

Partnering with Families to Improve Literacy Skills (K-5)

Many years of research have shown that partnerships between schools, families and communities contribute to improved student achievement and higher performance for schools (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Effectively engaging families and communities around student literacy can lead to increased reading and writing skills for students. This is true for families from different backgrounds and income levels (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Family Literacy Services are special types of family literacy programs that target low-income families with young children and are designed to break the cycle of poverty and low literacy skills. According to the federal definition, family literacy services are “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 training that leads to economic self-sufficiency.
- An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences."

Funds to support Family Literacy Services are available through the Federal Even Start program. Under some circumstances, funds from a number of other federal programs can be used to support family literacy services. They include: Title I, Part A; Early Reading First, Title I, Part B, Subpart 2; Migrant Education, Title I, Part C; Head Start; Adult Education; Bureau of Indian Affairs; and Education for Homeless Children and Youth, (McKinney-Vento Act). For more information about Family Literacy Services, click [here](#).

Sample Action Steps

Universal Strategies (for all students and families)

- Invite families to the school to observe how reading and writing skills are taught in the classroom.
- Host family literacy nights at school where students, families and community members work on fun literacy activities together.
- Invite families to watch students perform Readers' Theatre, give brief book talks and talk about book projects.
- Provide families with information about how their child is performing in reading and writing between report cards.
- Include articles on literacy topics in school and class newsletters.
- Host workshops at the school that help families learn various ways to help their children with literacy skills at home, including ways to read aloud.
- Use family and community members as reading partner volunteers and guest readers. High school students, college students and senior citizens are often eager to serve as volunteers in these kinds of programs.
- Use family and community members as pen pals to help students build writing skills.

- Assign interactive literacy homework, such as having students read aloud to family members, go over vocabulary and spelling words, and discuss comprehension with family members.
- Provide material and host workshops which help families understand academic content standards and literacy-related benchmarks appropriate to their child's age.
- Provide families and students with summer reading lists to help them continuing to build reading skills over the summer.
- Provide families with information about summer and after-school programs that focus on building literacy skills.
- Discuss reading goals during parent, student and teacher conferences.
- Place information about community adult literacy programs in family rooms or family centers.
- Invite preschool teachers and day care personnel to participate in literacy-related professional development opportunities at the school.
- Encourage students and families to check out books from the school library to read at home.
- Create reading kits for students to take home. They can contain worksheets that can be filled out with their families and tips for family members about how to help their children with reading. The reading kits should contain three levels of books for students and families – “read by myself” books, “read with me” books, and “read to me” books.
- During events, provide books, journals or other literacy supplies as prizes.
- Reach out to community organizations such as libraries, universities, businesses or theatres to create cooperative programs and field trips that focus on building literacy skills.

Targeted/Intensive Strategies (For students who may need extra help with building literacy skills)

- Refer families of students who need extra assistance in reading or writing to community agencies that provide out-of-school assistance.
- Use family and community members as reading and writing tutors for students who may need extra help building literacy skills.
- When meeting with family members regarding a student's difficulty with reading or writing, ask them to explain what difficulties they see the student having with reading or writing at home.
- Develop cooperative relationships with supplemental educational service providers.
- Provide resources and books in different languages for families who are not native English speakers. While non-native English speaking families may have more difficulty effectively promoting English literacy, most are able to promote literacy in their native language at home. The use of native language texts in the home promotes literacy through transfer skills from one language to another.

Resources

Guidance for the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Programs

Non-regulatory guidance on understanding, administering and implementing Even Start Family Literacy Programs is available from the U.S. Department of Education.
www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/evenstartguidance02.doc

Put Reading First – Helping Your Child Learn to Read

This publication helps families to understand how reading is taught and how they can help their children learn to read. It is most appropriate for families with children in preschool through third grade.
www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/reading_first2.html

Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) Interactive Homework

TIPS Interactive Homework is a research-based approach to increase family involvement in students' education. This approach helps teachers to develop homework which requires students to interact with family members in subjects such as language arts, science and math. <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/tips/subject.htm>

Parent Academy – Academic Content Standards

Parent Academies are free two-hour workshops for parents on topics that will help them support their child's learning and development. School districts, parent organizations and community groups can schedule trained facilitators through the Ohio Department of Education to conduct workshops that meet district and parent needs. A Parent Academy which focuses on helping parents to understand academic content standards can be scheduled.
<http://education.ohio.gov/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?Page=3&TopicRelationID=1532&Content=66290>

Web sites

Ohio Department of Education, *Getting Involved in your Child's Learning* –
<http://education.ohio.gov/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=245>

National Center for Family Literacy – <http://www.familit.org>

Evidence-Based Programs

Click [here](#) to link to evidence-based programs that include family involvement strategies in literacy.

Sources

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