

# Families & Learning

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

## The Magic of Family Literacy

**F**amily Literacy exists in all families and occurs naturally during day-to-day routines to help adults and children “get things done.” Examples of family literacy might include using drawings or writing to share ideas; composing notes or letters to communicate messages; keeping records; making lists; reading and following directions; or sharing stories and ideas through reading, writing and conversation. Family literacy activities also reflect the ethnic, racial or cultural heritage of the families involved.

Parents want what is best for their children, including providing a supportive learning environment. Moreover, many parents would like help improving their own literacy skills and expanding their current uses of literacy in the home. These families may benefit from programs that use an inter-generational approach to teaching literacy skills to parents and children together. Family Literacy programs give families access to the training and support they need to create a literate home environment and enhance the academic achievement of their children.

Literacy is much more than reading. Interwoven with the fabric of life, literacy skills cannot be separated from the context of learners’ lives. Family Literacy programs recognize how such issues as child care, health needs and poverty affect lives and how violence and abuse impact the ability to engage in literacy classes or maintain employment.

Learners have multiple life goals related to their roles as parent and citizen and are not limited to viewing literacy for economic purposes alone. Family Literacy programs enable families to use literacy to advance the life goals, aspirations and expectations of the adults and children within the family unit.

## A Few Facts

The impact of literacy in the home and of parental involvement in school-related activities is significant.

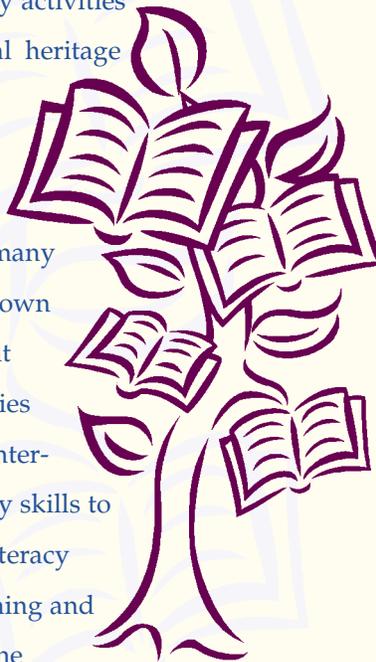
In homes where reading materials are plentiful and children are read to, children are more likely to become successful readers and better students. These children are also more likely to stay in school longer and go on to higher education and higher earning careers.

Unfortunately, many parents in Connecticut are not proficient readers and may be unable to pass on the “legacy” of literacy to their children.

Over 500,000 of Connecticut’s adults (20% of adults) lack a high school credential. This figure is close to the entire K-12 population in Connecticut schools. 16% of Connecticut’s adults function at Literacy Level 1 – meaning that over 400,000 people over age 16 cannot read well enough to fill out an application, read a food label, or read a simple story to a child. Another 650,000 adults (25%) function at Literacy Level 2. They lack the higher-level reading and problem-solving skills required to use complex information and technology. Experts believe that adults with skills at Levels 1 and 2 – more than A MILLION people in Connecticut – lack a sufficient foundation of basic skills to function successfully in our society.

Too many families get caught in the cycle of undereducation and unemployment or low-level employment.

Almost 50% of adult welfare recipients do not have a high school diploma or equivalent. In a study of illiterate high school drop outs, less than 1% of their parents had completed high school. Poor children tend not to perform well in school and are more likely to drop out altogether.



## What are Family Literacy Programs?

Family Literacy programs provide instruction for adults and children which is simultaneous and connected. Parents take high school completion classes or job training, while children receive high-quality child care or attend school. Parents and children regularly read and learn together, and parents participate in a “parent group” that provides life-skills and parenting education and peer support. The goal of Family Literacy programs is to increase the literacy of both adult and child simultaneously.

Families are linked to other community services including health care, housing, substance abuse, domestic violence and nutrition programs.

Family Literacy programs promote life-long learning, encourage reading and writing in the home, help adults promote the literacy abilities of their children, and strengthen supportive, emotional family ties.

## Family Literacy Works!

### **For Adults:**

Documented outcomes for adults include positive changes in attitudes, increased library visits, more reading materials in the home, increased reading to children, and increased participation in their children’s schools.

### **For Children:**

Children in family literacy programs are ready to start school and better able to succeed in class. A recent study revealed that almost 80 percent of children who participated in family literacy programs rated above their class average on seven factors – academic performance, motivation to learn, family support, relationships with others, class behavior, concept of self, and probable success.

## Connecticut Statewide Family Literacy Initiative

Connecticut was awarded over \$600,000 of federal funds through the Even Start Family Literacy State Initiative Grant. The purpose of the grant is to “expand, strengthen and coordinate” family literacy services in the state. The state must provide a 100% match for this grant through cash and in-kind services. At the end of this two-year project, over \$1.3 million will be invested in creating a statewide infrastructure to support family literacy.

The grant will be used to address “systemic” issues related to providing services for families in need of literacy assistance. Although local programs will benefit from this grant, they will not be direct recipients of funding. Grant activities will address professional development for providers, standards for high-quality programs and public education, and outreach around issues related to low-literacy and its impact on families.

To carry out Connecticut’s plan, a statewide Family Literacy Consortium has been formed and is co-chaired by Dr. Eddie Davis of the Connecticut State Department of Education and Maria Mojica of the Graustein Memorial Fund. The Consortium is made up of professionals, local program operators and families themselves. Their goal is to create a coordinated effort that will permanently improve the current disparate system of family literacy services in Connecticut.

## Where are the Family Literacy Programs in Connecticut?

There are many Family Literacy programs throughout the state – some are more comprehensive than others. A directory of Family Literacy programs in Connecticut will be available fall 2000.

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