

3 Planning a New Program

Getting started

To start planning a family literacy program for your community, you'll need to find reliable people who share your beliefs and are willing to devote time and expertise to meet together and discuss the next steps of getting a family literacy program off to a good start.

We know that thinking and behavior are guided by assumptions, which are educated guesses about the nature and function of things thought to be true. Family literacy programs are grounded in important beliefs about families and learning. For example, the family unit is the appropriate focus when planning to influence the attitudes, values, and expectations communicated within a home. Furthermore:

- families are culturally and individually diverse. This diversity is healthy and enriches the community;
- literacy has a strong intergenerational effect. It exists on a continuum;
- all families have strengths; and
- change takes time. It is a gradual process. It is more meaningful and lasting when the community or family as a whole participates in planning and adjusting to change.

When planning a family literacy program examine your own assumptions and biases that affect your attitudes toward parents and children. Personal beliefs also reflect teaching styles, lesson content, and instructional methods. For example, what if your adult educator believes that calculators and computers are inappropriate accommodations for parents with learning disabilities? Does the director assume that the teacher will comply with a program objective to enhance achievement with educational technology or does the director yield to the teacher's preferences? Sometimes program staff members are well into their first program year before they realize that members of their team are operating under different assumptions about the program mission, families' needs, teachers' roles and responsibilities, or component integration. Set aside time to regularly examine and discuss the assumptions that underlie your work with families. You may want to use the list above as a starting point for staff discussions.



FACT



Thirty one of every one thousand babies in Missouri (3.1%) are born to teen parents between 15 and 17 years of age.

1999 Kids Count

Begin by cross-training a team of staff and teachers as well as the support staff of your school or agency. You'll need to balance responsibility for planning integrated activities across the components. For example, decide who shares the responsibility for planning and supervising PACT time, facilitating parent group meetings, recruiting families, observing and assessing individuals and families, and maintaining community collaboration.

Next, set up collaborative groups representing the agencies and organizations of community stakeholders in the welfare of families. Integrated services require strong, effective, and sustained collaborative networks. Begin establishing a network during the planning stages of your program. Public schools, colleges and universities, libraries, social service agencies, local government, churches, businesses and other organizations hold numerous resources to strengthen family literacy programs. Links with local businesses are especially important to prepare parents for the workforce. A curriculum becomes more workplace-relevant and responsive to the specific needs of the local economy when local business leaders are invited to share workplace literacy demands and skill criteria. Similarly, you will want to connect with colleges and universities to help parents make transitions to further their education. ¹

Take the necessary time

This process of planning and working out the details will not happen overnight. Some things will fall into place quickly; however, there are other things that will take much longer. Establishing a good, quality, self-sustaining family literacy program takes time. Plan on at least six months to a year of planning before implementing a new program. Additionally, consider the following questions with your team of collaborators.

Does your community have a documented need for a family literacy program? Specific facts (indicators) you need to find are the following:

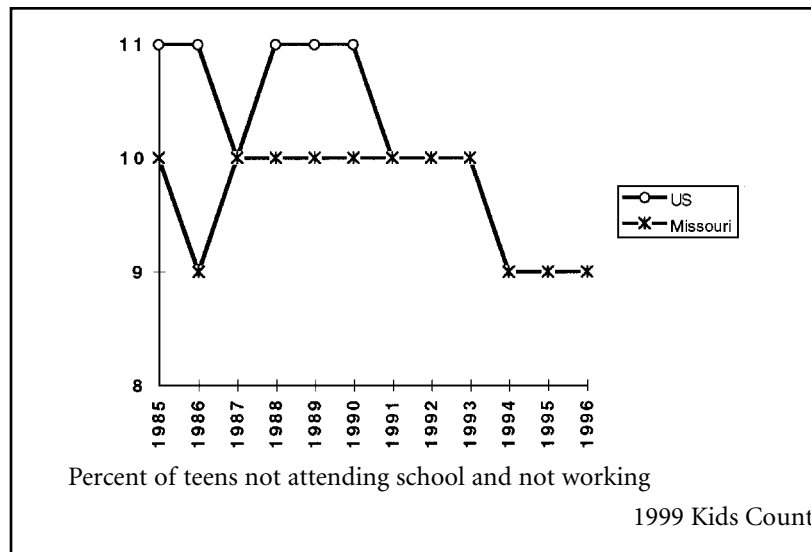
- How many adults do you have in your community who do not have a high school diploma and would benefit from a family literacy program?
- How many adults have a diploma, but are functioning at lower literacy levels?
- How many non-English speaking families are in your community?
- What is your community's current unemployment rate?
- How many adults are on welfare?
- How many single parent homes are in your community?
- What is the current median income for your community?
- What is the business community reporting about their workers?

¹ The Family Literacy Answer Book. Louisville, KY: National Center for Family Literacy. (Used with permission)

- What is the dropout rate for the last five years in your community schools?
- How many pregnant or parenting teenagers are in your community and would benefit from a family literacy program?
- How many children are on a waiting list for a preschool program?
- How many children and their families are being served by Head Start?
- How many are being served by the Women, Infant and Child (WIC) Program?
- How many families are reported for child abuse or neglect each month or year?
- Are the kindergartners entering school ready to learn?
- Are the school districts meeting the current reading standard for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education?
- How many children are eligible for the Title I reading instruction program?

Once you determine that your community needs a family literacy program begin identifying the ages of the children to be served with their parents. This is a big decision because by impacting the adults through education and parenting skills you affect the learning and future school success of their children. You cannot cover all the bases at once. Determine a starting point and plan for the future. Where could you make the biggest impact first? For example, do you have a high number of teen-age pregnancies and parenting teens? Are these teens being successful in school? Who is caring for their infants and toddlers while they are in school? What happens when their child is sick? What percentage of these teens is dropping out of school? How many of these parenting teens have been hot-lined for child abuse/neglect? The findings from your initial action research to answer these questions can guide planning for the ages of children served and deciding where to locate your program.

Or, is there a waiting list for the local Head Start? Chances are the children who are on the waiting list have parents who are in need of literacy services either to get a GED or to increase their reading and math levels, and need to strengthen their parenting skills. Head Start is working with the National Center for Family Literacy to include family literacy components in local programs. Contact the state Head Start office for details about this initiative.



FACT



Children of parents who are unemployed and have not completed high school are five times more likely to drop out than children of employed parents.

Does your community need quality preschool opportunities because children are entering kindergarten not ready to learn in formal learning settings? Is this due to an influx of immigrants from other countries or different cultures? Is English as a Second Language a key issue? The parents of children deemed at-risk participate to a lesser degree in school functions such as parent-teacher conferences than parents of children who are not at-risk. Teachers may observe that high-risk children's homework is not being completed, they have frequent absences, and a host of other problems that compound the probability for school failure. Family literacy is an intervention strategy to enhance children's learning and prevent reading difficulties. Most likely your community needs to think about how to support these children and their families to ensure academic success.

Whatever age level you decide on, think of all possible collaborators who could help you develop a high-quality program that achieves intended outputs, outcomes, and impacts. You must plan and be creative in finding ways to make your community's family literacy program successful. So, once you determine the ages of the children you will serve with their parents, the next step is to start pounding the pavement for collaborators. These collaborators can provide time, space, money, salaries, staff, etc. Consider all volunteers and potential partners. You never know whom they know or what they can provide. Clarify your mission, vision, core values, and expectations for collaboration "up front."

What programs and/or services are currently available for a family literacy program to utilize?

Prioritize and focus on the target families' immediate and long-term needs. If you're starting by only serving families with elementary school aged children you might not need to contact preschools. Notice, we said, "might not." If you plan on adding preschools later, then by all means involve them from the beginning. Specific Community Programs and/or services to consider as collaborating partners include:

- Adult Education Banks
- Senior Citizen Organizations
- Homeless Shelters
- School Transportation
- OATS
- Churches
- Libraries
- School to Work programs
- Welfare to Work Programs
- VISTA Volunteers
- Literacy Organizations
- Hospitals
- United Way Agencies
- Early Childhood Educators
- Parents As Teachers Program (PAT)
- Practical Parenting Partnerships (PPP)
- Head Start
- Title I Staff
- Department of Health
- Child Care Licensing
- Department of Social Services
- High School Counselors
- Area Vocational-Technical Schools
- Area Preschool Programs
- School Lunch Program
- Child and Adult Care Program
- Chamber of Commerce
- Women's and Men's Organizations

What types of services will your community provide through its family literacy program? Once you've identified community resources and people willing to help, start looking for additional support from institutions, government, and/or charitable organizations. Sometimes a family literacy program needs money to fill in gaps that aren't met by other means. We will identify a few programs that can fully fund a family literacy program. This is not an exhaustive list. As we all know, the world changes constantly. New resources, grants, and ideas are always coming about as other resources are exhausted. Information about additional supporting programs are incorporated into Chapters 4 through 7 of this *Guide*, which describe each of the components of a family literacy program.

Funding sources

The programs discussed below can be used to fund a family literacy program. Title I and Head Start would require a fundamental shift of resources to support a family literacy program. Adult Education and Even Start require submitting a grant proposal and being awarded the opportunity to start a program.

Title I. Title I is now authorized to support family literacy. The individual schools within the district may choose to change their focus to include a family literacy concept. A programmatic change at this level requires many modifications affecting staff, resources, programs, etc. Not all schools are willing to change their perspective of reallocating funding streams unless an unmet need is clearly delineated for the persons responsible for program compliance and quality assurance.

Title I Preschool. In addition to the changes of Title I, the Title I Preschool programs had to either adopt the Head Start Education Performance Standards or an Even Start Family Literacy model. This doesn't mean preschools receive more money if they adopt a family literacy model. Most (if not all) programs in Missouri chose to align their program with the Head Start Education Performance Standards because these are nearly identical to what the preschool programs were already doing. The Even Start model is relatively new and to some program directors, it may appear to be intimidating. Changing from a traditional Head Start model to a family



Three main accomplishments characterize good readers: (1) Good readers understand the alphabetic system of English to identify printed words. (2) Good readers have and use background knowledge and strategies to obtain meaning from print. (3) Good readers read fluently.

National Research Council, 1998

FACT



Between the ages of four and nine, your child will have to master some 100 phonics rules, learn to recognize 3,000 words with just a glance, and develop a comfortable reading speed approaching 100 words a minute. He must learn to combine words on the page with a half-dozen squiggles called punctuation into something - a voice or image in his mind that gives back meaning.

Paul Kropp, *Raising a Reader: Make Your Child a Reader for Life*, 1996

literacy model requires a different “look” on how to educate children and their parents. A family literacy model requires parents to be an active and very vital part of the early childhood education program. Family literacy represents a fundamental shift directly engaging parents in their children’s education.

Even Start Family Literacy. In April 1999, the federally-funded Even Start Family Literacy Program celebrated its tenth anniversary. Even Start is often viewed as a demonstration project because of the limited time span of funding allocations. Nevertheless, Even Start programs have documented significant accomplishments affecting children and their families. Communities look to the Even Start Family Literacy Program for the “glue” to hold community resources together. The Even Start Family Literacy Program is for family-centered education projects to help parents gain the literacy and parenting skills they need to become full partners in the education of their young children. The program is to be implemented through cooperative projects that build on existing community resources to create a new range of services. A more complete description of Even Start is described in Chapter 2.

Head Start. Head Start has evolved significantly over the past few years. Head Start programs are now mandated to provide family literacy activities for their eligible participants. Consistent with the funding patterns of Title I and Title I Preschool, Head Start programs did not receive more money to include family literacy activities. Head Start has been expanding in providing additional preschool services, full-day and full-year funding, and early Head Start (infant and toddlers). For Head Start to run a family literacy program successfully requires additional support from other programs and the community. The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) recently received a \$15.5 million dollar funding award to facilitate Head Start statewide efforts throughout the nation to comply with the charge of providing quality family literacy components within their programs.

Adult Education. The National Adult Education Act of 1998 recently changed the way the act can be used within the states. Allowable activities should include one or more programs that provide services or instruction in one or more of the following categories:

- adult education and literacy services,
- workplace literacy services,
- family literacy services, and
- English literacy programs.

Although adult education can fund all components of a family literacy program, you still need to have the community and other agencies working together to sustain a comprehensive family literacy program.

These federal programs can be used as a starting point for establishing a family literacy program. Additional support from other sources such as businesses, schools, and churches are crucial for establishing a successful family literacy program. Chapters 4 through 7 discuss the specific family literacy components by defining their composite purposes, functions, and resource needs.

Educare. The Department of Social Services funds Educare at 17 sites serving 47 counties. Educare provides intensive, on-site, individualized training for early childhood programs and can serve as a resource for other training opportunities, support to providers, and technical assistance.

Planning surprises

After several years of working with family literacy programs we are always amazed at the variety of collaborations, variations of program design, and projected programmatic outcomes. Several Even Start Family Literacy projects which are currently funded tried two or three times to submit funding proposals before being awarded an Even Start grant.

One example that comes to mind is a project located in southern Missouri. In this case, the school district used their Title I fund to implement a fifth-grade homework nights program. Parents and their fifth-grade children came together to learn at school by working on homework. The students could attend only if at least one of their parents came along. They worked together on homework, played board games, and even learned to use computers. The school district saw an increase in participating students' achievement and parental involvement. An interesting unplanned result happened. As the parents became comfortable coming to school, working with their child, and becoming familiar with the computers, several parents enrolled in a local ABE program and received their GED certificates.

Based on the success of these parents, the school district started a family literacy program. Their first Even Start grant proposal was not funded. They didn't have a bad grant, just the unfortunate luck of being in an unusually large pool of applicants that particular funding year. The next year they re-applied and with the strength of an extra year of planning they were able to ask for less money because they had secured greater collaboration and fiscal support from the community. Within a year of the first attempt for Even Start funds, the city donated a building, Head Start jumped on the bandwagon, and the Department of Health and Social Services was located within walking distance from the new building. The school district saw this project as an investment opportunity to raise student achievement through parental involvement. The real turning point was identifying a competent coordinator who believed in the program, was active in the community, and was a leader within the school district. We'll say it again, collaboration with the community is a critical attribute of every successful family literacy program.

Getting organized

Family literacy programs facilitate parents' and children's success by providing comprehensive and holistic family-focused approaches. High-quality programs document many ways to provide parents and children with intensive, frequent and long-term education, and family support services.

After planning tasks are complete, organizing your program becomes of paramount importance. The next four chapters are devoted to the four components of a well-organized family literacy program. We explain each component in terms of staffing, supplies, and training needed to run a quality family literacy program. We begin with adult literacy education, followed by early childhood education, parenting education and Parent and Child Together (PACT) time.

Children must have access to books if they are to read. But books in themselves are simply not enough. Children also need to have a caring adult to read to them and talk to them, preferably every day. In many high-risk families, parents may have poor reading skills themselves and not much experience with books. They may not know how to choose good literature or engage their children in reading. And they may not know how important reading is from infancy through early school years.

Preventing Reading Difficulties, 1999