

Elements of a Family Literacy System

To build a comprehensive system of family literacy services, a number of elements must first be established at the state and community levels. Together these elements form the infrastructure needed to support the provision of direct services to families. These elements are:

1. *A common vision of family literacy* that is clearly expressed and integrates the four components of family literacy and is to be carried out through a long-term strategic planning process.
2. *The integration of family literacy into the priorities, activities, and culture of the community*, including developing community-wide efforts to stimulate and support the provision of family literacy services especially in high need areas; offering new, extended and integrated services for families built from existing high quality community resources and established partnerships; and ensuring cultural relevance of programs for participants from diverse backgrounds.
3. *Research-based professional development* for practitioners, managers, and policy makers including a continuum of learning opportunities for providers of family literacy services that require increasing depth of content and levels of competency and result in a knowledgeable and skilled family literacy workforce.
4. *A system of program standards and accountability measures* that lead to the development and sustainability of quality programs; use research and data for planning and evaluation; reflect Head Start performance standards, Even Start performance indicators, and the New York State Learning Standards; and can be applied across these systems and programs to assess quality as related to the federal definition of family literacy services.
5. *Fiscal coordination and integration of local, state, and national resources* in support of family literacy services; including identifying, coordinating and tracking new and

Benefits of a Statewide Family Literacy System

1. A culture that fully supports literacy development through incorporation of family literacy into state and local policies and programs.
2. Strengthened partnerships among schools, community-based service providers, and families that allow for the efficient use of human services and educational resources that lead to comprehensive approaches to meet family needs.
3. Increased early literacy levels and school readiness for children, helping them to reach their full potential.
4. Increased parental support for their children's education.
5. Parents who are better able to guide their children's learning and decision-making skills.
6. Increased range of adult education opportunities that empower parents to break the cycles of poverty and illiteracy.
7. Skilled and knowledgeable providers of family literacy services.
8. Consistent quality of programs across the state that are comparable, measurable, and accountable.
9. Integrated services designed and built upon principles of family support and empowerment.
10. Increased public knowledge and accurate perceptions of family literacy.

existing revenue streams; sharing of financial and other resources; and using blended funding and increased compensation to support staff recruitment and retention efforts.

6. *A public awareness campaign* to generate support for comprehensive family literacy services from individuals, organizations, and governmental bodies at all levels.



www.familyliteracyinnys.org

New York State Council on Children and Families

Mayor Erastus Corning 2nd Tower • 5 Empire State Plaza
Albany, New York 12223

(518) 474-6294

Fax: (518) 473-2570

www.ccf.state.ny.us



A FAMILY LITERACY SYSTEM FOR NEW YORK STATE

Family literacy services are an intergenerational effort intended to break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by enhancing the educational opportunities of all family members. Family literacy supports parents as the first teachers of their children. Children thrive in school when their parents take an active role in their education. Children do better in school when their parents read with them, expose them to books, exhibit a positive attitude toward school, and provide encouragement. For adults, seeing the positive effect that they can have on their children's education motivates them to strengthen their literacy skills and help further their own educational and employment goals.

The Alliance for Family Literacy was established in 1999 to develop a

coordinated system of high quality family literacy services across New York State. A partnership among the NYS Council on Children and Families, State Education Department, and the NYS Head Start Association, the Alliance is supported by over 40 organizations, programs, and agencies throughout the state that are working to promote family literacy. To build a system of quality comprehensive family literacy services, the Alliance is using as its foundation the integration of the four components of family literacy services described in the federal definition (see below).

Such a system combines the resources of Head Start and child care programs, libraries, adult education providers and others to meet the literacy needs of the whole family.

Federal Definition of Family Literacy Services

Family literacy services are defined as services that are of sufficient intensity in terms of hours, and of sufficient duration to make sustainable changes in a family and that integrate all of the following activities:

- Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children
- Training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children
- Parent literacy education that leads to economic self-sufficiency
- Age-appropriate education to prepare young children for success in school and life experiences.

Local Family Literacy System Development

To support community efforts to develop family literacy service systems, the NYS Alliance for Family Literacy has supported the development of eleven local alliances. These local alliances have taken many forms, included many kinds of organizations, and used different approaches to establish a coherent family literacy system that makes sense for the community. The experiences of the local alliances provide valuable lessons for replication as other communities seek ways to address literacy needs.

Since their inception in the spring of 2001, the local alliances have made substantial progress and met significant challenges. Progress reported includes new networks of service providers, increased resources for families, improved understanding by a larger audience of the scope and availability of community



resources, new training opportunities, collaborative programming, and the involvement of a wider range of people and agencies in the provision of family literacy services. Ongoing challenges include establishing strong linkages with school districts, obtaining access to ongoing, in-depth training for providers of family literacy, and sustaining the initiatives.

In one New York State community, initial alliance members began making connections with people from organizations outside those that are usually involved in literacy discussions. As a result of these efforts, the local newspaper editor, the Rotary Club, and representatives of local government joined and became active participants in the alliance. The involvement of key community leaders led to members of the alliance being invited to the city's planning and economic development board to discuss literacy programming and workforce development. Building on the new partnerships established through the local alliance, the community was awarded a second Even Start grant.

When home visitors in a Parent Child-Home Program noticed that mothers could not sign their names, they were able to arrange with a partner of the local alliance, the LVA, to provide adult literacy classes for these parents. Due to the established relationships the home visitors have with the families/parents, they were able to sensitively approach the subject with parents and encourage their participation in these classes.

In a rural area in New York State, the library happened to host the local family literacy alliance meeting. As a result of hosting the alliance, the librarian gained useful insight from the other members into ways to redesign the children's reading corner to make it more welcoming for children and families, expanded the library's collection of children's literature, invited the local Head Start program to the library once a week, and changed traffic flow to make the children's area more conducive to groups.

Characteristics of Quality Family Literacy Services

The Alliance for Family Literacy is committed to developing a system that provides quality services. The following are characteristics of quality family literacy services.

Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children:

offer an opportunity for parents and children to participate in shared learning experiences. Through interactive literacy activities, parents learn to:

- *support their children's literacy development;*
- *connect stories to children's experience;*
- *engage their children in discussion; and*
- *take advantage of everyday activities and occurrences to connect sounds, oral language, and print.*

Parenting education:

provides a positive impact on the whole family by enhancing the relationship between parents and their children. Parents learn to understand their children's development and support family-school partnerships. Parenting education helps to foster:

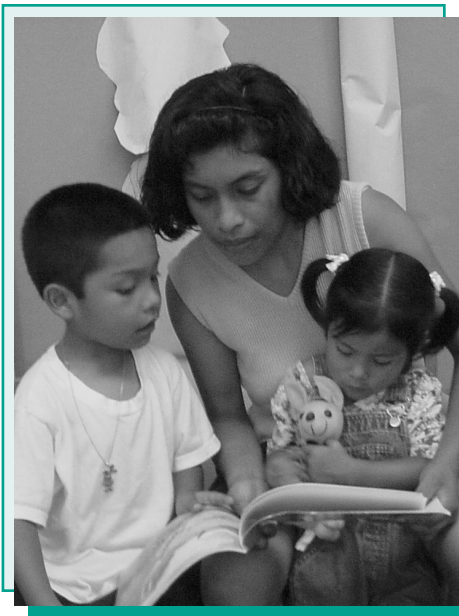
- *understanding of children's growth and development;*
- *positive relationships between parents and their children;*
- *selection and use of quality materials;*
- *support for learning in the home;*
- *communication with school and understanding of school expectations; and*
- *understanding of the parents' role as the first teachers of their children and lifelong partners in their education.*

Adult education:

improves the educational level of parents and the economic self-sufficiency of families by empowering parents to set and meet goals, improve their English language literacy, and

increase their employability. Adult education helps provide:

- *adult basic education, GED preparation, employment skill, and life skills training;*
- *education and training experiences that respond to each parent's interests and needs; and*
- *English as a second language learning opportunities for non-English speakers.*



Early childhood education:

provides children with an age-appropriate education that prepares them for success with school and life experiences. Early childhood education includes:

- *developmentally appropriate activities;*
- *print-rich environments;*
- *pre-reading, reading readiness, and early reading activities;*
- *enhanced learning through play;*
- *verbal interaction with and support from adults; and*
- *a focus on children's interests.*

Service integration:

maximizes the benefits of each of the four components of family literacy. While children

and adults might benefit from each service in isolation, the continuity of services keeps participants in programs longer and provides opportunities for participants to meet their short- and long-term goals and objectives. Service integration includes:

- *connection of program activities through meaningful and consistent messages;*
- *experiences that will change intergenerational patterns associated with low literacy;*
- *co-location of child and adult services;*
- *flexible staff work roles, team building, coordination and crosstraining in each service component for all staff members;*
- *joint planning time and professional development opportunities for staff; and*
- *a strong team effort and a collective willingness to take risks to attain transformational change.*

Sufficient intensity/duration of services:

results in significant gains in literacy skill development enabling children to succeed in school and adults to find sustainable employment. Intensity and duration of services:

- *provides sufficient hours per session to have an effect, and sufficient sessions over time to make sustainable changes in a family;*
- *keeps families participating long enough in the program to achieve gains in learning and improvements in parenting; and*

- *allows for the development of a plan appropriate to the individual's and the family's needs, capabilities and goals.*

Promotion of sustainable change in a family:

has been shown in the research to strongly influence positive outcomes for both the children and the adults. Research has found that children participating in family literacy programs are better at identifying letters, number, and words, have higher attendance and higher competence than those not enrolled. Research has also shown that adults participating in family literacy programs tend to stay longer in adult education. This increases the likelihood of success for the adults since high participation rates are a strong indicator of success in adult education programs. Sustainable change ensures that:

- *the long-term capacity of individuals is strengthened so that they are able to continue to benefit from learning experiences;*
- *there is little or no possibility of family members returning to the original state of knowledge and skill; and*
- *adequate ongoing supports are provided to sustain program effectiveness.*

