



GUEST COLUMN

Dig in and read

JULIE RUTLEDGE

In a few weeks, through the generous support of the Lincoln Health Foundation, we will have delivered more than 25,000 books to Lincoln Parish preschoolers through the Bulldog Book Club over the past four years.

How did we get there? We did a pilot study on parent-child reading time behaviors with preschoolers and their parents. We found that children who preferred "traditional" books were reported by their parents to be more engaged and spent more time on the daily reading task than children who preferred "electronic" books. More than 75 percent of the preschoolers said they preferred the "electronic" book. Mind you, this was not a tablet or a phone, it was a recordable book with the same voice (Dr. Amy Yates, a family and child studies professor) recording.

We used these results as a catalyst to find a way to get children excited about traditional books and developed the Bulldog Book Club with the aims of: increasing preschoolers' access to books in the home, increasing parents' access to current, research-

based knowledge on children's health and social development topics, encouraging children's interest in books by creating a fun and rewarding reading environment, and encouraging parents to include reading time with their children in their daily activities.

The majority of the BBC books center around health or social development themes, and we send parents a one-page sheet related to that theme.

Every month, when children receive their books and parents receive their information sheets, children get a sticker to add to their yearly BBC book chart. They also receive some BBC Gear – crayons, zipper pull, keychain, eraser, pencil, etc. – with the BBC logo.

In May, children receive a BBC backpack with books for May, June, July and August. Last year, Tech XXI helped us to deliver the summer bags.

We have also partnered with some faculty at Tech for special MiniPrograms. Dr. Heath Tims, associate dean of undergraduate studies in the College of Engineering and Science, has created a car, skyscraper and truck kit for the classrooms to promote STEM learning. Dr. Greg Ly-

ons, an assistant professor of music, and the Tech Percussion Ensemble have gone to the schools for special performances to promote music and movement – the children all get a maraca and get to play along to the music too!

Dr. Ernest Ruffeth, an assistant professor of English, and I wrote a children's coloring book on "Romeo and Juliet" (we left out a few scenes and children get to make up their own ending!) to promote fine arts, and a student from art did the illustrations for us. What an incredible gift to be able to take a creative idea, turn that into a research grant (we collect data, of course!), and give back to our community at the same time!

Julie Rutledge is an assistant professor of family and child studies and the Mildred Trussell McGehee Endowed Professor. The Bulldog Book Club grant was funded through the Lincoln Health Foundation to Julie Rutledge and co-principals: Laura Chestnut, director of the Early Childhood Education Center; Amy Yates, the Sue Woodard Huckaby Endowed Professor in family and child studies; and Anita Pumphrey, an instructor of family and child studies.