

EDUCATION

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## EFP Takeaways

Too Little or Too Much? Actionable Advice in an Early-Childhood Text Messaging Experiment

### *Background*

Many early childhood programs aim to improve parenting practices. Text-message based interventions are an innovative approach to helping parents, and have the potential to be both scalable and low cost. Such programs have been shown to have a particularly positive impact for under-resourced families. Prior research suggests that both the frequency and the content of the text messages may be components that drive student learning gains from such text-message interventions. Building on this prior work, Cortes, Fricke, Loeb, and Song examine whether content and frequency of delivery affects the impact of a text-message based intervention for preschool literacy. Their work is published in vol. 16 issue 2 of *EFP*.

### *The Study*

The authors examined if students benefited from actionable advice alone, or also from information and encouragement messages. They also investigated if there is an ideal number and frequency of texts to send.

The study examined 3,473 families in the Dallas Independent School District, 664 of whom participated in an end of intervention survey which measured parent-child engagement. Participants were randomized into one of three experimental groups. The first treatment group of parents received one text per week, the second received three texts per week, and the final group received five texts per week.

### *Findings*

Results indicated that three texts per week were more effective at changing parent-reported behaviors and increasing learning for lower achieving children than one text per week and five texts per week. Parents favored three text per week, and only the lowest performing children benefited from more than one weekly contact. Findings suggested that texts with general information and encouragement were especially useful for parents of lower-achieving children by providing immediate gratification to parents. Results also indicated that increasing the number of texts to five times per week lead to greater program attrition and lower parental engagement.

#### **For more details:**

- View the [full issue](#).
- See the [full article in Education Finance and Policy](#).
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- Summary of:  
Cortes, K., Fricke, H., Loeb, S., Song, D., & York, B. (2021). Too Little or Too Much? Actionable Advice in an Early-Childhood Text Messaging Experiment. *Education Finance and Policy*, 16(2).