards for the older students through grade 12.

Books, books and more books to get into student homes. They need access to high quality paperback books to practice literacy skills at home.

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