This fall, several child advocates will launch a project called Family Voices: Connecting Generations with Stories. The goal is to help your children succeed in school. We're going to do it by reading stories to them.

Sound radical? It is in many homes.

Only 54 percent of our nation's children under age 5 are read to at home on a regular basis. That drops to 36 percent in families living at the poverty level; 31 percent when neither parent is a high school graduate.

That's like withholding tools a child needs for a good life. Literature's words through stories build a child's language skills, and kids who are good with language are more likely to succeed in school. Poor readers at the end of first grade are likely to remain poor readers after fourth grade, and become prime candidates for dropping out of school.

Family Voices is an effort to make more parents aware of the positive long-term effects of reading daily to their preschool children. Beginning this fall with a trial effort at Boyd and McGregor elementary schools, project volunteers will record parents reading to their preschool children. Age-appropriate books will be selected by children's librarians and provided at the recording session.

The parents' voices will be preserved on a CD along with the voices of more than a dozen community leaders reading more stories. The result will be a treasury of more than one hour of stories for young children, read by adults who want kids to grow up loving books and literacy.

Each participating family will receive the CD that includes their own voices, and one free book for each child under age 5 in the family. Even when a parent is unavailable to read to a child, the CD will provide opportunities to listen to good stories read well, and help the child develop a love for books and the magic of words.

Family Voices is an independent committee of literacy advocates whose members represent Drury University, Springfield Public Schools, Springfield-Greene County Library District, Parents as Teachers, and community leaders. The project is sponsored by Drury University’s School of Education and Child Development and chaired by its poet laureate, David Harrison. Checks made to Drury University, earmarked Family Voices can be mailed to Alumni and Development Office, Drury University, 900 N. Benton Ave., Springfield MO 65802

Submitted by committee members David Harrison and Kathleen O'Dell