

## Family Literacy

Policy Brief No. 19

**High-quality family literacy programs prepare caregivers to succeed as parents and employees, enhance bonds between parents and children, strengthen connections between families, schools, and other institutions, and revitalize neighborhood networks, leading to stronger communities.**

### Overview

Whether delivered in the home, in a neighborhood library, or within a public school, family literacy is an evidence-based, family-centered educational approach that can improve the basic reading and mathematics skills, English language proficiency, and life skills of both parents and children. Family literacy, however, can offer more than educational benefits: high-quality family literacy programs prepare caregivers to succeed as parents and employees, enhance bonds between parents and children, strengthen connections between families, schools, and other institutions, and revitalize neighborhood networks, leading to stronger communities.<sup>1, 2, 3, 4</sup>

Successful family literacy programs epitomize a “place-based family strengthening” approach to family and community development.<sup>5</sup> Much like other place-based family-strengthening approaches, family literacy programs are inherently family-focused, designed to address the learning needs of an entire family rather than individuals in isolation.

Family literacy programs are also place-based: because they are typically embedded within local schools, businesses, community- and faith-based institutions, and other neighborhood organizations, family literacy programs can help strengthen connections between families and community assets. Family literacy programs are also fundamentally collaborative, creating partnerships across schools, libraries, community and faith-based institutions, businesses, and local governments to provide literacy training and other educational services to families in need.

This brief will explore the promises of family literacy, the challenges faced by family literacy programs, and the policy priorities that will enable family literacy programs to continue their work strengthening low-income families with children.

## The Facts about Family Literacy Participants and Program Delivery

### What Is Family Literacy?

Unlike literacy education that focuses on young children or adults in isolation, family literacy situates the act of learning to read and write within a web of supportive, intergenerational relationships. As Margaret Caspe from the Harvard Family Research Project explains, “intergenerational family literacy programs... work with the family rather than on the child or the adult separately. Such programs assume that the greatest impact on literacy development is achieved by combining the effects of early childhood interventions, early parenting strategies, increased adult literacy, and enhanced parental support for

**Unlike literacy education that focuses on young children or adults in isolation, family literacy situates the act of learning to read and write within a web of supportive, intergenerational relationships.**

children's school-related functioning.”<sup>6</sup>

The Kenan Trust Model for Family Literacy, established in 1989 through the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) and embodied within many programs funded by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act and the Even Start Family Literacy Program, provides another useful framework for understanding how family literacy differs from other models of literacy education. The Kenan Model

identifies four components that define family literacy programs, including:<sup>7</sup>

- Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children;
- Training parents how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children;
- Parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency; and
- Age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.

The National Governors Association (NGA), a non-partisan organization of the nation's governors and strong supporter of family literacy, has described how successful family literacy programs may configure these four components – children's education, adult education, parenting education, and interactive literacy activities between parents and children – in different arrangements, including:<sup>8</sup>

- Center-based literacy classes for both children and parents;
- Family literacy services provided primarily through home visits;
- Combinations of regularly scheduled center-based classes and periodic home visits; and
- Comprehensive programs that include parents learning workplace skills as they volunteer in their child's school, the child receiving reading instruction, and parents learning alongside their child at designated times.

Some family literacy programs, such as the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPIY) model, offer home-based family literacy conducted by home-visitation instructors who live in the community or are known to the family through a community network, such as a church or child development center. Other programs, such as

center-based programs funded through the Even Start Family Literacy Program and adhering to the Kenan Trust Family Literacy or the Parents as Partners in Reading models, are offered in collaboration with preschools, elementary schools, public libraries, faith-based organizations, and businesses, linking families to these important community institutions. Finally, many family literacy programs partner with other programs offering such adult education resources as English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, GED classes, and vocational training.

### **Why Family Literacy Matters**

Family literacy programs aim to address two challenges at once: supporting the literacy development of young children and addressing the persistent problem of illiteracy among adults. According to estimates from the 2003 National

Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), approximately 29 percent of the adult population in the United States only has *basic* literacy skills, and 14 percent of the adult population has *below basic* literacy skills. Moreover, these percentages are virtually unchanged since the 1992 assessment.<sup>9</sup>

For reference purposes, the NAAL states that an adult possessing *basic* literacy skills has “the skills necessary to perform simple and everyday literacy activities” when working with straightforward prose texts, such as reading a television guide or finding in a pamphlet for prospective jurors information about how a jury pool is selected. An adult possessing *below basic* skills literacy has “no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills.” At best, such a person might be able to read brief medical directions on a pill bottle or perform simple math on a bank slip.<sup>10</sup>

## **Key Federal Family Literacy Initiatives**

### **Adult Education and Family Literacy Act**

As Title II of the 1998 Workforce Investment Act, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act creates partnerships among states, local communities, and the federal government to provide adult education and family literacy services to individuals with low literacy skills. AEFLA funds “one-stop centers” where individuals can access family-focused literacy instruction, job training, and employment counseling.

### **William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Program**

Even Start is a state-administered discretionary grant program that funds integrated family literacy programs at the state and local levels. First enacted in 1988, Even Start supports programs that provide low-income families with literacy services for parents and their young children (birth through age 7) in order to break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy experienced by such families.

Underdeveloped literacy skills can create enormous difficulties for these adults and their families. Some of these difficulties include:<sup>11, 12</sup>

- Lower educational achievement for children as a result of reduced opportunities for parental tutoring and other informal academic support within the family.
- Restricted health care due to difficulties reading printed health information or an inability to properly complete medical paperwork.
- Inadequate nutrition due to an inability to read food labeling and compare the nutritional content of different meals.
- Weaker financial management skills due to an inability to comprehend bank statements, credit reports, or tax returns.
- Increased periods of unemployment due to difficulties reading printed employment resources, job training information, or transportation schedules.
- Reduced average annual earnings for parents due to low educational attainment resulting from underdeveloped literacy skills (see Figure 1).
- Decreased access to information about work supports such as food stamps, child care tax credits and subsidies, EITC, transportation assistance, and Medicaid/SCHIP.

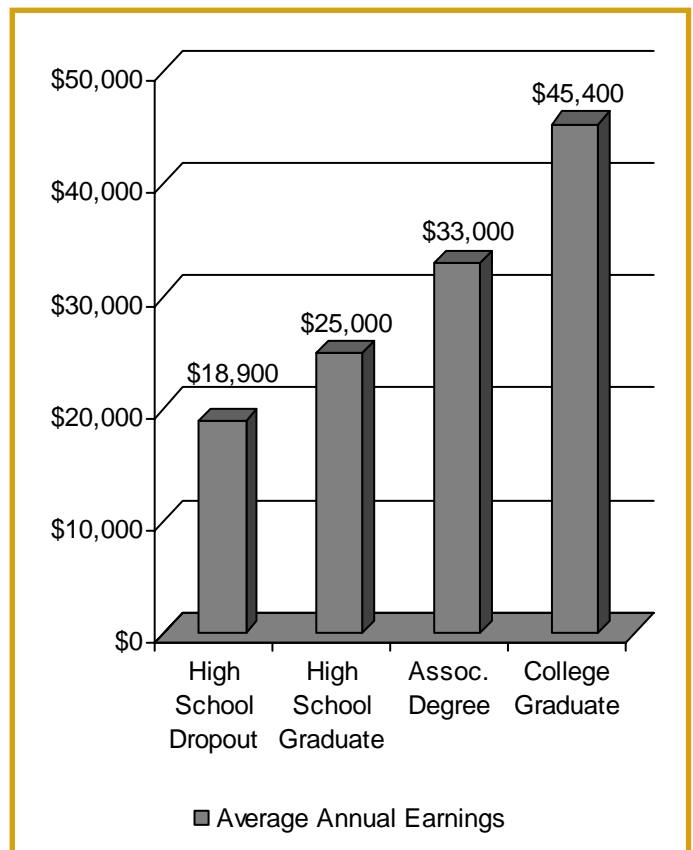
### FAMILY LITERACY—A PROVEN APPROACH

Family literacy programs are based on the principle that the family is the most fundamental factor in influencing the lives and educational outcomes of children. In a successful family literacy program, all four of the components identified by the Kenan Trust Family Literacy model work together: interactive

literacy activities, parent teacher training, parent literacy training, and age-appropriate education. These components build on the concept of the *intergenerational transfer*—the notion that children’s educational achievement and attitudes toward education reflect those of their parents.<sup>13</sup>

Broadly speaking, family literacy programs are based on evidence suggesting that a parent’s education level exerts a strong influence on both children’s school success and the family’s economic well-being. In other words, family literacy programs prepare all parents to make a positive impact on their children’s education – including parents whose

**FIGURE 1. Educational Attainment and Average Annual Earnings, 1997-99<sup>51</sup>**



first language is not English.<sup>14, 15, 16, 17</sup>

Family literacy programs are also based on evidence suggesting that parents' participation in literacy activities with their children enhances children's reading acquisition. A meta-analysis conducted by the National Institute for Literacy found that family literacy programs encouraging parents to read with their children and teach them specific literacy skills significantly improved children's reading abilities. Moreover, this improvement occurred regardless of a family's socioeconomic status.<sup>18</sup>

Family literacy programs also offer a promising alternative to stand-alone adult education programs, early childhood education programs, or parenting programs. In a National Center for Adult Literacy report reviewing four major models for family literacy programs active in Michigan, the following advantages of family literacy approaches were identified:<sup>19</sup>

- Greater responsiveness to familial, cultural, and community characteristics;
- Enhanced collaboration with surrounding agencies (social, medical, government, job skills programs);
- Reduced barriers to access and participation in literacy instruction (such as transportation and child care);
- Improved parental understanding of developmentally appropriate materials and effective literacy instruction;
- Enhanced access to age-appropriate literacy materials for families;
- Increased self-efficacy for children and parents; and

- Improved communication between parents and teachers, home and school

These advantages demonstrate why family literacy exemplifies a place-based, collaborative approach to strengthening low-income families. By their very nature, effective family literacy programs are place-based because they link families to the resources of a specific community; effective family literacy programs are also collaborative because they encourage providers to respond to families' unique social, cultural, and economic characteristics.

### **Benefits for Children**

Children who participate in successful family literacy programs receive age-appropriate instruction that prepares them for school and starts them on a path of lifelong learning.

Moreover, children of adults who participate in literacy programs improve their grades and test scores, improve their reading skills, and are less likely to drop out of school.<sup>20</sup>

The effectiveness of family literacy programs on children's reading acquisition is well-documented. For example, a 2006 National Institute for Literacy meta-analysis of 14 family literacy studies determined that parent involvement in literacy instruction has a significant, positive impact on children's reading acquisition – with an effect size equivalent to a 10-point score gain on literacy tests.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, a 2001-2002 study conducted by the Colorado Department of Education found the following beneficial effects of Even Start family literacy programs on children's subsequent school performance and parent involvement:<sup>22</sup>

- 100 percent of Even Start children in the sample were reading at or above grade level, while only 72 percent of their non-Even Start peers were reading at or above grade levels.
- Teachers rated Even Start children higher (by 15 percentage points, on average) than their non-Even Start peers on traits such as overall academic performance, reading skills, and writing skills.
- Teachers described Even Start parents as more frequently involved in their children's education (by 21 percentage points, on average) than non-Even Start parents.

Finally, a study funded by the U.S. Department of Education and conducted in 1996 by the National Council of Jewish Women's Center for the Child found a number of positive effects resulting from children's participation in HIPPY-model family literacy programs. The study found that:<sup>23, 24</sup>

- Children who had participated in HIPPY programs were less likely to be retained in first grade or placed a special education environment than children in child-focused programs.
- Children who had participated in HIPPY family literacy programs demonstrated a significantly stronger ability to adapt to classroom environments compared to children in other child-focused pre-kindergarten programs.
- HIPPY children were more likely to attend school regularly than their counterparts from other programs.

## Benefits for Adults

Family literacy programs are powerful because they benefit both children and their parents. Research by the University of Louisville examining the adult impacts of the Next Step family literacy program in Bullitt County, Kentucky, found that:<sup>25</sup>

- Adults in the Next Step family literacy program gained an average of 1.6 grade equivalencies in language and mathematics and 1.0 grade equivalencies in reading on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) after participating in the program.<sup>a</sup>
- 94 percent of the adults participating in the Next Step family literacy program during 2003-2004 eventually earned their GED certificate.

Research published by the National Center for Family Literacy also indicates that family literacy improves adults' educational achievement, employment prospects, and economic self-sufficiency. The NCFL's findings include:<sup>26</sup>

- Adult's academic gains in family literacy programs were greater than those reported for stand-alone adult education programs. Adult participants in family literacy scored an average of 1.15 grade equivalencies higher on pre- and post-tests of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), compared to a 0.75 grade equivalency pre-post gain by adults in a comparable "stand-alone" adult education program;

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<sup>a</sup> For reference, a 1.0 "grade equivalency" gain corresponds to a one year of academic progress in the K-12 education system.

- Family literacy programs have higher retention and program completion rates than adult-only education programs: 59 percent of family literacy students remained enrolled more than 20 weeks, compared to 40 percent in adult only programs.
- 43 percent of adults were employed after participating in family literacy programs, compared with 14 percent prior to enrolling.
- As a result of increases in income or other improvements in family conditions, adults' dependence on public assistance significantly decreased after participation in family literacy programs. 67 percent of families were receiving public assistance prior to enrolling in family literacy programs; 44 percent were receiving assistance at the

time of follow-up.

Because income, adult education and earnings, and child academic successes are interrelated, family literacy programs offer parents the capacity to “take charge” and make improvements in their family and life conditions by acquiring academic and job-related skills.<sup>27</sup>

### Benefits to Communities

When located in neighborhoods, high-quality family literacy programs draw on neighborhood strengths and reach families that otherwise may feel reluctant or unable to participate in program activities.<sup>28</sup> By

## Family Literacy: One Approach, Many Faces

Individual family literacy programs often blend several instructional components at once, depending on their resources, institutional contexts, and community needs:

- **The Jane Addams School for Democracy** is a community-based education organization housed in the Neighborhood House, a 105 year-old settlement house located in St. Paul, Minnesota and affiliated with the United Neighborhood Centers of America. The School, which is a partnership between Hmong and Latino leaders at the Neighborhood House, the University of Minnesota, and the College of St. Catherine, uses innovative “learning circles” to facilitate English language instruction, citizenship education, literacy activities, and cultural exchange among its participants – who might include local university professors, college and high school students, young children, and recent immigrants.
- **MomStart**, located in Valley Center, California, brings low-literacy mothers into their children’s schools as classroom and special project volunteers. Starting in kindergarten, the predominately Latina mothers with limited English proficiency help support their children’s reading and writing skills while strengthening their own English skills. In addition to helping specific families, MomStart can also improve learning for all children within the school environment, as teachers receive additional classroom support that allows them to deliver instruction more effectively.
- **Western Washington HIPPIY**, located in Oregon’s rural Washington County, empowers parents to deliver literacy instruction to their own 3, 4, and 5 year old children within the home environment. Funded through the federal Even Start program and focusing on low-income families of Mexican immigrants, Western Washington HIPPIY’s home visitors assist parents with immersing their children in a resource-rich English language and literacy curriculum that aligns with national reading and writing standards.

connecting parents and children with local organizations, family literacy programs build upon and enhance a community's strengths.

According to a cost-benefit analysis performed by from the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), the positive benefits to local communities from Even Start family literacy programs during the 2000-2001 school year included:<sup>29</sup>

- Decreased numbers of children requiring targeted Title I services in local schools. The CDE estimated a cost savings of \$20,000 for the 31 children not requiring Title I services during the 2000-2001 year, and the decreased Title I caseload allowed schools to focus their resources on helping other disadvantaged students in the community.
- Reduced public assistance caseloads in local communities, as parents gained job-

- Increased local tax revenues as Even Start parents became employed. In 2000-2001, the CDE estimated that Even Start families entering the workforce had increased local tax revenues by \$230,000. The CDE also projected that, after seven years, the net annual tax revenues generated by families graduating from Even Start programs in 2000-2001 will have outpaced the initial program costs.
- Improved civic engagement and community participation. According to the CDE study, 72 percent of Even Start families reported more frequently using the library, voting, and accessing other community services after participating in the Even Start program.

Family literacy programs' capacity for promoting thriving and nurturing communities underscore why family literacy is an important place-based approach to strengthening low-income families that deserves continued support – particularly as family literacy programs scale up to serve greater numbers of families.

**43 percent of adults were employed after participating in family literacy programs, compared with 14 percent prior to enrolling.**

**– National Center for Family Literacy**

related skills – such as GED preparation, English proficiency, computer literacy, and workplace literacy – that allow them to successfully enter the workforce. According to the CDE study, 74 percent of Even Start parents were employed by the end of the 2000-2001 program year – compared to only 35 percent employed prior to entering the program.

### Challenges Facing Family Literacy

Despite family literacy's holistic benefits for children, adults, and communities, family literacy programs often face considerable challenges. While many low-income families would benefit from family literacy services, lapses in program quality and gaps in access may drive away those who would benefit most. These potential weaknesses demonstrate why providing sustained financial and technical support for high-quality family literacy programs is important for realizing the potential benefits of family literacy.



## Challenge: Quality Instruction for Children

As described previously, family literacy programs hold enormous promise for improving the school readiness, academic abilities, and life skills of disadvantaged young children.

Several key challenges, however, may weaken the impact that family literacy programs have on the children they serve.

Recent findings have called attention to the potential difficulties of implementing family literacy as an instructional strategy for young children. The U.S. Department of Education's *Third National Even Start Evaluation* (2003), for instance, examined 18 Even Start-funded family programs and found that "while Even Start children made gains on literacy assessments, children and parents in the 18 Even Start programs did not gain more than children and parents in the control group, about one third of whom also received early childhood education or adult education services."<sup>30</sup> This evaluation also found deficiencies in the quality of early childhood experiences, with insufficient emphasis on "language acquisition and reasoning" to make measurable impacts on later measures of literacy skills.

While the Department of Education's report indicates several areas for improving Even Start family literacy programs, the report's findings are not conclusive. A counter-report by the Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy charged that the Even Start programs' reported weaknesses were more likely due to problems with the study's methodology, a failure to capture recent Even Start reforms within the data, and a failure to study the kind of high-intensity, integrated, four-component programs

advocated by Congress and the National Center for Family Literacy.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, the Department of Education and Goodling Institute reports outline many of the obstacles to providing quality instruction for children that family literacy programs must overcome in order to succeed:

- Family literacy programs must provide instruction for a wider range of age groups and developmental levels than other programs providing early childhood instruction, reducing programs' abilities to offer targeted instruction.
- Parents in family literacy programs such as Even Start are also far more educationally disadvantaged than parents of children in Head Start or other early childhood programs. This educational disadvantage may limit parents' abilities to provide effective literacy instruction to children without intensive support from a family literacy instructor.
- Children's regular, sustained participation in family literacy activities is also essential for their success. However, families must overcome a number of barriers to ensure that children regularly participate in family literacy programs. These barriers to persistence may be dispositional (fear of schooling, lack of self-confidence), institutional (location of services or schedule), and situational (lack of child care for siblings, transportation).<sup>32</sup>
- States often require Even Start sites and other family literacy programs to partner with external local agencies, in order to avoid duplication of services. While many of these partner agencies provide the early childhood education component of family literacy programs, they may not be accountable for providing the same kind of "high-intensity, integrated, four-component programs"

specified within the Kenan Trust Model and other effective family literacy programs.

### **Challenge: Quality Instruction for Adults**

The success of family literacy programs pivots upon providing high-quality programming and instructors to both children and adults. High-quality adult education, however, may be difficult for programs to provide due to challenges facing those in the adult education profession:

- According to the National Center for Adult Literacy, many instructors enter adult education without any formal training or certification in teaching adults.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, some adult literacy instructors may lack an understanding of adult development and learning theories – and how to meet the unique needs of adults participating in family literacy programs.
- Ongoing opportunities for adult literacy instructors' pre-service and in-service professional development are also limited. As a 2005 National Center on Adult Literacy study noted, there is no commonly-recognized credential or certification mechanism to ensure quality of practice in the adult education field, nor is there a comprehensive system of profession development in place.<sup>34</sup>
- Teaching adults is also a transitory, limited-commitment career for many instructors.<sup>35</sup> Adult literacy instructors are largely part-time in status, and opportunities for full-time employment are limited: one study found that 36 percent of all adult literacy programs do not have full-time staff, in either administration or teaching, and 59 percent of all adult literacy programs do not have full-time instructional staff.<sup>36</sup>
- Finally, research compiled by Harvard University's National Center for the Study of

Adult Learning and Literacy suggests that, on average, adult basic education teachers earn salaries well below K-12 teachers and often do not receive benefits – contributing to high numbers of adult education teachers eventually leaving the profession.<sup>37</sup>

Consequently, the realities of short-term employment and job migration, combined with low wages, lack of professional development, and difficult working conditions, lead to high staff turnover among adult literacy instructors, with many leaving the field within a few years. This turnover, combined with the previously-mentioned challenges, have the potential to dramatically reduce the quality and effectiveness of adult education components within family literacy programs.

### **Challenge: Program Access and Outreach**

Finally, ensuring adequate access to family literacy programs is a critical policy priority. Physical access is often the most important feature of a successful family literacy program, yet ensuring such access is not a simple matter. A center's hours of operation, its geographical location, and the availability of child care can affect a learner's persistence in a family program – if a program is offered at a time when a family finds it difficult to attend or at a location that is difficult to reach, families will drop out or attend only intermittently. As an MDRC report on library-based family literacy programs observed, successful programs typically extend their hours of operation and offer in-house support services such as food, transportation subsidies, and child care to reduce barriers to persistence and improve program access.<sup>38</sup>

A Pennsylvania Department of Education study also found that offering more work-based learning and job-readiness training within family literacy programs

can increase access, since some parents are forced to choose between participating in literacy programs and seeking better employment prospects.<sup>39</sup>

Social access is another important feature of successful family literacy programs. While most family literacy programs use formal or informal referral networks to recruit participating families, many families do not have access to such networks and may not be aware of the literacy resources available in their communities – reaching these families can be difficult, especially when linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers are present. Developing more comprehensive referral networks that include local institutions such as faith-based organizations, schools, hospitals, social service agencies, the court system, and drug rehabilitation programs can help family literacy programs recruit and retain these difficult-to-reach families.<sup>40</sup>

## Policy Recommendations

Giving low-income and low-literate families access to high quality family literacy programs improves parent and children's literacy achievement and provides additional benefits to children, adults, and their communities. Family literacy also offers versatile, place-based strategies and resources to policymakers, service providers, and advocates seeking to help disadvantaged children and families achieve the best possible outcomes. Expansions in federal, state, and private support for family literacy programs should build upon the benefits highlighted in this brief and directly address the challenges identified in the previous section: ensuring quality instruction for children and adults, stabilizing program funding, and enhancing program access.

Expanding support for family literacy is not a simple task. Public policies and funding streams that support family literacy programs are diverse and complex. At the federal level, there are 17 funding streams supporting family literacy programs, distributed among four federal departments. Funding streams at the state and local levels can be even more diverse. While federal and state governments have supported the expansion of family literacy programs in the past, uncertain reauthorization processes and tightening budgets threaten to weaken family literacy programs across the country.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, it is critical to sustain federal funding for family literacy efforts, strengthen state-level commitments, and encourages public/private partnerships, foundations, and other non-profit organizations to preserve the promises of family literacy.

## FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Currently, federal funds for family literacy programs travel through 17 programs in four departments: Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Interior (through the Bureau of Indian Education). The complexity of this funding and its jurisdictional fragmentation hinders the federal government's ability to drive improvements in the quality of family literacy programming.

Even Start is particularly vulnerable. For fiscal year 2006, Congress reduced funding for Even Start by 56 percent from its level the previous year. The program continues to face potential cuts during the budget process: for fiscal year 2007, the Bush Administration proposed eliminating funding for the Even Start Family Literacy Program altogether, citing the Department of Education's *Third National Even Start Evaluation* and a negative assessment by the

Office of Management and Budget as justification<sup>b</sup>. Given the significant educational, social, and economic benefits of family literacy and the disputed nature of the findings critical of Even Start, eliminating Even Start would unnecessarily jeopardize the valuable work of many state and local family literacy programs.

Federal fragmentation also increases the difficulty of successfully coordinating family literacy programs with related social programs (e.g. Title I Supplemental Educational Services, Head Start, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) at the state and local levels.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to addressing the challenges posed by fragmentation, federal policy should also seek to improve the quality of family literacy programming for children and adults, support additional research and evaluation regarding family literacy “best practices,” expand professional development opportunities for family literacy program staff, and broaden access to family literacy programs at the state and local levels.

### **Recommendations:**

#### *Funding*

- Restore recent reductions in the Even Start Family Literacy Program funding to FY2005 levels or higher, and allocate additional funding for research to evaluate and improve the program’s effectiveness.

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<sup>b</sup> Fiscal Year 2007 appropriations were not completed at the time of publication, and so the fate of Even Start.

- Sustain current levels of funding for the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) provisions within the current Workforce Investment Act, and sustain these programs in the next reauthorization of WIA.
- Increase percentages of AEFLA funding that can be used for ESL instruction, research and evaluation, interagency coordination, and professional development, and expand the role of the National Institute for Literacy as a clearinghouse for “best practices” in family literacy instruction and program development.
- Support policy that sustains other federal funding streams for family literacy, bridges or consolidates fragmented funding streams, and coordinates family literacy delivery with other social services.

#### *Quality and accountability*

- Maintain a clearly defined focus on accountability and results by developing a unified quality rating system for all federally-funded family literacy programs. This rating system should track indicators such as family enrollment and retention, staff training and education levels, adult-to-child ratios, and program accreditation.
- Strengthen standards for Even Start grantees by limiting funding to models authenticated by research-based publications and organizations, such as the RMC Research Corporation’s *Guide to Quality Even Start Literacy Programs*, and validated by the National Research Council.

#### *Professional development*

- Target additional family literacy grant funding to improving the recruitment,

retention, and professional development of highly-qualified adult education instructors.

- Broaden the percentages of existing family literacy grants that can be used for curriculum development, training, and technical assistance within both early childhood and adult education components of family literacy programs.
- Expand the allowable uses of grants to include programs assisting immigrants and other individuals with limited English proficiency with improving their families' reading and writing, speaking, and mathematics skills.

#### *Access and outreach*

- Expand access to family literacy programs by retaining and fully funding tools for community outreach, such as the Parent Information Resource Centers (PIRCs) in the No Child Left Behind Act.
- Expand access to literacy programs for families with limited mobility by maintaining support for HIPPIY-corps funding in the Corporation for National Service and supporting other home visitation components within family literacy programs.
- Urge Congress to pass the Education Begins at Home Act, a bipartisan bill that would provide federal funding to expand quality early childhood home visitation programs such as HIPPIY and other home-based literacy and English language learning programs.

### **STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS**

While many governors have recently focused on education as a priority, state governments should take into account the needs of the entire family when

articulating their education strategies. According to the National Governors Association, state-level family literacy initiatives often struggle as a result of agencies that lack effective coordination, education laws that do not specifically include family literacy as an allowable use of funding, and federal funding that is never redirected to support family literacy efforts.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Encourage agencies to work together for families by facilitating coordination among state agencies and urging agencies to adopt unified grant applications and common quality indicators to ensure accountability for family literacy initiatives. Promising vehicles for such coordination include governors' children's cabinets<sup>43</sup> or other executive offices overseeing state-level children, youth, and family programs.
- Ensure that state and local agencies partnering with family literacy programs are accountable for providing the same kind of "high-intensity, integrated, four-component programs" specified under Even Start and other family literacy grant programs.
- Preserve family literacy as an allowable use of existing education funds. Funds for childhood education, adult education, English as a second language, vocational and workforce development, and parental involvement should all be potential sources of funding for family literacy programs.
- Authorize specific funds for family literacy. Combining federal grants with modest, targeted state funding can provide sustainable financial support for a range of family literacy programs.<sup>44</sup>

### **PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS**

Public/private partnerships can be highly effective vehicles for energizing support for family literacy programs and ensuring continued funding for such programs.

One useful model is the United Way's Success By 6 (SB6) program. Operating with support from local United Way organizations, SB6 coalitions galvanize support from business, government, and non-profit leaders for issues and programs relating to early learning and family literacy. For 16 years, SB6 coalitions have been raising awareness of the importance of early childhood development, improving access to services, advocating for public policies and overhauling systems—budgets, laws and supports—to improve young children's lives.

Another instructive model is the Child Care Partnership Project, established through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Child Care Bureau.<sup>45</sup> This project provides technical assistance to help state child care administrators develop partnerships with businesses, foundations, and other groups for the purpose of improving the quality, supply, and access to care for working families. Several of the CCPP's local partnerships promote significant family literacy work. The Ready to Succeed Colorado Partnership, for example, links family literacy programs housed in local child development centers with state and local

educational agencies and non-profit organizations, such as Mile High United Way.<sup>46</sup>

#### **Recommendations:**

- Use grant programs in the federal Workforce Investment Act and comparable state-level initiatives as “best venues” to encourage public-private partnership between family literacy programs and employers.
- Support and expand family literacy work among existing public-private partnerships, such as Success By 6, by targeting start-up funding and technical assistance to partnerships focusing on literacy-related projects.
- Adhere to “work-plus” principles by integrating family literacy and adult basic education into job-advancement opportunities.
- Improve access to family literacy programs by coordinating operation with employers' schedules and locating services near the work site.
- Develop certification and professional development programs for adult and family literacy instructors in partnership with local colleges and universities.

- Expand the pool for family literacy volunteer tutors and instructors by working with employers to improve volunteer marketing and outreach.<sup>47</sup>

available to family literacy programs, community-based organizations can dramatically improve the educational and vocational opportunities available to vulnerable families.

## FOUNDATIONS AND NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Foundations and other non-profit organizations – especially community-based organizations – are becoming increasingly involved in supporting family literacy programs. There are many illustrative examples of how foundations and non-profit organizations can become involved with supporting the development and replication of effective family literacy programs, such as the work of the Dollar General Literacy Foundation,<sup>48</sup> the Verizon Literacy Network,<sup>49</sup> and the Neighborhood House of St. Paul, Minnesota.<sup>50</sup>

By augmenting the funding, professional development resources, and local partnerships

## Recommendations

- Encourage grantees to partner with local schools, universities, public libraries, faith-based institutions, neighborhood centers, and other institutions to develop family literacy programs that draw on local assets.
- Permit grantees to allocate funding toward program costs and capacity-building measures such as:
  - Sponsoring and evaluating family literacy demonstration programs that utilize local networks and assets.
  - Collecting and analyzing data on program participants, in order to track learner persistence and strengthen matches between

## Foundation Involvement in Family Literacy

Foundations can directly or indirectly support the work of family literacy professionals and participants:

- The Dollar General Literacy Foundation awarded \$2.6 million in grants in 2006 in the following literacy areas: adult basic education, English as a Second Language programs (ESL), GED preparation, family literacy, and workforce literacy. The foundation, established in 1993, is especially notable because of its long-standing commitment to literacy.
- The Verizon Literacy Network (VLN) is a non-profit organization providing valuable online resources to anyone interested in improving literacy. With content developed and approved by literacy experts such as ProLiteracy Worldwide and the National Center for Family Literacy, VLN is designed to empower teachers, volunteers, parents, caregivers, and students of all ages with the tools to advance literacy development. VLN is funded through a grant from Verizon Communications, which promotes the work of VLN through its customer billing and communications.

- literacy services offered and community needs.
- Developing local professional development resources, such as workshops, cooperative instructional libraries, and professional support networks.
- Expanding technology instruction and computer access within family literacy programs to help participants update their marketable work skills.
- Strengthen local family literacy networks by facilitating communication and coordination between community-based organizations.

## Resources

The following resources focus on a wide range of policy, practices, and research relevant to family literacy.

### **English Language Services Strengthen Immigrant Families**

[http://www.gcir.org/resources/gcir\\_publications.htm](http://www.gcir.org/resources/gcir_publications.htm)

Grant makers can strengthen immigrant families through strategic investments in language acquisition programs, according to a new report sponsored by Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR) and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The report highlights some of the best practices from family literacy programs designed for immigrant families, where both adults and pre-school children can develop English and literacy skills.

### **Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) and Harvard Family Research Project**

<http://www.finenetwork.org>

FINE is a national network of more than 5,000 people who are interested in promoting strong partnerships between children’s educators, their families, and their communities. FINE’s membership is composed of faculty in higher education, school professionals, directors and trainers of community-based and national organizations, parent leaders, and graduate students.

This online resource hosts a number of valuable resources including a “what’s new” monthly announcement of current ideas and new resources and a comprehensive *Guide to Online Resources on Family Involvement*. This resource guide contains annotated Web links to recent (published in and after 2000) research, information, and tools about family involvement including but not limited to strengthening parenting practices, developing parent leadership, improving home-school relationships, and marshalling collective engagement for school improvement and reform. The guide also identifies 126 national organizations that support family involvement in education and strengthen family-school-community partnerships.

### **Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy, The Pennsylvania State University**

<http://www.ed.psu.edu/goodlinginstitute>

The Goodling Institute offers many resources concerning family literacy research, professional development, and best practices. The policy resources available at the Institute’s web site are especially thorough.



Of particular interest is the *Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy: Annotated Bibliography*. This resource is an annotated bibliography of family literacy professional development resources for educators. It is also intended for program staff, researchers, community leaders, private and public funding agencies, policy makers, and others who want to learn more about family literacy, including the theory, policy, and research upon which it is based. The *Annotated Bibliography* reviews and defines more than 200 publications, and it is available both in print and through PSU's web site.

#### **HIPPY USA (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters)**

<http://www.hippyusa.org>

HIPPY promotes school readiness and early literacy through parent involvement. Its community-based service model – training home visitors that offer one-on-one instruction in the parent's language – embodies diversity and cultural sensitivity. HIPPY programs have effectively partnered with center-based programs to meet with families where they are, working within the community they live in and utilizing the opportunities and skills already in place.

HIPPY USA is the national office that promotes and guides the development of the HIPPY program in the United States. It ties together the network of state coordinating offices and the 149 local HIPPY programs. HIPPY programs are found in 25 states and the District of Columbia and Guam, and serve roughly 16,000 children and families in 2005-2006. HIPPY USA provides training and technical assistance, develops and improves the HIPPY materials and model, conducts outreach and advocacy, and collects national data, and oversees research.

#### **Leader-to-Leader Innovation of the Week: MomStart, Paradise Community Services, Valley Center, CA**

[http://www.leadertoleader.org/innovation/innovation/innovation.asp?innov\\_id=653](http://www.leadertoleader.org/innovation/innovation/innovation.asp?innov_id=653)

Paradise Community Services created MomStart to help Latina mothers learn English language skills such as reading, writing and speaking by immersing them in their children's schools as classroom and special project volunteers.

MomStart engages the challenges of illiteracy, low self-esteem, and poverty at their core levels. The program begins a process of learning at the kindergarten level for both the mother and the child, helping mothers and their children learn to read together and encouraging families to carry the school environment into their home lives. In essence, MomStart brings together children and parents in the beginning of a long-term path to strengthen families rather than focusing independently on either child literacy or on adult literacy in isolation. As mothers' reading skills improve, they can become more closely involved with their children's education and offer their children a lifetime of support – while gaining skills that can enhance their employability and strengthen their family's overall economic prospects.

#### **National Center on Adult Literacy**

<http://www.literacy.org>

The National Center on Adult Literacy (NCAL) was established in 1990 with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The Center is currently supported by federal, state, and local agencies as well as by private foundations and corporations, and it is affiliated with the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education.

NCAL's mission incorporates three primary goals: to improve understanding of youth and adult learning, to foster innovation and increase effectiveness in youth and adult basic education and literacy work, and to expand access to information and build capacity for literacy and basic skills service provision.

The Center has pursued this mission by engaging in cutting-edge and high-impact research, innovation, and training in youth and adult education in the following areas: research and development; technology and distance learning; staff development and training; curriculum and instruction; improved linkages between research, policy, and practice; and dissemination of the latest research findings. NCAL's web site offers a number of publications with relevance to family literacy policy and practice.

#### **National Center for Family Literacy**

<http://www.familit.org>

The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) pioneered the approach that puts family at the forefront of educational reform. Since its inception in 1989, NCFL has provided leadership to initiatives that fuel improvement for the nation's most disadvantaged children and parents. More than 1 million families throughout the country have made positive educational economic gains as a result of NCFL's work, which includes training more than 150,000 teachers and thousands of volunteers. The web site offers a wealth of research, policy, training information, and programmatic resources.

#### **National Commission on Adult Literacy, project of the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL)**

[www.caalusa.org](http://www.caalusa.org)

CAAL is dedicated to strengthening adult literacy in the public conscience and works to build a respected national adult education system. The CAAL web site offers studies and analyses, interview-based think pieces, symposia, and special projects — all intended to help promote effective policy and resource development, program improvement, and communications. Moreover, its unique contribution to the field is research and publications relating to the role of community colleges in adult education and literacy. Additionally, the "Related Internet Sites" section includes useful collections concerning literacy advocacy and coalitions, family literacy practices, English as a Second Language programs, and workplace/workforce literacy.

#### **National Institute for Literacy**

Washington, DC

<http://www.nifl.org>

The National Institute for Literacy, a federal agency, provides leadership on literacy issues, including the improvement of reading instruction for children, youth, and adults. In consultation with the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services, the Institute serves as a national resource on current, comprehensive literacy research, practice, and policy.

## Profile of Award-Winning Program for Low-Income Immigrant Families

[http://www.leadertoleader.org/innovation/innovation/innovation.asp?innov\\_id=646](http://www.leadertoleader.org/innovation/innovation/innovation.asp?innov_id=646)

Leader-to-Leader Institute profiled the Boys and Girls Clubs of Huntington Valley's Twilight School, where every member of an immigrant family can learn English and acquire the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in their community. The program helps parents overcome many of the usual barriers to accessing literacy services: it is free of charge, transportation is provided by the Club, children and adults learn at the same facility, and the program is scheduled in the evening to accommodate working parents.

## Success By 6 (SB6)

<http://national.unitedway.org/files/pdf/sb6>

Although national in scope, SB6 programs are place-based, collaborative efforts that work community by community to develop effective early childhood education programs. Operating with support from local United Way organizations, SB6 coalitions galvanize business, government, and non-profit leaders around early learning to create community change. For 16 years, SB6 coalitions have been raising awareness of the importance of early childhood education, improving access to services, advocating for public policies and overhauling systems—budgets, laws and supports—to improve young children's lives.

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**This series of policy briefs produced by the Family Strengthening Policy Center** seeks to describe a new way of thinking about how to strengthen families raising children in low-income communities and how this approach can and should influence policy. The premise of "family strengthening" in this context, and as championed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is that children do well when cared for by supportive families, which, in turn, do better when they live in vital and supportive communities. The series describes ways in which enhancing connections within families and between families and the institutions that affect them result in better outcomes for children *and* their families.

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This brief reflects the findings and views of the Family Strengthening Policy Center, which is solely responsible for its content. For more information or to access other family strengthening policy briefs, visit [www.nassembly.org/fspc](http://www.nassembly.org/fspc).

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