

FALL 1998

# SCHOOLS & FAMILIES

## Family Literacy: A Powerful Model of School-Family-Community Partnerships

*Family Literacy is parents and children learning together and succeeding together.*

**L**iteracy is a family legacy. Parents have a strong influence on the literacy development of their children. Children who live in homes where literacy activities take place regularly are more likely to experience academic success than their peers with non-reading parents. Positive effects on children's reading and writing abilities are observed when children are read to frequently at home, when they are engaged in dialogue about books, when they are given access to reading and writing materials, and when they receive positive reinforcement for literacy activities. Schools can make an impact on children's academic success by engaging in strategies that promote family literacy.

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. Programs combine education for children with the education of their parents. Successful programs start with family strengths and goals to meet the needs of a whole family *as a unit*. Models range from activities involving parents and children reading together to comprehensive educational programs that integrate four core services:

- \* **adult education**
- \* **parenting education**
- \* **parent and child time together**
- \* **early childhood or school-age programs**

The more comprehensive programs target a complete "package" of services to the most economically disadvantaged families. A unique feature of any family literacy program is attention to the process of transmitting the parent's newly developing skills and strengths to the child.

Schools can take steps to promoting literate families. The first rule is don't try to do it alone. Here are a few ideas for getting started:

- \* Develop a strong partnership with service providers in your community who jointly take responsibility for providing family literacy services and develop new relationships to improve services to families. Look for ways to integrate existing services into a comprehensive whole that serves families as a *unit* and promotes meaningful family activities to change intergenerational patterns associated with low literacy.
- \* Every Connecticut community has an adult education program that can assist with providing some of the components of a family literacy program including adult basic education and parenting education. Why not offer an adult education class at your school for those parents who need help with basic skills or English-as-a second language?
- \* Visit a family literacy program to see the model in action. Connecticut has a variety of family literacy programs including five Even Start Family Literacy programs. For more information, contact Judy Carson at 860/638-4222.

We know from research that families who break the intergenerational cycle of underachievement are no longer estranged from school. They become supporters of their children's education, taking part in activities at school and assisting their children's learning at home. When parents value education - and have an opportunity to be successful themselves - their children are more likely to succeed in school and in life.

A recently published survey finds that parent involvement in public schools has increased compared to findings reported a decade ago! *The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher* finds that teachers and students are positive about the role that parents can and do play in supporting their public schools and their children's education. Most encouraging is the strong and consistent relationship between students' academic success and the extent to which they feel that their parents take an interest in and support their academic and personal ambitions.

Teachers today are as likely or more likely than they were ten years ago to feel that parents are a valuable asset to their schools. They also feel that parents' interest in school life has grown and are more readily available and responsive when parent-teacher contact is needed.

More teachers today feel that parental involvement in education should occur both at home and at school. Teachers also believe that parents are valuable members to be included on school management teams and that parents should be consulted about changes in disciplinary issues. However, most teachers still believe that it is more appropriate that parents be informed, but not actively consulted, about changes in class curriculum and homework policies. These results point to progress made but also indicate room for improvement in developing meaningful school-family partnerships.

*For the full report, write to The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, P.O. Box 807, Madison Square Station, New York, NY 10159-0807.*

**Highlighting Our Partners:**  
This work could not be done without the contributions of many groups. In this issue we recognize . . .

- CT Association of Boards of Education & CT PTA - Policy Action Packet
- Drugs Don't Work! The Governor's Prevention Partnership - Training & Technical Assistance
- Southern CT Library Council - Family Literacy programs in local libraries
- STATES Initiative - Family Day '98

"The school should grow gradually out of the home life; it should take up and continue the activities with which the child is already familiar in the home . . . It is the business of the school to deepen and extend the child's sense of values bound up in his home life"  
- John Dewey, 1897

## New Public Law Fosters Meaningful Partnerships

In 1997 the Connecticut General Assembly passed Public Act 97-290. Provisions in the Act are intended to foster meaningful partnerships among schools, families and communities to enhance student learning. Each local and regional board of education is required to develop, adopt and implement written policies and procedures to encourage parent-teacher communication by September 1, 1998.

A new document, *The Policy Action Packet for School-Family-Community Partnerships: A Guide to Developing Partnership Programs for Student Success*, is available to assist school districts and local boards of education in meeting the requirements of Public Act 97-290. This guide is sponsored by a partnership of the Connecticut State Department of Education, the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, the Parent Teacher Association of Connecticut and the Special Education Resource Center.

*The Policy Action Packet* offers tools to assist local educators and families throughout the year in every stage of the policy development and implementation process. It includes resources such as a sample policy, procedures and agreements that have been developed in school districts or by parent participation specialists around the country. Crafting policy is only the beginning. Effective policies are those that are implemented properly, maintained with adequate resources and evaluated regularly against meaningful criteria. *The Policy Action Packet* lists criteria, developed by the National PTA, for evaluating local policies and partnership programs.

Although Public Act 97-290 requires policies to be developed by September 1, we know that developing, implementing and maintaining effective school-family-community partnership policies is an on-going process. The Department of Education is prepared to assist local districts in this long-term endeavor and will be offering special workshops for district administrators and board members this fall. If you would like to receive a copy of *The Policy Action Packet* or information on workshops, please contact any member of the School-Family-Community Partnership Team (listed in our return address).

## Schools Share Partnership Practices

**M**any Connecticut schools are developing active School-Family-Community Partnerships. An effective partnership offers a broad array of opportunities for schools, families and communities to interact. Not all partnerships look the same. Successful ones exhibit as much variety as the local conditions that create them. Partnerships work best when they recognize and accommodate differences among families, communities and cultures.

### Developing Parent Brochures to Enhance Student Learning

At [Robertson School](#) in Manchester, the goal of increasing parent involvement is always at the forefront, particularly when it comes to identifying potential academic and/or behavioral problems. Principal, Rochelle Abraitis says, "when a child is being evaluated for eligibility for special services of any type, it can be a rather formal and somewhat intimidating process for parents. . . . Too often, suggestions made during the planning and placement team meetings get lost in the midst of all of the formal discussion and paperwork. We decided that if we could prepare a variety of parent brochures, with easy fun activities to be done at home, parents might be more likely to use the suggestions. We also wanted to be sure that our suggestions were appropriate for parents who might have limited time to devote to this and whose own educational experiences may not have been particularly good." A series of brochures has been developed on many, many topics including auditory memory, social comprehension, visual perception, listening skills, verbal reasoning, and shared reading experiences. The types of suggestions offered in the brochures can be done at any time – they are fun and simple to implement. Many can be done while shopping or in the car, as well as at home.

### Come For Coffee . . .

At [Somers Elementary School](#) you can come for morning coffee and learn a lot! Over sixty parents joined administrative and teaching staff for a "before-school coffee" and a chance to learn more about one of the school's academic learning goals - improved listening and speaking skills for students grades K-5. At the same time 85 students participated in an enrichment activity related to careers which was part of the Somers School District's larger School-to-Career Initiative. Parents could be assured that their children were safe and also involved in a constructive learning activity. Also, students were served a light breakfast snack during their activity.

Parent Community Liaison, Mary Keeney, developed the early morning presentation series to make it more convenient for busy parents to learn firsthand about efforts aimed at strengthening students' basic skills. Those who were unable to attend were sent supplementary materials and had access to a videotape of the session. Other presentations in this series offered information and discussion on improving student mathematics and writing skills.



## Connecticut School-Family-Community Partnerships

[Bristol](#)  
[Greene Hills](#)  
[South Side](#)  
[Cheshire](#)  
[Highland](#)  
[Norton](#)  
[Danbury](#)  
[Stadley Rough](#)  
[East Granby](#)  
[Allgrove](#)  
[East Hartford](#)  
[East Hartford Middle](#)  
[Enfield](#)  
[Eli Whitney](#)  
[Henry Barnard](#)  
[Nathan Hale](#)  
[Griswold](#)  
[Griswold Elementary](#)  
[Hartford](#)  
[Kinsella](#)  
[S.A.N.D. Everywhere](#)  
[Manchester](#)  
[Highland Park](#)  
[Robertson](#)  
[Meriden](#)  
[Nathan Hale](#)  
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[Norwich](#)  
[Veterans' Memorial](#)  
[Plantsville](#)  
[Strong](#)  
[Trumbull](#)  
[Daniels Farm](#)  
[West Hartford](#)  
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[Clover Street](#)  
[Oliver Ellsworth](#)  
[Winsted](#)  
[Batcheller](#)

The Network is growing!  
 New teams entering this fall !!

## Resource Materials on S-F-C Partnerships Available For Loan

Be sure to visit the SERC Library located in Middletown at 25 Industrial Park Road. The library is open Monday through Saturday to the public. Membership is free!! Call for hours and directions (860/632-1485) and to check out the extensive library of books, journals and videos related to School-Family-Community partnerships. These materials are helpful for administrators, teachers and family members and cover a broad array of issues. You may also request an annotated bibliography of the library materials on this topic. Listed are a few examples of what is available for loan:

**Family Book Sharing Groups: Start one in your neighborhood!** Simic, M.R. & Macfarlane, E.C. (1995). Bloomington, IN: EDINFO Press. This book offers plans and agendas for meetings where families can come together to gain mutual support and share ideas. Families learn how to select books that parents and children will enjoy reading together, how to make time for reading, and how to make book sharing a meaningful family activity.

**Effects of Even Start on Family Literacy: Local and national comparisons.** Connors-Tadros, L. (1996). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center on Families, Communities, Schools & Children's Learning [Report No. 35]. This report describes the implementation and evaluation of one local Even Start Project, using the results of the recently released final report of the *National Evaluation of Even Start Family Literacy Program* for comparisons where possible. The national evaluation reveals that the Even Start program is providing previously unavailable services to the most needy families in many local communities. Effects of the Even Start program on specific child and family outcomes have, however, been mixed. The clearest result of the national evaluation is that adults and children with high levels of participation in Even Start's core services gained significantly more on the outcome measures than did adults with low levels of participation.

**Comics to classics: A Parent's Guide to Books for Teens and Preteens.** Reed, A.J.S. (1988). Newark, DE: International Reading Association. A compilation of titles and annotations serves as a guide to the world of young adult literature, not just for parents but for anyone who cares about adolescents. The early chapters discuss the stages of adolescent development. The heart of the book is about the books adolescents read and examines the value of discussing books with children.

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