

FAMILY LITERACY

The National Institute for Literacy defines family literacy as a continuum of programs that addresses the intergenerational nature of literacy. The essence of family literacy is that parents are supported as the first teachers of their children. Family literacy programs work with individuals as well as with the family unit. While family literacy programs provide developmental experiences for young children, their parents are offered instruction in parenting skills and parental support. Programs also work to enhance the literacy skills of parents and extend learning opportunities to include pre-employment and employment skills.

Through intensive education of more than one generation, family literacy programs build on families' strengths and provide the tools and support they need to become stronger and more self-sufficient. As the education level of adults improves, so does their children's success in school. Helping low-literate adults improve their basic skills has a direct and measurable impact on both the education and quality of life of their children.

SOURCE: National Institute for Literacy

One-third of welfare recipients in Florida are illiterate, and approximately 71% of mothers receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) have not completed high school. If parents cannot read and face economic hardship, their children suffer, often encountering barriers to learning and to reading, and the cycle of illiteracy continues. Family members in 50% of all Florida households with incomes below poverty level cannot read on an 8th grade level.

Twenty percent of Florida's children under the age of 6 live in poverty and are likely to live in families where the most educated parent has less than a high school education.

SOURCE: *Key Facts about the Children: A Report on the Status of Florida's Children.*

Research informs us that children of parents living at the poverty level typically have fewer words spoken to them in their homes. Increasing the number of words spoken by parents as they interact with their children is a powerful family literacy tool.

SOURCE: *The Reading Teacher* Vol 59, No 7 April 2006.

When children lack the advantages of a home with an educated parent, they are less likely to be exposed to educational opportunities outside the home, and half of them start school as much as two years, in terms of development, behind their peers.

SOURCE: Florida in the 21st Century.

THE NEED FOR FAMILY LITERACY

As a mother's education increases, the likelihood that her child will be read to increases. In 1996, 77% of children whose mothers were college graduates were read aloud to every day. The percentage of children that are read to decreased to 62% for postsecondary education mothers, 49% for high school graduate mothers, and 37% for high school drop out mothers.

SOURCE: Digest of Educational Statistics, 1998.

In general, schools with high poverty concentrations and minority enrollments reported less parent involvement than schools with lower poverty concentrations and minority enrollments:

- 72% of schools with low concentrations of poverty reported 'most or all' parents attended open house.

- 48% of schools with moderate concentrations of poverty reported ‘most or all’ parents attended open house.
- 28% of schools with high concentrations of poverty reported ‘most or all’ parents attended open house.

Most schools with poverty concentrations and minority enrollments of 50% or more perceived the following issues to be barriers than schools low on these characteristics:

- Lack of parent education to help with schoolwork
- Cultural or socioeconomic differences
- Language differences between parents and staff
- Parent attitudes about the school
- Staff attitudes toward parents
- Concerns about safety in the area after school hours.

SOURCE: *Parent Involvement in Children’s Education: Efforts by Public Elementary Schools.* National Center for Education Statistics.

BENEFITS OF FAMILY LITERACY

Research regarding the benefits of family literacy programs provides us with the following information:

Benefits to Children:

- Children’s achievement in school improves. One review of 53 studies showed, beyond dispute, that student achievement results from increased parent involvement in education.
- Children attend school more regularly and are more likely to complete their educations. This has been a persistent finding for more than thirty years.
- Children’s general knowledge, including that measured by intelligence tests, improves. One major research review found that the learning environment at home accounts for more than half the variance in children’s IQ scores.
- Children’s oral language development accelerates.
- Children’s phonemic awareness and decoding improves.
- Children’s writing improves.
- ESL children and their parents learn English.
- Children’s motivation to read increases.

Benefits to Parents:

- Parents’ reading achievement increases.
- Parents’ social awareness and self-advocacy increases.
- Parents enhance their employment status or job satisfaction.
- Parents persist in family literacy programs longer than in other types of adult literacy.
- Parents’ attitudes about education improve; the value they perceive in education increases.
- Parents’ knowledge about parenting options and child development increases.

Benefits to Families:

- Families read more and engage in more literate behaviors at home.
- Families build foundations for lifelong learning.

SOURCE: Ohio Literacy Resource Center at Kent State University.

A study of family literacy in Kentucky found that in family literacy programs where adults and children see each other learning and thereby reinforcing each other, children tend to show greater test score gains than they do in child-focused programs such as Head Start.

SOURCE: *High-Quality Family Literacy Programs: Child Outcomes and Impacts* in FLA Connecting: The World of Family Literacy, #4: Family Literacy Alliance, 2002.

Children who watch four or more hours of TV per day spend less time on schoolwork and have poorer reading skills than children who watch less TV.

SOURCE: Center for Media Education. *Children and television: Frequently asked questions.* www.cme.org

At the beginning of kindergarten, children from a “literacy-rich” home environment (i.e., those who are read to, sung to and told stories to more frequently and those who have more children’s books, records/audiotapes./cDs in the home) demonstrated higher reading knowledge and skills than other children. This relationship existed whether their families’ income was above or below the federal poverty threshold.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education. (2003). *The condition of education.*

Reading aloud to children is the single most effective parent practice for enhancing language and literacy development.

SOURCE: Handel,R.& Goldsmith,E.(1988). *Intergenerational literacy: A community college program.* Journal of Reading.

A study of family literacy programs demonstrated the following parent-child interactions:

- Parents provided a wider range of reading and writing materials at home for their children.
- Parents took their children to the library twice as often, about every three weeks.
- Parents bought or borrowed books for their children 40% more often, every one to two weeks.
- Parents engaged in a wider range of reading and writing activities with their children at home, drawing and writing with their children and using educational materials and games.
- Parents read or looked at books with their children 40% more often, almost every day.
- Children asked parents to read to them 20% more often, almost every day.
- Children’s book and magazine reading increased by nearly 40%, to more than once a day.

SOURCE: Mikulecky and Lloyd. 1995. *Evaluating Parent/Child Interactions in Family Literacy Programs*

The 2000-2001 Executive Summary on the Governor’s Family Literacy Initiative reported that parents in family literacy programs:

- Read more to their children (90%).
- Tell stories to their children (97%).
- Draw or paint with their children (84%).
- Call or visit their children’s teachers (89%).
- Help their children with homework (94%).
- Have library cards (70%).
- And visit the library (86%).

Parents improved their own skills and reported gains in confidence in helping their children. The 2000-2001 Executive Summary also reported serving 1,315 adults, 2,418 children, and 1,077 families. Additionally, 76% of the participants attended a minimum of 2 months of classes.

SOURCE: *Florida Family Literacy Survey 2002 Report.*

In 2001, 73% of children whose mothers were college graduates were read to every day. In comparison, daily reading occurred for 60% of children whose mothers had some postsecondary education, 49% of children whose mothers completed high school only, and 42% of children whose mothers had not finished high school.

SOURCE: National Center for Family Literacy.

SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

The number of parents a child lives with is strongly linked to the resources available to children and their wellbeing. Children who live in a household with only one parent are substantially more likely to have family incomes below the poverty line than are children who live in two parent households.

STATISTICS ON SINGLE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS

- 31% of American children lived with one parent and 27.2% of Florida's children lived with one parent.
- White, non-Hispanic children are much more likely than black children and somewhat more likely than Hispanic children to live with two parents.
- 78% of white, non-Hispanic children lived with two parents, compared with 38% of black children and 65% of children of Hispanic origin.
- 8% of children in married couple families were living in poverty, compared with 40% in female-householder families.
- 8% of black children in married-couple families lived in poverty, compared with 49% of black children in female-householder families.
- 21% of Hispanic children in married-couple families lived in poverty, compared with 48% in female-householder families.

SOURCE: U.S. Census 2000.

Children with two parents were more likely to be read to every day than were children who live with one or no parent. Sixty-one percent of children in two-parent households were read to every day in 2001, compared with 48% of children living with one or no parent.

SOURCE: National Center for Family Literacy.

Students living with both parents have higher proficiency in school, even after controlling for other key differences between two and one parent families.

SOURCE: *America's Smallest School: The Family*. Educational Testing Service.

A survey of more than 20,000 parents found that when fathers are involved in their children's education, including attending school meetings and volunteering at school, children were more likely to get A's, enjoy school, and participate in extracurricular activities and less likely to have repeated a grade.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.