



# PRIME TIME PRESCHOOL

## Helen and Martin Schwartz Prize: Nominating Statement

### PRIME TIME Preschool—The Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities

Website: [www.primetimefamily.org/preschool](http://www.primetimefamily.org/preschool)

For Program Overview Video, [click here!](#)

## INTRODUCTION

The Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities is pleased to nominate the PRIME TIME Preschool program for the Helen and Martin Schwartz Prize for Excellence in Humanities Programming.

The Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities has responded to the urgent and critical need for enriching early childhood experiences with a premier humanities program for vulnerable families. With this program model, the power of the humanities is harnessed to enhance child, family and community outcomes. Parents along with their 3-5 year-olds are shown and practice positive interactions and school readiness techniques through sharing high-quality children's literature and engagement with age-appropriate activities, all focused on key humanities themes. Through training in best practices and methods the effectiveness of those teaching our youngest students is amplified, furthering the impact of the program beyond the immediate participants. The program has successfully spread statewide in Louisiana with 144 programs completed in partnership with community education organizations in just a short three years, showing positive impact and measurable results. To date, PRIME TIME Preschool has reached approximately 2880 underserved individuals in Louisiana and distributed approximately 9,000 humanities-themed books to low-income families. Implementing schools, early childhood centers, libraries, community partners, and empirical evidence testify to the value of the program.



PRIME TIME Preschool is a forward-thinking model that was created on research that indicates reading and learning together as a family and as a community is a powerful, formative experience for young children. We believe the program is here to stay, and will continue to grow and become the premier model for early childhood humanities programs. It is a change-maker program that draws on the strength of the local community and builds the capacity of service organizations while enhancing family relationships and outreach. The components of the program were created among the poorest of the poor, and are designed to provide enriching experiences for those most vulnerable among us. For young children, when reading occurs at regular intervals over time the effects of the activity are powerful. In addition, reading and talking together as a family and as a community can be a powerful bonding experience. "Children advance in language and literacy areas with shared adult-child reading experiences in which adults (parents and teachers) explore the ideas and uses of print, have conversations with children about a book's content and meaning, and convey the value of books for the pleasure, information, and empowerment they bring (Coppie & Bredekamp, 2009)." Sharing humanities topics and personal perspectives in a supportive community setting promotes the pro-social skills needed for later success in school and in the world. Community educators also build the capacity to serve and interact with the families they assist through implementing the program.

# PURPOSE OF THIS UNDERTAKING

The Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, and its subsidiary PRIME TIME Inc., are committed to establishing programs that seek new audiences and provide access to the humanities; spreading the benefits of humanities-based learning to those who are least likely to receive it otherwise, and nurturing a future community of humanities scholars.

## Program Goals

The goals of PRIME TIME Preschool are to:

- Increase school readiness of preschoolers.
- Enhance parent/caretaker skills for facilitating school readiness.
- Encourage a culture of literacy in the home.

By:

- Selecting and training quality program partners from the local community for program delivery
- Providing high-quality materials and other needed program supports
- Ensuring high-quality humanities-based literacy programs are delivered for preschool aged children (3-5 yrs. old) and their parents/caregivers.

Several things distinguish PRIME TIME Preschool from other literacy programs. PRIME TIME Preschool:

- Is held after 5pm to allow working adults to attend; thereby reaching the family as a unit.
- Employs open-ended questioning to promote critical thinking about humanities ideas.
- Gives modeling and practice of book-sharing and other skills for promoting school readiness.
- Provides families with nutritious meals and transportation; removing barriers to participation.
- Trains staff from community service entities, building their capacity to serve their constituencies.
- Incorporates best practices in early childhood education to cultivate interest in humanities education and reading.



## Program Description

PRIME TIME Preschool is a 6 week program which meets for 90-minutes once per week. It is held during afterschool hours to allow working parents to attend. The program is hosted and delivered by trained partner agencies such as schools and early childhood centers serving low-income families. Each site is provided with the resources and materials to engage up to 15 families per program with allowances made should the site recruit more. The program embodies a multidisciplinary experience whereby children and parents explore quality children's literature via storytelling and play. Families and providers begin each session with a nutritious meal and a book previewing. Trained facilitators then work together to guide families through the remaining program components (see below for a snapshot of program components; listed as they occur during a 90-minute program). Each family receives a copy of the session book to add to their home library, and to use as a tool for replicating reading strategies at home. The books used in every PRIME TIME series include content and issues that encourage participants to see and find connections to their own experiences. The books are grouped and presented thematically to encourage humanities-based discussion. Examples of some themes are *fairness, community, tradition, respect, individuality, and peace*. Through interactive story-sharing and age-appropriate discussion of humanities themes, the participants exercise their critical thinking abilities and comprehension skills and enjoy literature together as a family unit.

The story-sharing portion of the program is followed by play in exploratory thematic stations, or centers. Parents are encouraged to engage in play with their children and continue to dialogue about the themes and story as they share activities that correspond with the story. Programming partners are trained to create active experiences for the children that allow them to revisit ideas and concepts presented in the books. Children learn through active participation. They revisit the story and themes by acting them out, artfully expressing, constructing, or recreating them. Program components such as the Picture-graph Questionnaires (PGQs) and the Group Language Experience Book (GLEB), as well as trained team members, are designed to facilitate adult-child interactions during the play time for maximum benefit to the families. The result is a school-based community of literacy that extends to home-based literacy practices.

The careful selection of texts, stimulating humanities conversations, and playful thematic exploration offered in a supportive, community-based environment differentiates PRIME TIME Preschool from other reading and discussion programs (see appendix for a sample syllabus, questions, and exploratory activities).

## Program Components:

| Preschool Component                             | When Does it Happen?                        | What Does it Look Like?  | What Research Supports the Practice?  |
|---|---|--|---|
| <b>Book Walk</b>                                | During the dinner time                      | A preview of the night's book selection  | Learning to Read and Write- Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 1999; NAEYC Pg. 25  |
| <b>Group Book</b>                               | Over the course of the Program              | A binder of artifacts from the session compiled by the facilitators weekly   | Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Reader's Workshop Keene & Zimmerman, 1997  |
| <b>Intergenerational Book-sharing</b>           | At the beginning of the session             | The facilitators read one story to the group- similar to "circle time" in a classroom setting  | Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children- International Reading Association                     |
| <b>Open Ended Questioning</b>                   | Before, during, and at the end of the story | The facilitators asks open-ended questions of the participants about the story   | Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8- Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC |
| <b>Picture-graph Questionnaires</b>             | During exploratory center time              | Adults take pre-printed picture-graphs on clipboards to the children and record their responses to the questions, encouraging them to converse.          | Learning to Read and Write- Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 1999; NAEYC Pg. 17  |
| <b>Exploratory Literacy Enhancement Centers</b> | After the book-sharing and discussion       | Areas are pre-set for purposeful, free play. They are organized into interest areas such as: Dramatic Play, Science, Art, Library, Building, or Puzzles. | Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8- Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC |
| <b>Family Reading Time</b>                      | At home with the care givers and children   | The family reads the week's selection together at home at least once during the week before the next session   | Learning to Read and Write- Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 1999; NAEYC   |

## Involvement of New Audiences

PRIME TIME Preschool is progressive in that it serves young children ages 3-5 as well as their parents/guardians. Though this is not a traditional audience for humanities, the years between the age of three and five are a critical time for learning and brain development in the human trajectory. Humanities subjects are uniquely complex, and yet can be made individually simple and relevant for even the youngest learners, and are the perfect stimulus for building foundational critical thinking and pro-social skills. The target program participants include children, and their caretakers, who are likely to be low-level readers or are at-risk for functional illiteracy due to the effects of low socioeconomic status and limited access to quality education or enrichment programs. Various studies have illuminated the link between low socio-



economic status and low-level reading ability (Burgess, Heckt, & Lonigan, 2002). Without intervention, the children of adults lacking literacy skills are likely to continue the cycle. Early engagement in shared family reading and conversations are a cornerstone of successful literacy and future learning (Coppie & Bredekamp, 2009). Through an inter-generational approach, PRIME TIME Preschool enhances reading readiness in preschool-aged children while helping parents raise their levels of interest in reading, as well as their abilities to provide academic support for their young children.

The preschool years are a critical time for learning about the world and acquiring language, as well as other skills. At no other point in development is the human mechanism so uniquely attuned to learning as in the preschool years. Children born into economically and educationally vulnerable families often have fewer opportunities to develop the skills and cognition needed to be successful in school, a condition that becomes increasingly difficult to remediate as the child ages. With intervention these families can provide the natural environment in which children are encouraged to practice new skills and acquire the habits of mind needed for

success in school. PRIME TIME Preschool exposes families to age-appropriate discussions and questioning about books in ways facilitate literacy that can also be replicated at home. Parents participating in the interactive preschool sessions spend time gaining practical experience with strategies to support their child's learning after the program ends. Like all PRIME TIME programs, PRIME TIME Preschool aims to create communities in which children and their families are developed into self-directed and self-motivated learners who are eager to absorb the world around them through literature, inquiry, and meaningful interaction with others.

### Unique Collaborations

PRIME TIME programs have always sought audiences outside of those that can be reached through the traditional partner institutions such as libraries and museums. PRIME TIME Preschool brings the humanities into the heart of Louisiana communities by partnering with early childhood education centers and other organizations that target low-income families with 3 to 5 year-olds (e.g. Head Starts, preschools, and charter, public, and private schools) for implementation. Partner staff members receive training from humanities scholars in program implementation and convening skills which are also relevant to their service positions. In this manner PRIME TIME programs also build the capacity of community providers to serve their constituents.

PRIME TIME Preschool is a turn-key, humanities-based model for developing important skills, and fills a significant gap for organizations throughout the state that are struggling to keep up with intensified learning standards for school-aged and preschool-aged children. Three team members facilitate PRIME TIME Preschool programs, and are all chosen from the staff of the partnering entities. These individuals undergo a full day professional development by scholars from various humanities areas in preparation for delivering the program. Because the method is grounded in best-practices for early education, the training is relevant to their work in the classroom and strengthens their skills to work with all children.

Public schools have long been regarded as the great equalizing institutions of our democratic society, and, more recently global attention has been placed on early childhood centers as being pivotal to ensuring equal education opportunities for children when they enter the public school system. The World Health Organization positioned early child development as a powerful equalizer that can determine a child's entire life course (WHO, 2007). Therefore early childhood centers and public schools serve as natural allies for humanities agencies serving educationally and economically vulnerable children and families.



# PUBLIC IMPACT

In August 2012, through private funding, the PRIME TIME Preschool was formally launched in five sites in New Orleans. Because of high interest from local schools and additional private funders, between fall 2012 and spring 2015, PRIME TIME Preschool has expanded rapidly to implementing 30 to 40 programs each spring and fall term. Additionally, PRIME TIME affiliates (partner organizations outside of Louisiana: Humanities Nebraska and the Georgia Public Library Service) have raised funds on their own to support implementation of a total of 7 programs within their states, expanding the program nationally.



In 2014 analyses of the PRIME TIME Preschool programs revealed statistically significant increases in:

Children's autonomous reading time

33%

Family reading time

7%

Preschool-aged participants' new vocabulary

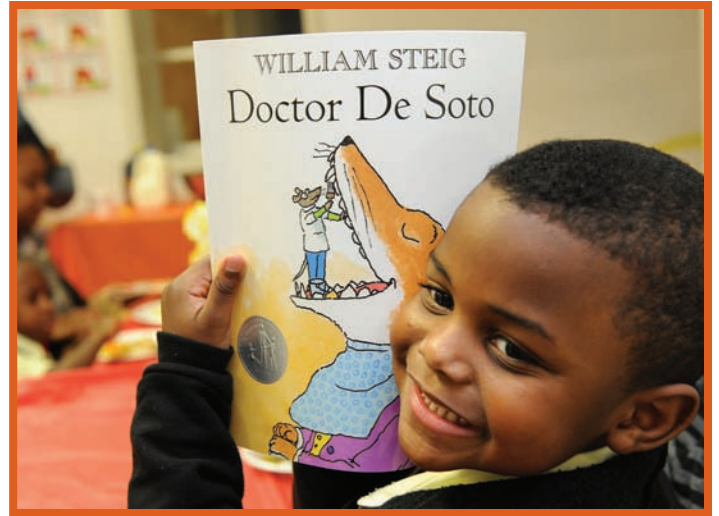
28%

If parents, who previously read infrequently or not at all with their young children, are now doing so as the results suggest, the research overwhelmingly indicates that these children will be better prepared for kindergarten and formal education altogether (Copple & Bredecamp, 2009).

Statements from PRIME TIME Preschool families made on the parent surveys corroborate the statistical findings of the effectiveness of the program:

- **"I can see improvements from attending PRIME TIME Preschool in general dramatically."**  
— Parent from Maria Immacolata Child Care
- **"We discuss the meaning of certain words and the actions of characters now."**  
— Parent from Southland Child Care
- **"PRIME TIME has helped my child reading skills improve. My child love to ask questions when I read to her."**  
— Parent from St. Lucy Day Care
- **"I learned that I need to take the time and read more to my child."**  
— Parent from the Multicultural Development Center





## FINANCIAL STRUCTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY

The PRIME TIME Preschool expansion and sustainability model is based upon the same proven, successful model established for PRIME TIME Family Reading Time over 20 years ago. We offer a flexible, replicable program model that is affordable at the onset, and increases in affordability as partner infrastructure grows. We establish appropriate and meaningful partnerships with charitable funders and implementing institutions. Since 2012, nearly \$800,000 in private funding and an additional \$200,000 in public funding has been raised for the project. This funding provides the materials and training necessary for autonomous program implementation by the schools and centers. We then aid the partner network in its ability to expand the program via technical and fundraising support, which increases the potential for the sustainability of PRIME TIME Preschool.

With a budget that decreases after the first program implementation, and allows for LEH to cost share on training and administrative expenses, the PRIME TIME Preschool program offers a financially sustainable model for a humanities-based early literacy program. Total program costs for the first implementation are estimated at \$7,500 per site. These program costs are all-inclusive and cover

the training fees, books, team support stipends for the 3-team members, program support stipend, monitoring and evaluation of the program, and administrative costs. For a site's ensuing programs, the costs decrease by about 40% because training and start-up administrative costs have been met. The program also encourages teams to be resourceful when organizing food and program supplies by providing strategies for soliciting donations from local vendors in their communities. While each site is given a program support stipend to help them purchase supplies and get the program started, the teams typically combine it with in-kind donations and support from the local community.

The fast-paced growth and demand for the program demonstrates PRIME TIME Preschool has set roots within the family literacy arena; giving it a sure legacy in Louisiana early education annals. Through partnerships with visionary funders, child care centers and school districts, PRIME TIME Preschool's model has been implemented by school personnel and exposed to the greater school community, allowing its impact to reach beyond the participant families and into the classroom.



# PRIME TIME PRESCHOOL

[www.primetimefamily.org/preschool](http://www.primetimefamily.org/preschool)

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: HELEN AND MARTIN SCHWARTZ PRIZE PRIME TIME Preschool—Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities**

### **PRIME TIME Preschool**

**Format:** Storytelling, Literary Exploration Via Play and One-on-One Discussion

**Schedule:** One weekly 90-minute session for 6 weeks

**Partners:** School-based Preschool Programs, Head Start Centers, and Childcare Centers

**Audience:** Parents/Caregivers and their 3 to 5 year old children.

PRIME TIME Preschool was developed in 2011 in response to the growing awareness of the importance of early learning, and targets children ages 3 to 5 and their families. Based on the empirically proven PRIME TIME methodology, the program was piloted in late 2012 in several Louisiana parishes. Interest in and support for the program is strong. By the end of 2014 an estimated 90 programs will have been implemented throughout Louisiana. Affiliate partners in Alabama, Georgia, and Nebraska have either signaled interest in the program or are in the early phases of implementation.

The mission of PRIME TIME® is to **create the precondition for future learning among economically and educationally vulnerable families**. As a project of the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, PRIME TIME is committed to establishing programs designed to seek new audiences and provide access to the humanities; spreading the benefits of humanities-based learning to those who are least likely to receive it otherwise.

PRIME TIME Preschool introduces young children and their families to literature through engaging activities that promote family-centered foundational skills in early literacy. The program shares strategies which encourage meaningful at-home reading behavior between parents/caregivers and their young children. PRIME TIME Preschool introduces young children and their families to the humanities and to literature through age-appropriate storytelling and literary exploration via center-based play.

## **ELECTRONIC IMAGE: HELEN AND MARTIN SCHWARTZ PRIZE PRIME TIME Preschool—Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities**



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