A National Survey to Identify the Most Important Priorities for Bridging the Word Gap
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ABSTRACT
An estimated 30 million word gap exists by age 4 in the cumulative number of words addressed to children in poverty compared to those in advantaged circumstances. This poster presents results of a survey of more than 1,000 diverse stakeholders asked to identify the most important research priorities to bridge that word gap.

INTRODUCTION
Many children growing up in poverty enter school with a serious learning disadvantage that emerges in their earliest years—substantially smaller vocabularies than their more advantaged peers. This disparity in child vocabulary size between groups (the “Word Gap”) is often traced to low exposure to talk in children’s home and child care environments (Haris & Risley, 1995).

While research has pointed to evidence-based interventions to improve children’s language learning environments and thereby reduce this word gap, this knowledge to date has had limited population-level impacts.

The Bridging the Word Gap Research Network (BWGRN) was funded by Health Resources and Services Administration to build an infrastructure to advance the field of intervention to reduce the word gap. The BWGRN’s first charge is to articulate a stakeholder-informed national research agenda for bridging the word gap. This poster presents that agenda and describes how it was developed.

METHOD
We carried out an iterative process to develop a survey to ask a variety of stakeholders to identify how important each of 16 research topics were to reduce the word gap and to ask which research topic would make the biggest difference in adding up that word gap.

We created a web-based survey and distributed the link to our Network members and to a wide variety of organizations to solicit feedback from diverse stakeholder groups including researchers, program managers, early intervention providers, early childhood educators, health professionals, policymakers, public and private funding agency representatives, and representatives from specific cultural and linguistic communities.

Snowball sampling was used with each stakeholder group asked to forward the survey to additional groups. The survey was open for 3 months. It is estimated that the survey link was sent to at least 247, 218 email addresses.

RESULTS

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<tr>
<th>What were the 5 Highest Rankings of Importance of Each Research Topic?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing effective strategies for reducing the word gap, preventing childhood language delays</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding how language interventions work on child development</td>
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<td>Identifying effective strategies for in-home intervention</td>
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<td>Identifying effective strategies for early intervention</td>
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<td>Identifying effective strategies for in-school intervention</td>
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CONCLUSIONS
The number one research priority identified by the majority of stakeholders and by each stakeholder group was: Developing new strategies to help parents and other family members talk and interact with their children.

The second highest priority were learning which language interventions worked best for specific groups of children ("individualizing"), and identifying ways to incorporate families’ home language and culture into language interventions.

Researchers were much more likely to identify "individualizing" as a top priority area (17%) than were early childhood professionals (5%).

NEXT STEPS
To obtain more input on the identified research priorities, the entire agenda is currently posted for public comment on our website.

Parent feedback is being solicited from members of diverse language and cultural groups.

The Bridging the Word Gap Network is currently carrying out research syntheses to identify what is known and where research gaps exist in the identified priority areas.

The national research agenda will be used to guide the Bridging the Word Gap Research Network’s future studies.

The research agenda will be shared with potential public and private funders to encourage research in the identified areas.

REFERENCE

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