This EBE response contains information on both parent involvement and family literacy. No information was available on parent academies. The document begins with a meta-analysis on parent involvement; other articles on parent involvement follow. The section concludes with some additional resources. The second part of the document is focused on family literacy. It begins with an article offering a broad review of the research on family literacy. Other materials follow. The section also concludes with one additional website for further information. PDFs are available for all resources included in the EBE response.
This response is based on a thorough search of the following resources:

- ERIC
- Education Full Text
- Education Retro
- Masterfile Premier
- Academic Search Premiere
- The National Center for Family Literacy
- The Future of Children
- The Promising Practices Network
- RAND
- Mathematica
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- American Institutes for Research
- The Education Commission of the States
- The Regional Educational Laboratory system
- National Center for Education evaluation
- The U.S. Department of Education
- The National Academy Press
- *Cognition and Instruction*

These search terms were used:

- Parent involvement
- Parent involvement and student achievement
- Effective models for parent involvement
- Models for parent involvement
- Parent academies
- Effective family literacy programs
- Family literacy programs
- Literacy programs
- Increased time for parents and teachers to meet
- Increased time and education
- Increased time and parents
Parent Involvement


“Noting that the evidence of families’ influence on their children’s’ school achievement is consistent, positive and convincing, this report examines research on parent and community involvement and its impact on student achievement. Following an introduction, the first section of the report describes the methods used for selecting the studies; describes what the studies cover; provides a table showing the studies by topic area; by age and grade level and by design type; and discusses limitations of the studies. The second section of the report synthesizes the studies’ findings. This section also provides some pertinent definitions; lists recommendations to help educators put findings to practical use; and presents research findings related to three areas: (1) impact of parent and community involvement on student achievement; (2) effective strategies to connect schools, families and communities; and (3) parent and community organizing efforts to improve schools. The third section provides summaries of the 51 studies, conducted between 1993 and 2002, described in this report. The report finds that there is strong and steadily growing evidence that families can improve their children’s’ academic performance in school and have a major impact on attendance and behavior. Children at risk of failure or poor performance can profit from the extra support that engaged families and communities can provide. All students, but especially those in middle and high school, would benefit if schools supported parents in helping children at home and in guiding their educational career. The report’s appendix provides a short history of the research in this field over the past 30 years.”

Some main points

Many studies in this report found that students with involved parents, no matter their circumstances, were more likely to

- Earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs.
- Be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits.
- Attend school regularly.
- Have better social skills, better behavior, and adapt well to school.
- Graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

Families from all settings and all cultural groups are engaged with their children’s’ education at home but white, middle-class families tend to be more engaged at school. Supporting involvement from all parents may be an important strategy to address the achievement gap. Programs and special efforts show evidence of helping to engage families. Schools that engage families successfully share key practices. Studies found that community organizing—strategies aimed at low-performing schools intended to supply low-income families power and political skills to hold schools accountable contribute to positive changes in schools.
Certain strategies can help put these findings into action:

- Recognize that all parents are involved in their children’s’ education and want them to do well.
- Design programs that will support parents’ efforts to guide their children from preschool through high school.
- Develop the capacity of school staff to work with parents.
- Link all efforts to engage families to student learning.
- Build families’ social and political connections.
- Focus efforts on developing trusting and respectful relationships.
- Embrace a philosophy of partnership; make sure that all those involved understand that children’s’ education is a collaborative effort.
- Build strong connections between schools and community organizations.
- Include families in all efforts to reduce the achievement gap.


“Parent involvement in education is associated with positive outcomes for students: however, little is known about how parents decide to be involved in children’s education. On the basis of the K.V. Hoover-Dempsey and H.M Sandler (1995, 1997) model of parent decision making, a parsimonious process variable model supplies five levels that link parents’ decision to become involved in their child’s education with student achievement. The authors examined the relationship among four parent variables (role construction, sense of efficacy, resources and perceptions of teacher invitations) with PI activities at home and school. The authors surveyed parents of elementary students from an urban district in the Southwest. Parents were surveyed once. Results indicated that specific invitations from teachers had the largest effect on the three types of parent involvement. Parents’ sense of efficacy and level of resources was less influential than anticipated. Parents indicated much greater involvement in activities at home that in those at school. The authors discuss implications of the findings for teacher and school practices, policy development and future research.”


“The authors sought to understand the types of parent involvement that teachers, parents and students believe affect the academic achievement of adolescent learners at the junior high school level. Research that included focus groups, interviews and surveys indicated that teachers and students believed that parent involvement at school was considered less important to a child’s academic achievement than parent involvement in academics at home. In addition, parents rated themselves as more participatory in academics than did their children or junior high school teachers.”
Some main points:

- Adolescents are affected positively when there is a sustained relationship between home and school. Involvement at home has the strongest positive effect on achievement. Level of parent involvement is a better predictor of grades than standardized tests.
- Parent involvement decreases as students grow older.
- Factors such as parent education, financial stability, and support network impact the level of involvement. Teacher behaviors also have an impact.
- Study results indicate that students, parents, and teachers value parent involvement as a factor in student success. Behaviors perceived by all of these groups as important were similar. However, parents overestimated their involvement, while students and teachers underestimated it. The reason for this is unclear.
- Communication between groups is identified as important and also identified as lacking.
- Based on the results from this study, schools must institute a program to persuade parents to participate in important activities to a degree that noticeable impacts student results. Suggestions for accomplishing this are offered.


“Parent involvement in children’s learning at school and at home is considered a key component of school reform but more information is needed about how the effects of this involvement vary for students from disparate racial-ethnic and economic backgrounds. Data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (Ingels, Abraham, Karr, et al., 1990; Ingels, Abraham, Resinski et al., 1990) were used to examine the relationship between 12 types of parent involvement and 8th grade mathematics and reading scores. Ordinary least square regression indicated that statistically significant differences existed in the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement according to the students’ race-ethnicity (i.e., Asian, Black Hispanic and White) and family income (i.e., low and middle) as well as according to how achievement was measured, type of involvement and whether it was reported by the student or the parent.”

Some main points

The impacts of diverse family and community environments need to be identified and incorporated into school reform practice. Research shows that parent practices vary across racial, social, and economic groups. A number of independent variables were involved in this study, centered primarily around two factors; direct parent involvement with the school and parental discussion with the student. Overall findings indicated that racial, social, and economic factors do impact the effects of various types of parental involvement. Some specific findings were:

- Traditional variables and parent involvement measures were better predictors for advantaged populations than disadvantaged populations. School quality may mediate this finding.
Parent involvement was more predictive of grades than test scores for all groups. 

Student perceptions of involvement mattered more than parent perceptions across all groups. 

Direct connections with the school had varying effects on student achievement, depending on the group involved. 

Volunteering was a significant factor only for white, middle-class students; it was not a significant predictor for disadvantaged minorities. However, PTO participation was strongly associated with achievement for these students. This type of experience may be important for bridging the gap that may exist between schools and some student/parent populations. Schools may need to find ways to do a better job of including low-income parents. 

Contact with the school about academics had a consistently negative effect across all groups. 

Parent involvement had little effect on the achievement of Asian students. 

Student discussion with parents was a significant factor for all groups except Asian students; it was a better predictor for Whites and middle-class students than for other groups. 


“The idea that parental involvement has a positive influence on students’ academic achievement is so intuitively appealing that society in general and educators in particular, have considered parental involvement as the remedy for many problems in education. The vast proportion of the literature in this area, however, is qualitative without empirical data. Among the empirical studies that have investigated this issue quantitatively, there appear to be considerable inconsistencies. A meta-analysis was conducted to synthesize the quantitative literature about the relationship between parental involvement and students’ academic achievement. The findings reveal a moderate, and practically meaningful, relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement. Using moderator analysis, it is revealed that parental aspiration/expectation for children’s education achievement as the strongest relationship, while parental home supervision has the weakest relationship, with students’ academic achievement. In addition, the relationship is stronger when academic achievement is represented by a global indicator than by a subject-specific indicator. Limitations of the study are noted, and suggestions are made for future studies.” 

Some main ideas 

- There is a great deal of research available related to the effects of parental involvement on student achievement. This meta-analysis is an effort to bring clarity to this literature. The meta-analysis is limited to findings in the form of bivariate correlations between
indicators of parental involvement and student achievement. Twenty-five studies were used in the meta-analysis.

- Two types of analyses were conducted. The first, a study featuring meta-analysis, focused on correlation coefficients between parental involvement and student achievement. The second analysis is a study effect meta-analysis in which each study contributes only one effect size measure to the analysis.
- Results indicated that both “area of academic achievement” and “parental involvement dimensions” have strong moderating effects on the relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement. “Measures of academic achievement” have no moderating effect. Age and ethnicity have a very small effect.
- The relationship cannot be generalized across operational definitions of parental involvement, nor across different areas of academic achievement.
- Where the academic achievement measure is very general, there is a slightly higher correlation than where the measure is more specific. Parental home supervision was revealed to have a low correlation with student achievement, while parent expectations had a more robust effect.
- Overall, the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement is about .30, a high enough correlation to indicate that parental involvement does have a significant effect on student achievement.


“Several school level variables thought to influence the degree to which parents are involved in their children’s education were explored. The author sought to clarify, both theoretically and empirically, the meaning of parent involvement. Also, several statistical regression models were developed on the basis of school characteristics. The models help to explain the variance in 9 categories of parent involvement. The results of this study indicate that many forms of parent involvement, such as the structure that parents create for students in the home environment, are not easily influenced by school level variables. However, several forms of parent involvement, including parent volunteerism and participation in parent-teacher organizations, can be increased when teachers attempt to contact parents.”

**Some main points**

- Information on parent involvement and student achievement has typically focused on individual and family-level characteristics as factors that impact how parent involvement affects student achievement. This document attempts to connect a different set of factors, school characteristics, to this relationship.
- Some schools promote parent involvement effectively, while others do not. Several theories have been advanced to explain this. These theories focus on cultural capital, social capital, and structural differences in the culture among schools.
• Available empirical research groups studied school-related characteristics that may affect parent involvement under staff characteristics (age, experience, racial composition, attitude toward parents), student characteristics (average SES and minority composition), and school characteristics (setting, size, academic focus).

• Analysis of data resulted in nine dependent variables related to types of parental involvement. A set of control variables was also developed. Control variables included factors such as race, sex, and family size. A series of multiple-regression models show the degree to which the control variables influence the dependent variables associated with parent involvement. Results indicate that five of nine areas investigated are heavily influenced by factors such as sex, race, and family size, factors that cannot easily be moderated. Parent involvement cannot be readily stimulated in these areas.

• The author discusses methods by which schools may be able to stimulate parent involvement by focusing on the areas over which the school has control, rather than less malleable areas.


This article investigates an important factor in student achievement—parental involvement. Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), we estimate a value-added education production function that includes parental effort as an input. Parental effort equations are also estimated as a function of child, parent, household, and school characteristics. Our results suggest that parental effort has a strong positive effect on achievement that is largely relative to the effect of school resources and is not captured by family background variables. Parents appear to reduce their effort in response to increased school resources, suggesting potential “crowding out” of school resources.

Some Main Points

• Parental effort appears to have a significant positive effect on student achievement.

• Schools would need to increase spending by $1000 per student to achieve the effect generated by parent effort.

• A number of parent variables (e.g., parent education, family income) have an impact on various types of parental effort. Child variables (e.g., child sex, prior achievement) also have an impact. School resources have a negative relationship with parental effort. Parental effort is defined across several possible parent activities: discussing activities, discussing studies, discussing selections, attending meetings, and volunteering.


“Noting that students whose parents and other significant adults are actively involved in their learning are more likely to be successful in school, this paper examines eight parent and community involvement models and discusses selected strategies for initiating plans for school
restructuring related to parent involvement. Models of parent involvement are identified as useful in representing the range and type of activities that might be incorporated in parent involvement programs and can be used as a framework for developing, evaluating and redesigning parent involvement programs in schools. Considered in this paper are: (1) Gordon’s Systems Approach (2) the System’s Development Corporation Study (3) Berger’s Role Categories (4) Chavkin and William’s Parent Involvement Role (5) Honig’s Early Childhood Education Model (6) Jones’ Levels of Parent Involvement (7) Epstein’s typologies (8) language minority parents’ involvement approach. The paper also discusses selected strategies for initiating plans for restructuring in the area of parent involvement, including developing a center on family partnership, establishing parent centers, investigating the accelerated schools movement, developing parent cooperatives, creating new options for parents, and focusing on families, technology and the schools. The paper concludes with a discussion of the positive impact of research into the benefits of family and community involvement on national education policies over the past decade, on states’ efforts to encourage involvement, and on teacher education programs.”

**Some main points**

- Model or category systems represent the range of activities and types of activities that can be incorporated into a parent involvement program, serving as a framework to help educators develop, evaluate, and redesign parent involvement programs.

- Different types of parent involvement have been shown to be successful in helping students achieve.

This article describes eight models of parent involvement:

Gordon’s Systems Model is a social model that postulates four levels of parent involvement: the micro system, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macro system, in addition to a set of categories defining the roles that parents should play as they interact with schools:

- Teach own child
- Decisionmaker
- Classroom volunteer
- Paraprofessional
- Adult educator
- Adult learner

The SDC Study, a large study that examined 57 projects to determine how parents were actually involved in schools, found practices in six categories:

- Home-school relations
- Home-based instruction
- School support
- Instruction at school
- Parent education
Advisory groups

This study confirmed that parents were being effectively involved in these six categories, that are often used in federally supported projects.

Berger’s Role Categories offers six roles that parents can play in their involvement with their child’s school:

- Parents as teachers of their own child
- Parents as spectators
- Parents as employed resources
- Parents as temporary volunteers
- Parents as volunteer resources
- Parents as policymakers

Chavkin and William’s Parent Involvement Roles
These researchers surveyed 2,967 parents to assess their interest in seven possible roles:

- Paid school staff
- Audience
- Decisionmaker
- Program supporter
- Advocate
- Home tutor
- Co-learner

The focus of the data analysis was parent ethnicity. The researchers found consistency across groups in the top three roles most frequently named: audience, home tutor, and program supporter. The only racial difference found was in minority parents’ greater interest in paid roles.

Honig’s Early Childhood Education Model
Honig classified the types of roles described in the literature. She describes seven categories:

- Home visitation
- Parent group meetings
- Home visits for interagency linkages
- Program-articulated visits
- Parents as teachers
- Home follow-up on television viewing
- Omnibus programs

Her information emphasizes parent education and learning opportunities.

Jones’ Levels of Parent Involvement
Jones describes four nonhierarchical levels of parent involvement:

- Traditional
- Receives information
- Involvement at school
- Decisionmaking

A large study based on this model found that most schools had involvement at the traditional level, many schools had involvement at the “receives information” and “involvement at school” levels, but few schools had involvement at the “decisionmaking” level.

Epstein’s Typologies

These six categories are the basis for the PTA’s standards for family involvement:

- Parenting
- Communication
- Volunteering
- Learning at home
- Decisionmaking
- Collaborating with the community

Language Minority Parent Involvement

A 1997 study classified behaviors associated with high academic achievement among low-income, minority families into three broad categories:

- High expectations
- Belief in education
- Parents as home-school link

This report also offers a framework for developing a plan to incorporate parent involvement into the school. The framework contains six strategies and a number of possible avenues to increase parent interest and involvement in schools. Strategy Six, Create New Options for Parents, includes such options as magnet schools and charter schools, interdistrict and intradistrict choice, and vouchers. Other strategies include such activities as parent academies, a focus on technology, parent cooperatives, and activities from the accelerated schools movement that explicitly involved parents in the school-change process.

Many different programs can foster these approaches; programs should reflect local goals and values.


This paper describes five effective literacy programs for parents of ELL students:

- The Georgia Project, Whitfield County, Georgia
- Learning English among Friends, Waco Texas
• Bilingual Literacy Bags for Seventh Grade, Miami, Florida
• Family Literacy Bag Project for Kindergarteners, California and Utah
• Parent Literacy Involvement for Student and Parent Empowerment

Four of these programs were system-wide interventions. Three programs focused on empowerment. For each of the programs examined, the basis for the program, relevant demographics, the response, key characteristics of the program, reasons for effectiveness, program facilitation, and challenges are described. The most successful programs shared some characteristics. They had a broad base of community support, an ongoing relationship with university educators, and extensive support services available to parents. Alignment with student and parent needs and sufficient and timely resources also supported program success. The success of these studies supports the important role that parent involvement plays in literacy development.


“New emphasis is being placed on the importance of parent involvement in children’s education. In a synthesis of research on the effects of parent involvement in homework, a meta-analysis of 14 studies that manipulated parent training for homework involvement reveals that training parents to be involved in their child’s homework results in (a) higher rates of homework completion (b) fewer homework problems, and (c) possibly improved academic performance among elementary school children. A meta-analysis of 22 samples from 20 studies correlating parent involvement and achievement related outcomes reveals (a) positive associations for elementary and high school students but a negative association for middle school students (b) a stronger association for parent rule-setting compared with other involvement strategies (c) a negative association for mathematics achievement but a positive association for verbal achievement outcomes. The results suggest that different types of parent involvement in homework have different relationships to achievement and that the type of parent involvement changes as children move through the school grades.”

Some main points
• Encouraging parent involvement in homework is a strategy often practiced by schools to encourage student achievement. Parents agree that this is important, and their behavior underscores this belief. Ninety-five percent of students reported that they did better in school at least some of the time when parents were involved in their homework.
• The relationship between parent involvement in homework and student achievement may be influenced by many factors—for example, the parent’s strategy, the child’s age and ability level, resources in the home, and the parent’s mentoring skills.
• This meta-analysis examined three study designs: manipulations of parent training for homework involvement, cross-sectional data collections in which third variables were controlled, and cross-sectional data collections without controls. Some findings were consistent across all three groups.
The overall effect of parent involvement with homework was small and often not significant. This finding may be moderated by the fact that homework involvement was not consistent across all circumstances; in addition, other variables may have an impact on results. Further, homework involvement may have an effect on outcomes related to homework, such as completion rates and homework problems, and these factors may have an impact on student achievement in the long run.

Programs that emphasized monitoring homework completion were the only ones to have a negative impact on homework completion rates. Other programs emphasized improving the learning environment, helping students develop study skills, and supervising the homework process.

Findings from all studies indicated that training parents for involvement had a marginal effect at best on achievement. However, examination of subgroups revealed that training parents to assist in homework did have a positive effect on elementary students.

Studies revealed three important moderators of correlation strength: student grade level, type of parent involvement, and subject matter.


“Schools that are most successful in engaging parents and other family members in support of their children’s learning look beyond traditional definitions of parent involvement to a broader conception of supporting families in activities outside of school that can encourage their children’s learning. This idea book is intended to assist educators, parents and policy makers as they develop school family partnerships, identifying and describing successful strategies used by 20 local Title I programs. Following an executive summary, the book notes resources for involving families in education, includes research supporting such partnerships and describes how Title I encourages partnerships. Next, the book describes successful local approaches to family involvement in education, organized around strategies for overcoming common barriers to family involvement including (1) overcoming time and resource constraints (2) providing information and training to parents and school staff (3) restructuring schools to support family involvement (4) bridging school-family differences; and, (5) tapping external supports for partnerships. Finally the book present conclusions about establishing and sustaining partnerships, noting that at the same time that successful partnerships share accountability specific stakeholders must assume individual responsibility, and that those schools that succeed in involving large numbers of parents invest energy in finding solutions for problems, not excuses. The books’ two appendices present descriptions of 20 successful local approaches to family involvement and sign-on information for the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education.”

This report from WestEd, while focused on parent support, offers information on two related topics. The first part of the document examines the PIRC’s (Parental Information and Resource Centers) role in building understanding of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and other education-related issues. The second part focuses on how the PIRC can help to prepare and support educators. The document begins with a brief overview of some of the recent findings supporting parent involvement as a resource to improve student achievement. Next, it discusses parent involvement requirements as a part of NCLB, and their impact on LEAs. It then acknowledges the difficulties of engaging parents and highlights the role of PIRCs in providing parents with information and support that may help them become involved. The structure and work of PIRCs are discussed. The guide focuses on the experiences of five PIRCs as they, with their partnering agencies, implemented strategies to pursue the goal of increased parent involvement, offering information based on these experiences that may help guide others. Methodology for selecting these PIRCs and a conceptual framework for the report are provided. The document indicates that the PIRCs’ role in building understanding is based on six broad concepts:

- Understanding the audience.
- Making education-related information available and understandable.
- Getting in touch with parents statewide.
- Connecting with hard-to-reach parents.
- Promoting cross-stakeholder communication.
- Moving from information to action.

Strategies that help PIRCs realize their goals include:

- Addressing diverse language needs.
- Using existing NCLB resources.
- Ensure user-friendly language and format of information.
- Making performance data meaningful.
- Using technology.
- Establishing convenient parent centers and tailoring services to the local population.
- Facilitating home visits.
- Partnering with community organizations.
- Convening diverse stakeholders.
- Helping parents know what questions to ask and how to ask them.

These strategies can help parents move from information to action—the ultimate goal of becoming involved in their child’s school.

PIRCs also have a well-defined role in preparing and supporting parents and educators to take action for students. To provide this preparation and support, PIRCS:

- Assess local needs related to parent involvement.
- Train parent liaisons.
- Train parents for leadership.
• Train parents and educators to function in teams.

The document offers a number of suggestions for meeting these goals. Among these are:
• Provide surveys on a school’s family friendliness, and use the results to inform parent-related school programs.
• Provide a broad curriculum to liaisons.
• Use parents as liaisons for special needs families.
• Create mutual support cohorts.
• Collaborate with other agencies for training.
• Identify and adapt a training model to train parents.
• Recruit participants who mirror their community.
• Evaluate and innovate to improve.

Each PIRC is unique, and each one operates based on the needs of a unique community. However, there are enough commonalities to validate these suggestions as useful for providing parent support. In addition, there are a few primary ideas that are important for all PIRCS:
• Assess the needs of your constituents.
• Be creative in efforts to engage all parents.
• Prepare parents and educators for partnership by ensuring that both parties are familiar with NCLB’s parent involvement requirements, understand why these are important, and are adequately trained to work together.
• Build organizational capacity and eliminate duplicative or conflicting efforts.

PIRCS represent an important support for parents and educators.

Additional Parenting Resources
This website offers a webcast on parent involvement from the US DOE.
http://www.directionservice.org/CADRE/pdf/The%20impact%20of%20parent%20family%20involvement.pdf
This links to an annotated bibliography on parent involvement from the Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in special Education (CADRE).
http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement
This links to the Harvard Family Research Project. The site contains a range of information on family involvement.

Family Literacy

“This review focused on intervention studies that tested whether parent-child reading activities would enhance children’s reading acquisition. The combined results for the 16 intervention studies, representing 1,340 families, were clear: Parent involvement has a positive effect on children’s reading acquisition. Further analyses revealed that interventions in which parents tutored their children using specific literacy activities produced larger effects than those in which parents listened to their children read books. The three studies in which parents read to their children did not result in significant reading gains. When deciding which type of intervention to implement, educators will have to weigh a variety of factors such as differences in effectiveness across the different types of intervention, the amount of resources needed to implement the interventions, and the reading level of the children.”

**Some main points**

- Some research has indicated that parent involvement has little or no effect on student achievement. This analysis, that employs an approach focused on specific subject matter, finds that parents can have a positive effect on children’s literacy acquisition.
- Effect sizes in the meta-analysis ranged from .07 to 2.02. The mean was .65.
- Parent tutoring was twice as effective as listening to children read aloud; tutoring had an effect size of 1.15, while listening to children read had an effect size of .52. This corresponds to a 17-point increase on a standardized test for tutoring and an 8-point increase for listening to children read aloud. However, parent tutoring requires more educator resources than other forms of parent involvement. The type of tutoring that is most effective is unclear.
- Parent reading to children produced an effect size on reading acquisition of .18, not a significant effect. However, it is possible that this activity supports oral-language acquisition, and this may lead to better reading comprehension as children move through school.
- In addition to these three variables (parent tutoring, listening to children read aloud, and parent reading to children), three other variables were analyzed. These were amount of training, inclusion of supportive feedback, and length of intervention. Only amount of training yielded any significant results; additional examination of this revealed that the effect was probably due to the fact that four of six studies in this category focused on training parents to tutor their children. Impact of parent involvement was similar across all groups of students.
- Differences in study design had no significant effect.

“A think tank on researching family literacy was held to brainstorm a national research agenda for family literacy. The think tank brought together 12 researchers, policymakers and practitioners involved in family literacy. Key themes emerging during the think tank were as follows: (1) family literacy is difficult to research because it is essentially a “black box”; (2) integration of four components—adult education, early childhood education, parent education and parent and child together (PACT) time—is a hallmark of family literacy; (3) curricula in PACT time are especially lacking; (4) the selection of appropriate assessment instruments in family literacy is limited; (5) determination of those who are best served by family literacy program is critical. The following were among the items identified as belonging on the research agenda: (1) good measures of the components with demonstrated validity and reliability to assess the components impact; (2) a multi-disciplinary team approach using multiple research methods; (3) longitudinal research with cross-sectional data collection and multiple time frames for data collection; (4) research focusing on the differential impact of the four components for various subpopulations; (5) quantitative measures to track program effects over time. Lists of 12 references and the think tank attendees are appended along with the Gooding Institute’s goals.”

Some Main Points

- Family literacy is difficult to research since it lacks a well-articulated definition and research-based concepts to guide practice. Well-intentioned and often well-planned, programs are not designed around accepted research based practices. Research in this area is needed to guide practitioners.
- Integration across components is a hallmark of family literacy programs. What is lacking is the capacity to measure this coordination.
- Curricula are lacking in the core areas of family literacy programs, PACT, and parenting education.
- Assessment tools for family literacy programs range from few for early childhood programs to non-existent for PACT components. Outcomes beyond results on standardized tests also need to be developed.
- Information is needed to inform practice on who is best served in family literacy programs and by what type of program.
- Variables in this field are confounded because literacy is impacted by a range of other issues such as social, economic, and psychological factors; this impacts the ease and effectiveness of research in the area.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Family Involvement Network of Educators, Harvard Family Research Project.

This brief document from the Harvard Family Research Project offers an overview of family literacy, defining it—including traditions such adult literacy and emergent literacy that impact family literacy— and discussing perspectives on family literacy programs advanced by critics that include the deficit model, the research vacuum, the silent-gendered discourse, and the
missing social-constructivist perspective. The article also discusses emerging principles for family literacy programs, focused on taking into account family strengths, needs, and history, and the active role of learners in their own learning. Principles are illustrated in three effective programs that are described.


“Family literacy programs abound today, and many try to be all things to all participating families. Funding has eroded for programs of long length and shorter length programs need a specific focus to aim for a modicum of success. This article provides an overview of the importance of interactive reading for children’s future success in school, providing clear reasons for having it as a program focus. Specific research-based interactive reading behaviors which act as program objectives and a linked interactive reading assessment for accountability purposes are described. Methods of serving and recruiting diverse families are also explored. An example of a program is provided to demonstrate how to design a family literacy program of manageable length that leads to measurable gains in joint reading behaviors.”

**Some main points**

It has been shown that the integration of specific behaviors in interactive sessions can promote academic success for children as they enter school. According to this article, these include:

- Maintaining physical proximity.
- Sustaining interest.
- Holding the book and turning the pages.
- Sharing the book by displaying a sense of audience.
- Posing and responding to questions.
- Pointing to pictures and words.
- Relating the book content to personal experiences.
- Soliciting and pausing to answer questions.
- Using visual cues.
- Prediction
- Retelling
- Elaborating on ideas.

Designing an effective family reading program involves several critical components:

- Clear research-based objectives must be established to define what skills will be the focus of the program.
- Skills must be accurately measured to allow tracking of expected outcomes.
- The program must be culturally relevant to various groups.
- Families must be recruited and retained in the program.
Effective accountability is critical. The article discusses the Adult/Child Interactive Reading Inventory (ACIRI), an observational instrument that can be scored both quantitatively and qualitatively to assess both adult and child behaviors during interactive reading sessions.


Even Start projects offer family literacy services made up of four interrelated components:

- Early Childhood Education
- Parenting education
- Parent-child literacy activities
- Adult education

An important premise of the Even Start program is that education combining these four areas should add value to participant outcomes. Language and literacy outcomes should be improved significantly for children participating in Even Start programs. Parenting skills should also be enhanced.

This study is the third randomized study of Even Start. Two earlier studies did not show positive outcomes for children and families who participated in Even Start programs. The CLIO study was intended to intervene by offering a research-based, literacy-focused early childhood and parenting curriculum. It was intended to determine whether the CLIO curricula were more effective than existing Even Start curricula and whether research-based parenting curricula added value to preschool curricula. The CLIO study incorporated two research-based preschool and parenting education curricula, implemented in four combinations. The study used an experimental design in which 120 Even Start projects were randomly assigned to implement one of the four or to be part of a control group providing a pre CLIO curriculum. Data were collected over a three-year period. Several types of data were collected:

- Direct assessments
- Teacher ratings of child social competence
- Videotapes of parent child interactions
- Interviews of parents
- Observation of classroom instruction
- Surveys of teachers and project directors
- Tallies of child and parent participation

This report presents two-year findings on child language, literacy and social competence, parenting skills, parent literacy and instructional practices, and participation in preschool and parenting classes. Results of the study indicated that:

- The CLIO curricula had no significant impacts on any of seven measures of child language and literacy skills but did have a positive effect on child social competence.
There was a positive effect on both the parenting skills examined, but no effect on parent reading and vocabulary skills.

The CLIO curricula had a positive effect on some measures of classroom support for literacy development, but not on other measures.

There was no effect on participation levels.

CLIO parenting curricula did not significantly add value to the CLIO preschool curricula on any of the measures of early literacy skills or of child social competence.

There was a positive effect on parent interactive reading skill.

Secondary analyses were conducted on year of implementation, analysis of growth, and interaction with ethnicity and home language. There was little evidence that any of these factors had an effect. There was no evidence that the lack of positive impacts found by the CLIO study was related to a lack of fidelity or crossover in the control classrooms.

For additional information, see St. Pierre et al. (2005).


This rather lengthy document addresses the Year 3 and Year 4 evaluation of the California First 5 LA Family Literacy Initiative. This program is a comprehensive initiative intended to promote literacy among low-income families in LA County. The focus of the evaluation is described in the document along with data sources used, and key findings and recommendations are summarized. The First 5 Family Literacy initiative supported three interrelated components:

- Expansion and enhancement grants to 15 multifaceted programs across LA county.
- The Family Literacy Support Network to provide technical support and training to grantees, along with outreach to other related programs.
- A four-year implementation evaluation of the impact of the program on children birth to five and their families.

The document includes chapters addressing adult education, parenting knowledge, and practice; children’s learning and development; and continuous quality and improvement. The evaluation detailed was intended to assess implementation and impact of the program. Implementation was the focus in Years One and Two of the evaluation; child and family outcomes the focus in Years Three and Four. The evaluation highlights findings in five areas:

- Characteristics of program leadership and administration.
- Implementation and impacts of the adult-education component.
- Implementation and impacts of the parenting education and Parent Child Interactive Literacy Activities (PCILA) components.
- Implementation and impacts in the early-childhood component.
• Role of the FSLN in supporting continuous quality improvement among grantee programs.

Data for the evaluation were collected through site visits, surveys, participant data downloaded from the First 5 LA data system, an in-depth child outcomes study, a review of grantee reports and invoices and a review of FSLN deliverables, site-visit note summaries, and interviews with staff. Although the program has experienced challenges, the evaluation indicates many areas of success and a positive effect of the program, particularly among families with high levels of participation. In addition, links between program quality and outcomes support a pattern of positive connections that will be pursued. Overall, findings are encouraging and support additional efforts to further increase positive results. Recommendations resulting from the evaluation include:

• Focus on quality, not just quantity.
• Increase attention to literacy in the ECE classroom, and strengthen teacher-child interactions.
• Continue to work on supporting grantee development to enhance parenting education and PCILA.
• Maximize the impact of the four components by increasing their integration.
• Extend the use of data by grantees to support continuous quality improvement.
• Continue to support grantee sustainability by providing training and technical assistance.
• Continue to provide customized technical assistance to grantees, especially those with greater program improvement needs.


“This study evaluated an innovative family literacy program in Bullitt County, Kentucky, USA. Data sources included attendance sign-in sheets, pre- and post-TABE test scores, GED success, gender and age and ethnicity, and grant applications. The evidence suggested that since 1998, the program increasingly attracted proportionally more males, GED completion increased 10 times, computer placement in homes quadrupled, and roughly 2/3 met their goals. Additional features included extensive community involvement from businesses and local government.”

Some main points:

• The workplace is changing.
• Investment in the education and training of workers is a necessity to maintain a competitive edge.
• Learning has a positive effect on both economic and social well-being.
• The workplace increasingly demands highly trained, literacy workers; currently not enough of these workers are produced to meet needs.
• Literacy and the capabilities of the workforce can be viewed as human capital. Human capital is the basis of economic productivity; the development of human capital is a
cornerstone of the competitive advantage. Workplace education has a pivotal place in this; it is not limited to education that individuals receive at work, but also includes other forms of education that support effective work skills. An important workforce education development may be the advent of family literacy programs.

- Family literacy programs have a self-reinforcing effect in that they are intergenerational. Children develop and practice good literacy skills with the help of their parents, who also have an opportunity to learn.
- Family literacy may bring about academic gains, increase parent-child literacy related interactions, and lead to economic self-sufficiency.
- Family literacy incorporates four related parts: education for children, education for parents, parent and child time, and adult education. These four components work together to improve literacy skills for adults and children.


“A randomized experiment was conducted to test the effectiveness of Even Start, a federally supported family literacy program providing early childhood education, adult education parenting education and joint parent-child literacy activities to children and parents from low literate families. The evaluation of 18 Even Start projects followed 463 families for two years and found no statistically significant of educationally important impacts on Even Start families when they were compared with control families on child literacy outcomes, parent literacy outcomes, or parent-child interactions. The study concludes that Even Start projects were able to properly implement family literacy programs, and the observed lack of effectiveness is attributed to a combination of 2 factors: (a) a lack of full participation on the part of the families and (b) instructional services that may be ineffective because of the curriculum content or the instructional approach.”

Additional Resource

http://www.famlit.org/

This is a link to website of the National Center for Family Literacy.
The SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, under the leadership of Dr. Ludwig "Ludy" van Broekhuizen, is a university based research, development, dissemination, evaluation, and technical assistance center. Its mission is to support and promote teaching and learning excellence in the Pre-kindergarten to Grade 12 education community. SERVE Center operates solely on sponsored research funding; the majority of its approximately $11 million annual budget coming from federal sources.

We provide research based information on educational initiatives happening nationally and regionally. The EBE Request Desk is currently taking requests for:

- Research on a particular topic
- Information on the evidence base for curriculum interventions or professional development programs
- Information on large, sponsored research projects
- Information on southeastern state policies and programs

For more information or to make a request, contact:
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