



PRESS RELEASE

Largest-Ever Shared Book Reading Study Finds Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Dramatically Improves Early Literacy for Children in Ector County, Texas

Odessa, Texas. February 4, 2026

New [groundbreaking research](#) - **the largest dataset ever conducted on shared book reading** - reaffirms that [Dolly Parton's Imagination Library](#) significantly strengthens early literacy skills for children in Ector County, Texas alongside children across the five other countries, reinforcing the power of shared reading in the earliest years of life.

The study, authored by Dr. Claire Galea, Head of Research at United Way Australia, analyzed data from more than 86,000 caregivers in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Republic of Ireland. Results were compared with responses from 18,112 caregivers who were in the program compared to 37,776 whose children were not in the program.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, the flagship program of The Dollywood Foundation, was created over 30 years ago in honor of her father, who could not read or write. The program is dedicated to **inspiring a love of reading** by gifting free, high-quality, age-appropriate books to children from birth to age five. Today, the international program mails more than **3 million books each month** directly to children's homes. Every enrolled child receives **one book per month** from birth to age five—**at no cost to families**.

In Ector County, Texas Imagination Library is delivered locally through the Education Foundation of Odessa, helping ensure children have access to books during the most critical years in brain development.

Global Findings

The study found that across all countries evaluated, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is linked to **stronger early literacy outcomes and richer reading experiences at home**—helping **close early literacy gaps** by strengthening foundational skills, **increasing the frequency of children being read to**, and boosting children's **interest and engagement** during shared book reading. It also shows the program **builds positive family reading habits and traditions**, with caregivers more likely to interact in meaningful ways (like talking about pictures and encouraging children to hold the book), reinforcing a warm, consistent home literacy environment that supports children's learning and long-term success

United States

- Children were **11 times more likely** to be interested in books and **15 times more likely** to join in during shared reading compared to children not in the program.

Children were **nine times more likely** to initiate shared reading and **nearly three times more likely** to demonstrate concepts about print compared to children not in the program.

Imagination Library in Odessa, Texas

- Children currently enrolled locally: 2,775
- Books gifted locally to date: 56,450
- Total children impacted locally: 4,027
- Local funding partners: Chevron Permian, Ector County Public Library

Founded by Dolly Parton in 1995 to honor her father, the Imagination Library continues to deliver measurable, international impact by putting books directly into children's homes.

About Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is the world's leading early childhood book-gifting program, having gifted more than 300 million books across the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Republic of Ireland. The program is funded through a partnership between The Dollywood Foundation and hundreds of local community partners. Visit imaginationlibrary.com for more information.

About Education Foundation of Odessa

The Education Foundation of Odessa is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-exempt, philanthropic organization of citizens who share a vision of enhancing education in ECISD. The Education Foundation of Odessa provides a new and innovative source of funding to support the school district's educational plan. The Foundation does not attempt to replace lost state funding, nor does it attempt to take the place of the district's operating budget. When considering the level of funding required to educate students, the Foundation can expect only to provide funds for those projects and activities that go beyond the normal classroom experience. Such initiatives provide enrichment, research opportunities, teacher training, intervention and prevention strategies and extend the educational effort.

The mission of the Education Foundation is to create opportunities for education in Ector County ISD. Our vision is that every student in ECISD will be school-ready, college-ready, work-ready... WORLD-READY! For more information, visit www.educationfoundationodessa.org

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