

PART ONE

A Conceptual Framework

- CHAPTER 1** An Introduction to Family Literacy
- 2 Even Start Family Literacy Program
- 3 Planning a New Program

Challenges for a Literate Missouri

- 17% of adults in Missouri score in the lowest level of literacy and face life with few options.
- Nearly half of all adults in the lowest two levels of literacy live in poverty, and nearly 50 percent of adults on welfare do not have a high school diploma or GED.
- 950,000 Missourians age 16 and older (28%) do not have a high school diploma.
- Children's literacy levels are strongly linked to the educational level of their parents, especially their mothers.
- Children of parents who drop out of school are 6 times more likely to drop out than children of parents who finish school.
- There are 29 births to teens age 15-19 each day in Missouri; 11 of these 29 never finish high school.

1 An Introduction to Family Literacy

Family literacy is a term often used to describe a wide array of programs involving family members and literacy activities. These range from a parent and child reading and discussing a story to a conventional program with many coordinated services serving adults and their children. Many organizations offer activities involving parents and children without realizing that they are involved in family literacy. For example, some health clinics utilize waiting rooms as a place to convey oral and printed information on nutrition, health, and hygiene for parents and their children. They may provide toys and books as incentives for engaging in story telling or book sharing. No two programs look alike. Family literacy takes place in libraries, community centers, workplace sites, and jails, as well as in school classrooms. A common denominator for all family literacy programs is the presence of intergenerational literacy activities.

The working term “family literacy” used in this *Guide* is based on the definition of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998. According to this Act, a comprehensive family literacy program integrates:

- interactive literacy activities between parent and child,
- training in parenting activities,
- literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency, and
- age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.

The theme of family literacy is to support parents as the first teachers of their children while at the same time working to advance adult learning and literacy abilities. Programs work with individuals as well as with the family unit.

Family literacy programs provide developmental experiences for young children as well as parenting skills instruction for their parents. Intensive parental support typifies family literacy and this often changes patterns of family interaction. Some programs build parents' literacy skills and extend learning opportunities to include pre-employment and work readiness. Instructional approaches are modified



4 A Conceptual Framework

appropriately to respond to the variety of cultures within each program. Family literacy programs vary from one community to another as each program works to meet the educational, social, and economic needs of the participants and the community where they live and work.

Components of family literacy

The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) best describes the four components of a comprehensive family literacy program:

Adult education basic skills, including life skills instruction. Raising the education level of parents helps them gain the motivation, skills, and knowledge needed to become employed or to pursue further education or training.

Early childhood education. Increasing the developmental skills of children in a developmentally-appropriate setting better prepares them for academic and social success in school.

Parent groups for education and support. Providing parents with an opportunity to share their concerns with a trained instructor and/or their peers helps them learn new parenting strategies and provides support in their efforts to deal more effectively with day-to-day challenges.

Parent and Child Together Time. Providing role models and structured situations for positive Parent and Child Together time empowers parents in their roles as the primary teachers of their children. This also strengthens the learning relationship between parent and child and helps parents feel more comfortable in school settings.

The comprehensive approach of family literacy addresses the academic and non-academic needs of children and parents through adult and early childhood education services. Parenting issues and life skills are addressed by a parent group component. The fourth component, Parent and Child Time, helps strengthen the relationship between parent and child.

Comprehensive family literacy programs that want to ensure success of parents and children provide a holistic family-focused approach, targeting parents and children with intensive, frequent, and long-term education and family support services. Program quality is achieved by integrating the four components to form a unique, comprehensive approach to serve families.

Component integration

When components are properly integrated, the whole of the family literacy program becomes greater than the sum of the parts. For example, blending Adult Education curricula with Early Childhood Education, is a critical attribute of high quality family literacy programs. Teamwork and open, ongoing communication among staff members is essential for molding the four separate components into a comprehensive, family-focused service approach. The form on the following page was developed by a Missouri Even Start program to be used by staff members to help create and track integration of the component activities and curricula.

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION PLAN

Topic: _____ Week of: _____ Name: _____

	Goals and Objectives	Learning Experiences/ Teaching Methods	Resources Needed	Outcome Assessment
ABE				
Support Group				
Parent Education Parenting Group				
PACT/P.E. Infant/Crawler's				
Toddler's				
2's				
3-5's				
Early Childhood Infant/Crawler's				
Toddler's				
2's				
3-5's				

6 A Conceptual Framework

FACT Children's literacy levels are strongly linked to the educational level of their parents, especially their mothers.



The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) notes that high quality family literacy programs integrate activities in the following ways:

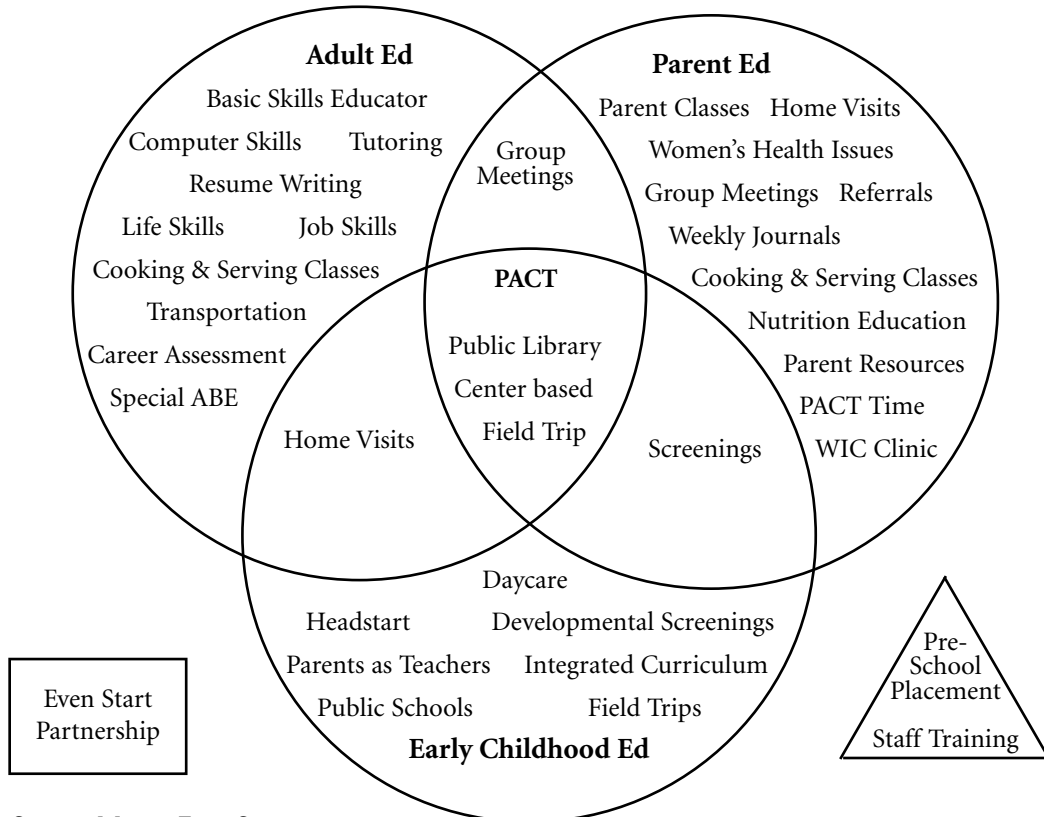
Parents and children support each other's learning and development within families.

Teachers and other staff members work together as a team, with the result that all the components of the program become integrated.

The activities of all four components complement and reinforce each other.

In order to bring together all the services — both education and other-than-education — that families require, the program collaborates with other community agencies and organizations to create a comprehensive, coordinated effort to assist and empower families.

Program integration can also be viewed as a schematic map. A local Missouri program illustrates this point below:




Source: Macon Even Start

Family literacy and the National Education Goals

The National Education Goals have stimulated numerous efforts to improve the quality of schooling. Family literacy programs are one means of achieving the National Education Goals. The relationship between the Goals' objectives and the four components of family literacy programs is shown in the following chart:

National Education Goal	Family Literacy's Support of the Goal
<p>Goal 1: School Readiness. "All children in America will start school ready to learn."</p> <p>Goal 2: School Completion. "The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent."</p> <p>Goal 3: Student Achievement and Citizenship. "All students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation's modern economy."</p>	<p>Early Childhood Education, Parenting, and PACT components provide access to high-quality and developmentally-appropriate programs to prepare children for school.</p> <p>Adult Education component helps to meet the objective that 75 percent of students who drop out will successfully complete a high school degree or its equivalent.</p> <p>Adult Education and Parenting components move students toward stronger abilities to reason, solve problems, apply knowledge, and write and communicate effectively. The Adult Education component also works to orient adults to the diverse cultural heritage of America and to greater understanding of the world community.</p>

continued on next page



By using a comprehensive and holistic approach to education, family literacy programs are making great strides in helping families break the cycle of low literacy, poverty, and homelessness.

8 A Conceptual Framework

National Education Goal	Family Literacy's Support of the Goal
<p>Goal 4: Teacher Education and Professional Development “The nation’s teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.”</p>	<p>All family literacy teachers in Missouri have access to continuing professional development activities, many which are provided at no cost by LIFT-Missouri, Parents as Teachers (PAT), Adult Basic Education (ABE) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). These opportunities provide teachers with additional knowledge and skills that are needed for teaching new subject matter and using new methods of teaching and assessment, and technologies. NCFL, National Even Start Association, PAT, LIFT-Missouri and the state each work to attract, recruit, prepare, retain and support the continued professional development of family literacy practitioners, administrators and related staff.</p>
<p>Goal 5: Mathematics and Science. “United States students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.”</p>	<p>Adult Education curricula addresses mathematics and science as core subjects associated with GED preparation.</p>
<p>Goal 6: Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning. “Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.”</p>	<p>Adult Education component of family literacy programs reflects a number of national objectives. These include opportunities for parents-as-workers to acquire the knowledge and skills, from basic to highly technical, needed to adapt to emerging new technologies, work methods, and markets. Family literacy programs found at libraries and community centers are often designed to serve more effectively the needs of the growing number of part-time and mid-career students. Longitudinal studies of family literacy program effects indicate that the proportion of qualified adults from local communities, especially minorities, who transition from the family literacy program to college is increasing.</p>

continued on next page

National Education Goal	Family Literacy's Support of the Goal
<p>Goal 7: Safe, Disciplined, and Alcohol- and Drug-Free Schools “Every school in the United States will be free of drugs and violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.”</p> <p>Goal 8: Parental Participation “Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.”</p>	<p>All components of family literacy engage parent, business, governmental, and community organizations to work together for protecting the rights of students to study and learn in a safe and secure environment. Family literacy programs are designed to provide a healthy environment and a safe haven for all children and their parents.</p> <p>The Parenting component reflects local school and local educational agency partnerships that respond to the varying needs of parents and the home. Family literacy programs are powerful interventions for parents of children who are disadvantaged or bilingual, as well as parents of children with disabilities. Educating parents in family literacy programs helps to ensure that schools are adequately supported. Parents in these programs are better able to hold schools and teachers to high standards of accountability.</p>

Source: In 1994 Congress enacted Goals 2000: Educate America Act to improve learning and teaching by providing a national framework for education reform. See the National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners (1997) for details of Missouri's progress at the state level.

FAMILY LITERACY IN ACTION

“When Robert was born, I was only 14 years old. I did not know how to be a parent. I was mainly interested in my friends and the things they were interested in. Now, I hate to be away from Robert. I think I am a very patient parent.”

Michele, a teen-age parent, began participating in Even Start when her son was about three months old. Robert attended preschool while his mom attended high school. Michele earned high grades and graduated. She plans to attend college. When Michele earns her bachelor's degree, she will be a first-generation university graduate.

Independence School District Even Start Family Literacy Program 1998 Study

10 A Conceptual Framework

Collaboration

Collaboration is defined as a “mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals that could not be accomplished by any single entity”.¹ Imagine two sets of eyes with one shared vision.

According to the NCFL, putting together a collaboration is just the first step for designing a quality family literacy program. To maintain successful collaboration, you need the following key elements:

- well-established, frequent communication among agencies,
- positive regard between agencies,
- membership that is strategic to the task,
- clear and well-defined mission statement, goals, objectives, and long-term strategies,
- members with well-defined roles who understand the parameters of their responsibilities,
- flexibility among the membership and a willingness to change course as needed, and
- mutual agreement on the agenda for meetings.¹

According to the NCFL some people use the terms cooperation, coordination, and collaboration interchangeably. It is true that the ultimate goal of all three is to bring needed services together for the benefit of clients. Collaboration in a family literacy program, however, is at the higher end of a continuum of strategies for working together.

The challenge of family literacy programs is to develop a strong partnership of service providers who jointly take responsibility of providing family literacy services; and develop new relationships and systems to improve services to families.²

¹ Wyner-Cyr, 1992.

² *Guide to Quality*, Dwyer, 1996.