BILL & MELINDA
GATES foundation

**Parents, Children, Libraries, and Reading**

*The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project has produced a series of reports presenting* **new research on library services, trends in reading habits and patron needs in the digital age**. *This three-year research program is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and informed by an advisory group, focus groups and surveys of library users, non-users, and librarians.*

*This brief, prepared by the Gates Foundation, offers information and potential messaging based on this research for you to customize and use in your community. Please feel free to use the information in this report as you see fit.*

**Message 1: Nearly all parents believe libraries are important because they cultivate a lifelong love of books, learning, and community engagement for their children and communities**

- Parents place a strong personal value on libraries that starts with the importance they assign to the role of reading and access to knowledge in their children's lives
- Parents are engaged supporters of library services and programs aimed at youth to help instill a love of reading and learning

Supporting Facts
- 94% of parents of children under 18 say libraries are important to their children
  - 86% of parents with incomes below $50,000—describe libraries as *very* important (page 39)
  - 84% of parents that state libraries are *very* important to their children say this because they believe libraries instill a love of reading and books in their kids (page 40)
- 70% of parents report their child visited a public library in the past 12 months, and 55% say their child has his or her own library card (page 41)
- 97% of parents think it's very important for libraries to offer educational programs and classes for children and teens (page 2)
- 71% say a major reason libraries are important is that libraries are a safe place for children (page 2)

**Message 2: Libraries provide vital learning opportunities and resources for all children and families**

- Libraries are at the forefront of bridging the digital divide and are working to ensure all people–including parents and children– can participate fully in the digital age
- Many important learning opportunities take place outside the classroom where children have the opportunity to explore, create, and cultivate new interests
- Librarians have become a de-facto digital literacy corps; helping patrons of all ages improve the digital and information literacy skills critical to most aspects of American life, school, and work
- Parents from low-income homes are especially connected to their libraries, and are more likely to take advantage of services, especially new tech-oriented services

Supporting Facts
- 81% of parents say libraries are important for their children because they offer resources and access to information they can't get at home (page 40)

- 77% of the youth ages 12-17 that visited the library in the past year went to the library to do school work (page 2)
- 86% of parents think libraries should definitely offer free literacy programs to help young children prepare for school and coordinate more closely with local schools to provide more learning resources to children (page 54)
- A majority of parents find the following library services to be very important:
  o Borrowing books (83%)
  o Free access to computers and Internet (81%)
  o Help from librarians (79%) (page 51)

## Message 3: Parents are avid users of library services and are eager to see new tech-oriented services

- Parents are more likely than other adults to visit the library and use many different library services– from borrowing books and accessing the Internet to renting DVDs and borrowing e-books
- Because of their higher-than-average library use, parents would like to see libraries embrace more innovative technology services
- Low-income parents place an even greater value on library staff & services (88% compared with 71%) and embrace new tech-oriented services

Supporting Facts
- 30% of parents claim their use of libraries has increased in the past five years, primarily due to the presence of a child or grandchild (page 29)
- 73% of parents have a library card compared with 59% of other adults (page 28)
- 62% of parents think libraries should definitely offer a broader selection of e-books compared with 49% of other adults (page 58)
- Low-income parents are comparatively more likely to use new tech-services than are other parents:
  o Classes on how to download library e-books (44% vs. 29%)
  o E-readers already loaded with content (40% vs. 22%)
  o Digital media labs (40% vs. 28%)
  o Classes on how to use e-readers (34% vs. 16%) (page 62)