



Brent Blackaby
Councilmember District 6

CONSENT CALENDAR

June 3, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Blackaby (Author), Mayor Ishii (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Humbert (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Taplin (Co-Sponsor)

Subject: The Berkeley Baby Book Project: Relinquishment of Council Office Budget Funds from General Funds and Grant of Such Funds

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution approving the expenditure of an amount not to exceed \$250 per Councilmember, including \$250 from Councilmember Blackaby, the Mayor and Councilmembers Humbert and Taplin, to support the Berkeley Baby Book Project, a non-profit, with funds relinquished to the City's general fund. The relinquishment of funds from Councilmember Blackaby and all other Councilmembers who would like to contribute, will provide books to Berkeley children aged 0-5 years. The books are delivered by USPS and addressed to the child who owns them at no cost to their family.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No General Fund impacts

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The Berkeley Baby Book Project (BBBP) is a childhood literacy project that provides children age 0-5 with free monthly, quality age appropriate books mailed directly to their home. Children love receiving books addressed to them and are excited to interact with them and learn to read.

Brain development rates in the early months of a baby's life are never again matched. Research shows that the presence of a generous number of books in the home of a young child is, by itself, a surprisingly strong indicator of later education level attainment, outweighing correlations to income and parent education. Frequent book sharing with babies is the best way to nurture roots of literacy. Ownership makes that easy.

Literacy is a cornerstone of social justice and equality. Without it, full access to and participation in the programs, movements and institutions that shape our culture and society is hindered.

The Berkeley Baby Book Project: Relinquishment of Council Office Budget Funds CONSENT CALENDAR
 June 3, 2025

All children 0-5 in Berkeley qualify for the Berkeley Baby Book Project, and BBBP conducts targeted outreach to low-income families directly and through Head Start preschools and the Federal WIC nutrition program.

Since its inception in 2015, the Berkeley Baby Book Project has mailed 85,733 books to almost 5,000 children.

BACKGROUND

The Berkeley Baby Book Project started with enrolling children in Berkeley/Emeryville in 2015. It expanded to San Pablo/Richmond in 2022. In 2023, bilingual books became available with almost 40% of newly enrolled children opting for them.

Books Mailed & Children Served Numbers thru 2024			
Berk-Emvl 2024 only		Berk-Emvl 2015 - 2024	
Children Served	1,186	Children Served	3,435
Books Mailed	14,082	Books Mailed	71,894
Rich-SnPb 2024 only		Rich - SnPb 2022 - 2024	
Children Served	885	Children Served	1,382
Books Mailed	8,105	Books Mailed	13,839
			#Books Mailed All Time: 85,733

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

No direct environmental sustainability or climate impacts

CONTACT PERSON

Councilmember Brent Blackaby Council District 6 510-981-7160

Attachments:

- 1: Resolution
- 2: Article about the BBBP written for the FAB (a retired women's organization)

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

AUTHORIZING THE EXPENDITURE OF SURPLUS FUNDS FROM THE OFFICE EXPENSE ACCOUNTS OF THE MAYOR AND COUNCILMEMBERS FOR A GRANT TO PROVIDE FUNDING TO THE BERKELEY BABY BOOK PROJECT

WHEREAS, Councilmember Brent Blackaby, Mayor Ishii and Councilmembers Humbert and Taplin have surplus funds in their office expenditure account and will contribute \$250.00 to the Berkeley Baby Book Project to provide free, quality books to children age 0-5 and they invite other Councilmembers to join them in contributing; and

WHEREAS, a California non-profit tax-exempt corporation, The Berkeley Baby Book Project, will receive funds in an amount up to \$250.00 per contributing Councilmember's discretionary account; and

WHEREAS, the provision of such services would fulfill the municipal public purpose of supporting literacy by providing a generous number of books to children aged 0-5 to read and have as their own; and

WHEREAS, brain development rates in the early months of a baby's life are never again matched.

WHEREAS, research shows that books in a young child's home is a surprisingly strong indicator of later education level attainment, outweighing correlations to income and parent education.

WHEREAS, literacy is a cornerstone of social justice and equality. Without it, full access to and participation in the programs, movements and institutions that shape our culture and society is hindered; and

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that funds relinquished by the Mayor and Councilmembers from their Council Office Budget, up to \$250.00 per office, shall be granted to The Berkeley Baby Book Project.

The [Berkeley Baby Book Project](#) has grown quite a bit since Helen Marcus wrote about us for FAB in 2020.

The Book Project provided books to over 2,000 children in 2024, all under age 5. Children enrolled in our programs receive new, age-based books by mail monthly – with their name on the label, a detail of great delight to toddlers. They may be enrolled as early as the day they are born.



We don't mail all those books ourselves. The BBBP is a Partner of [Dolly Parton's Imagination Library](#), a very large nonprofit. However, all Imagination Library (IL) Programs are operated by local IL Partner. In the East Bay, that's us.

Like all IL Partners, we do all the groundwork. We pay IL for books mailed to children we enroll, along with all other costs of our nonprofit organization: overhead, management and insurance. Library programs. IL wraps, labels and mails books. Book lists are updated annually by IL.

In 2023, a Bilingual Spanish-English book list was introduced. Parents choose it or the English book list when enrolling a child, a great thing for many families.

Toddlers love getting their own mail, a special book of their own.

Our outreach targets low-income families directly and through programs serving them like Head Start Preschools and the Federal WIC nutrition program.

We know literacy is key to school success from Kindergarten on. Kinder-Readiness assessments are the first tests of 5-year old's early literacy knowledge.

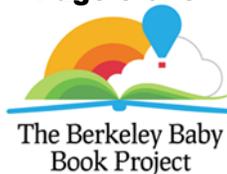


A child starting school with low literacy skills falls into the "Kinder-Readiness Gap" and tends to continue lagging behind more skilled students far beyond Kindergarten.



Our book gifting Programs cover Berkeley- Emeryville and Richmond-San Pablo. Enrollment criteria are a child's home address and birthdate, nothing else. If they are under age 5 and live in one of our IL Program regions they can be enrolled.

Research spanning decades and many nations shows that children with books in their home from the start know more words and have more early literacy and numeracy skills than children from homes with few or no books. In fact, simply counting the number of books



in an infant's home predicts Kinder-Readiness more accurately than any other metric, including parent income or education levels.

The lead researcher of a 20-year, 27 nation study sums up its findings succinctly:

"You get a lot of bang for your book."

Brain development rates in the early months are never again matched. It's simple to spark powerful connections between areas of the brain key to later literacy then with frequent, playful time spent with picture books, describing images and print, babbling and talking back and forth with little ones. Daily time spent with books plants the seeds of later fluent literacy.



We agree with Dolly, who says, "You can never put enough books into enough children's hands." Imagination Library delivers books to over 2.5 million US children every month. We want more of them coming to East Bay.

Berkeley-Emeryville families can enroll children online. Richmond-San Pablo families must mail in a paper form we provide to program partners, community centers, and libraries. Our website shows where they are available.

Our annual surveys never fail to strengthen and feed our passion for our work, and warm our hearts. Here are a few of thousands of parent comments received since 2015:

"Thank you for making my family stronger with spending family time learning together and expanding our minds." (original in Spanish, google translated)

"Thank you for encouraging reading with little ones, my kids love the books & we learn a lot together since our books are bilingual! Bless this program and the people who make it possible!"



"My kids are very excited every time they receive a new book in the mail. Just the fact they get their own mail makes them feel special & motivated to read it."

"We love that our son gets to experience many of the same books from our childhood AND grandma gets to read them in Spanish (she doesn't speak English)."

