

# Families & Learning

A PUBLICATION OF THE CONNECTICUT STATEWIDE FAMILY LITERACY INITIATIVE, A PROJECT OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

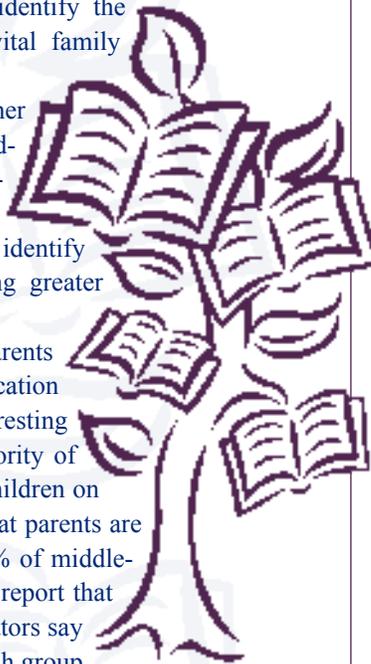
## Research Reveals How to Foster Family Learning

The State Department of Education is conducting an innovative research project to develop new strategies for promoting greater parent involvement in family learning and literacy activities. Researchers conducted opinion interviews with 1000 parents of children eight years old and younger, half of whom were from Connecticut's large cities. They also surveyed elementary and early childhood educators, school administrators, and school and community librarians. The findings will provide educators with a better understanding of parental attitudes about literacy and family learning. Comparing data will help researchers identify the most effective ways to foster participation in vital family learning activities.

Like all of us, parents are inundated with consumer marketing that tries to convince them to buy a product, behave in certain ways, or engage in an activity. To be "heard" in today's world, educators must understand parent views and concerns, in order to identify effective ways of reaching them and encouraging greater participation in their children's education.

The research reveals that a vast majority of parents feel that greater involvement in their children's education is critically important. It also reveals some interesting differences. For example, while a significant majority of parents say that they are already reading to their children on a daily basis, educators are far less likely to say that parents are reading to their young ones. While more than 80% of middle-income parents and 56% of lower income parents report that they read to their children daily, only 25% of educators say that this activity is taking place. Regardless of which group is more accurate, the knowledge that parents believe they are already engaged, but recognize that even more engagement is necessary should help educators craft more effective messages.

In the coming months, the State Department of Education will analyze the results of these studies in greater detail and provide additional recommendations on how educators can be more effective in promoting family literacy and learning efforts.



### Credible Messengers

When it comes to communicating with parents, the study found that a child's school remains the most important source of information about education and learning. In particular, classroom teachers, librarians and those in direct contact with children are seen as the most believable "messengers" when it comes to promoting parent engagement in their child's education. Also important to many parents, particularly those from lower income households, are messages delivered by local clergy and religious leaders.

### Effective Messages

Not surprisingly, the study found that parents find some messages far more persuasive than others. The most effective messages remind parents that:

- family learning helps make families stronger;
- allows parents to spend quality time with their children;
- helps students do better in school and have a better chance of getting good jobs as adults; and
- is a lot of fun.

## 5 Groups Win Family Literacy Kits

Over 750 education professionals responded to the family literacy and learning survey this spring. To thank respondents, the Family Literacy Initiative held a drawing for kits of family learning materials valued at \$50 each. Kits were awarded to the following programs:

- J.P. Vincent School, Bloomfield • Rodeph Sholom Nursery School, Bridgeport • Marvin School, Norwalk
- Hatton School, Southington • Ferguson Library, Stamford

Thank you to all who responded to the survey. Watch this space for more on the final results of your efforts.

This research was conducted by Impact Strategies and supported by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund and CTVoices for Children. For more information: Judy Carson, State Department of Education, (860) 807-2122, judy.carson@po.state.ct.us.

# Links to Learning:

## Strategies to help families prepare children for success

The ultimate goal of parenting education is to help parents understand how their actions affect children's learning and development. It provides opportunities for parents to reflect on how they raise children, and to exchange ideas with other parents.

**Links to Learning**, a program developed by Dr. Douglas Powell, Distinguished Professor of Child Development and Family Studies at Purdue University, is an excellent example. It emphasizes use of conversation and activities as tools to improve children's key problem-solving skills. Topics include how to prepare children for an uncertain future, how to stay connected with your children, and how parents' expectations set the stage for what children become. "Parents significantly influence how children think and learn," Powell says. "We tell parents, 'what you do, schools can't do.'"

Links to Learning seeks to strengthen family contributions to children's learning during the elementary school years. "Most parent education programs are concerned with preschoolers or adolescents," says Powell. "However, studies point to the elementary school years as a key time to support the role of parents in children's learning."

The program is based on five guiding assumptions:

1. *Society is changing.* The world is changing rapidly thus increasing the importance of problem-solving skills which allow individuals to be responsible citizens and successful participants in a competitive job market.

2. *Families are unique learning environments.*

The ways families and communities contribute to children's learning are different from school, but as special and as important.

3. *Daily routines are important.* Ordinary, routine interactions hold great potential for maximizing the family contributions to children's learning, especially around problem-solving.

4. *Learning is an active process.* At any age, important learning is most likely to take place when individuals are highly engaged in things of interest to them.

5. *Elementary school years count.* Early school years are a prime time to foster children's learning and development, and offer unique opportunities and challenges to families.

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### Parenting Education:

#### What do parents really want to know?

**Links to Learning** developers at Purdue University researched parent concerns about their children. The overwhelming response was that families worried most about their children's future. From in-depth interviews of over 150 parents, researchers learned that parents wanted to help prepare their children to cope with new technologies, a global economy and a rapidly changing society, but were not sure how. An overwhelming majority said their child would need to do things differently than they did in order to succeed in today's world. About one third of parents did not expect their child to attain an ideal occupation. And many parents emphasized child factors such as academic skills and abilities, rather than environmental factors as contributors to success.

## New Community Conversation: Family Literacy & Family Learning

The Family Literacy Initiative and League of Women Voters are pleased to announce a new Community Conversation guide entitled, *Skills for School & Life: Creating Family Learning*. The guide promotes discussion around the role of families in developing the skills children and adults need for success in school and life. It helps diverse members of the community share views and personal experiences to gain a better understanding of how together they can best support family growth and learning.

For more information on holding this conversation in your community, please contact Sonja Ahuja, 203-222-0753 or Nancy Polk, 203-288-7996, or go to [www.lwvct.org](http://www.lwvct.org).