

Families & Learning

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

Listening to Families: A Family Literacy Outreach Project

Supported by a generous grant from the *William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund*, Connecticut's Family Literacy Initiative is interviewing families in order to develop messages and materials that will make a meaningful difference in increasing family literacy in their lives. So far the Initiative has conducted personal interviews with almost 1000 Connecticut parents, 450 of whom were from low wage, urban families. Surveys were designed to identify the most effective messages and messengers for encouraging greater parent involvement in learning activities. This information, along with interviews of program providers and policy leaders, will be used to develop training and outreach tools to be pilot tested this fall in Hartford, Bridgeport, New Haven, Stamford and New London. The Family Literacy Initiative is pleased to be working on this exciting project with the *Commissioner's Initiative on Closing the Achievement Gap*, the *CT Early Childhood Alliance* and *CT Voices for Children*.

Family Literacy Training Opportunities Ongoing

Connecticut's Family Literacy Initiative continues its focus on quality professional development for those who work with families:

- **Family Literacy Institute** - Over 100 professionals have been trained since September in the new three-day interdisciplinary, research-based curriculum. This institute builds on family empowerment principles and examines the latest research and practice in family literacy. Feedback has been tremendous. One participant said, "Excellent resources. Great experience. This is exactly what I needed for my own professional development".
- The Initiative recently brought **Raising Readers Parents Clubs** to the state. Two cohorts of facilitator have been trained to conduct interactive, fun, hands-on book clubs for parents who have never found reading enjoyable. This program is especially effective with teen parents. Another facilitator training is in the works.
- The Initiative is convening a study group on **Advanced Topics in Family Literacy** this spring. A small group of professionals will meet over four sessions to explore challenging issues in family literacy using Denny Taylor's book *Many Families, Many Literacies*.

For more information: Harriet Feldlaufer, State Department of Education, Bureau of School-Family-Community Partnerships, (860) 713-6579, sde.partnership@po.state.ct.us.

Preliminary Findings:

- Overall there is broad-based recognition by parents about the importance of parental involvement in a child's education, and broad support for family learning activities.
- Virtually all parents of younger children, regardless of income, say that parental involvement in a child's education, and parents frequently reading to their children are "very important" to helping families succeed.
- Lower income parents are more likely than Connecticut parents as a whole to think that adult education in job training and life skills, English as a second language education for parents, and opportunities for all children to go to preschool programs before they start kindergarten, are "very important" in helping families succeed.

There is near unanimous support for the view that when parents are actively involved in their children's education, children are more likely to do well in school.

- Lower income parents are more likely than parents in general to say that most parents want to be actively involved in their children's education, and that some parents who want to be actively involved lack the skills to do so.

• When asked about credible family learning messengers, parents said teachers, childcare providers, librarians, and school administrators are all "very believable." Lower income parents are more likely than others to see religious leaders as "very believable", slightly more likely to mention librarians .

For more information: Judy Carson, State Department of Education, Bureau of School-Family-Community Partnerships, (860) 713-6576, sde.partnership@po.state.ct.us.

Family Literacy in Connecticut:

A Community Scrapbook *Family Literacy is not for schools alone. Here are just a few of the many important community contributions to family literacy in Connecticut:*



READ TO GROW...PROVIDING BOOKS FOR CHILDREN partners with community organizations to support literacy development and promote the joy of reading. This national program provides mothers of newborns a brand new book, information in both English and Spanish on reading to children, and information about local libraries and other literacy programs. Participating hospitals stress to mothers the importance of reading to an infant as a means of enhancing development. The program also distributes books to children through schools. For more information, contact Priscilla Russo, RN, Hospital Coordinator, 203-488-6800, prusso@readtogrow.org. Or go to www.readtogrow.org.

Reach Out and Read
This national literacy program run by pediatricians gives millions of children and their parents a love of books. Beginning at 6 months, volunteers read to children in the waiting room each time they come to the hospital or medical clinic. During the examination, the doctor gives the child a book to keep, and evaluates developmental progress in terms of how he or she responds to books. Pediatricians convey the message that reading aloud to children is vital to helping them learn to love books, succeed in school and become a lifelong learner. For more information: www.reachoutandread.org or 617-629-8042.

The Literacy Caravan of Connecticut,

an initiative of Weston Woods Institute in collaboration with the State Department of Education and Scholastic, is available to preschool programs and family resource centers statewide. A literacy specialist travels in a custom designed mobile facility called the Literacy Caravan, which provides a model literacy environment. In the Caravan, early childhood educators learn strategies for helping children develop language and vocabulary, print awareness and appreciation, listening skills, and for creating literacy-rich learning centers. Parents and kith and kin providers learn about creating home environments conducive to raising readers and writers. For more information, contact Laurie Noe, 203-222-3880 or go to www.westonwoodsinsitute.org.

A Family Place Library

Family Place libraries serve as community hubs for healthy child and family development, parent and community involvement, and life-long literacy. Focusing on parents of newborns to five-year olds, staff reach out to support them in their role as the primary teachers of young children. Family Place libraries offer a five-week parent/child workshop in a learning-space filled with books, toys, craft tables, and resources that emphasize emergent literacy and reading readiness. Each week a different health or social service professional circulates informally to answer questions and provide information. For more information, contact Sheila Wartel, Southern CT Library Council, 203-288-5151 or go to www.lff.org and click on the family place icon.