

Reading to your children helps them succeed in school



One of the best things parents can do to set the stage for their child's success in school is also one of the simplest. All it takes is some quiet time, a comfortable chair and a good book or two.

Reading to youngsters early and often develops language skills, instills in them a love of books and learning, and helps build parent-child bonds, says Nancy Williams, director of the Early Childhood Division at Rural Resources Community Action.

Parents who get involved in their child's education are helping their child succeed, she adds. "You don't have to have any special skills; you just need the desire."

The critical role parents play in their children's education is recognized by Gov. Christine Gregoire's "Washington Learns", a top to bottom, 18-month review of the state's education system.

One of 10 goals for achieving a world-class education system states that "parents will be their children's first and best teachers, and will have the support they need to help their children 'learn to learn' in their first years of life."

Parents may not always realize it, Nancy says, but many of the things they do naturally, including asking their child to tell them about something that has happened, teaches language and reading.

Here are some tips from Rural Resources for helping your child "learn to learn" and love reading:

- Start young. Babies learn about language by looking at pictures and listening to your voice. Point to and identify objects in books and in their world.
- Read together daily. Talk about the stories, pictures and words.
- Visit the public library often to check out a variety of books and take advantage of story times, computers and other free activities and resources.
- Engage your child in conversation, taking every opportunity to introduce new words.
- Set an example. Share the comics section of the newspaper, read signs and labels, and find other ways to show your child that reading is an enjoyable and important part of everyday life.
- Keep it fun and playful. Read with expression; ask your child what might happen next; let them ask questions. If your child gets distracted or loses interest, take a break.
- If you have more than one child, try to spend time reading alone with each one, particularly if they're more than two years apart.
- Use rhyme and repetition. With rhyming books, let your child guess at the words that come next. With old favorites, ask your child to hold the book and tell you the story.