

5 Early Childhood Education

The challenge [with the early childhood education component of family literacy] is to enhance development and ease transition to school by providing developmentally-appropriate settings for children of all ages from the families enrolled in a family literacy program. ¹

Early childhood education serves the children of adult learners by advancing emerging literacy skills through developmentally-appropriate literacy and pre-literacy activities. Family literacy theory attests that learning begins at birth and is encouraged through participation with adults in meaningful activities. Young children who are living in circumstances that place them at greater risk of school failure — including poverty, low level of maternal education, and maternal depression — are much more likely to succeed in school if they attend well-planned, high-quality early childhood programs. ²

Quality considerations

In helping to assure the quality of the early childhood education component of your family literacy program, the following considerations are essential:

- Physical environment is clean, safe, well lighted, and comfortable.

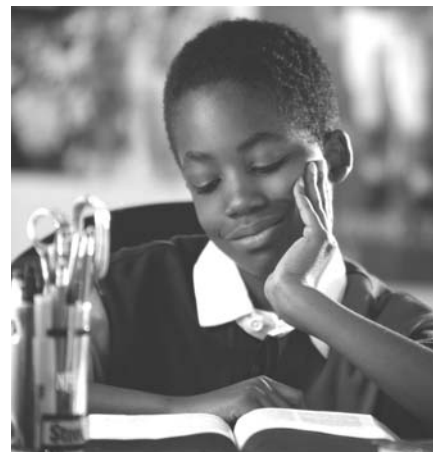
- Smaller class sizes and/or greater adult-child ratios reflect the program's commitment encouraging the responsive interpersonal relationships.

- Program creates and supports positive attitudes toward learning in young children.

- Program reflects commitment to children in the professional development and support of its teachers.

- Curriculum design and classroom environment are language-rich with many opportunities for:
 - interactive experiences,
 - child-initiated learning, and
 - the development of reasoning and problem-solving skills.

- Physical environment meets and, ideally, exceeds the minimum required standards for certification and licensure.



¹ Guide to Quality Even Start Family Literacy Programs, prepared for Even Start Program U.S. Department of Education by the RMC Research Corporation.

² National Reading Council, Preventing Reading Difficulties.

FAMILY LITERACY IN ACTION

Family literacy helps family members with literacy skills, parenting skills, job readiness skills, and it also provides a positive support system. Family literacy is working and now I expect these initiatives to make an even greater impact if we continue to enthusiastically support them.

Former Superintendent, St. James School District

Class sizes will be smaller and adult-child ratios larger than those required for certification and licensure.

Staff members are well qualified, trained in child development, and have appropriate certification by state requirements.

A living wage, health insurance, and on-going training and educational opportunities reflect the program's recognition of early childhood staff as professionals and the commitment to continuity within the program.

What is early childhood education?

Early childhood services in family literacy programs follow the same guidelines as other quality programs for preschool or school-age children. According to the recommendations of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), you should use a developmentally appropriate curriculum, which includes authentic assessment, and maintain a low teacher-student ratio and small group size.

Unique attributes of the early childhood component

There are additional necessary ingredients that distinguish early childhood services in family literacy. First, the daily routine of a family literacy program includes Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time and may have a parent/child shared reading time before nap time, a shared meal-time, and other program-specific requirements. In addition, the physical environment must be arranged to provide space, not only for the learning activities of children, but also to accommodate the presence of parents who work with their children during Parent and Child Together Time. Another special feature is the primacy of literacy-related activities. Teachers provide a multitude of opportunities for children to engage in literacy behaviors.

Another difference in a family literacy program results from the intergenerational nature of the services. In family literacy, the early childhood classroom cannot stand alone. It must be integrated with the other components of the program, and this requires that staff members function as team players. Finally, and most importantly, parents are involved in family literacy in different ways than they are in many early childhood programs. The involvement of parents as partners in the education of their children is a reality in family literacy, where parents and children learn together each day as a regular element of the daily schedule.³

³ The Family Literacy Answer Book. Louisville, KY: National Center for Family Literacy.

FACT



Family issues and the economic welfare of children continue to account for the smallest proportion of news stories, under 10% each. Yet, family and economic concerns are critical to children's well being, especially since families are more likely to be working and locked into poverty than any time in the past two decades.

Salisbury, *Children Now*, 1999

Do you have to start a new early childhood program?

Whether you need develop a new early childhood program depends on current programs located in your community. If you can use one or more local facilities for the early childhood component, by all means do so! Early childhood education facilities should be of high quality. They should be state licensed or meet state licensing requirements while working toward becoming accredited through the Missouri Accreditation Center or by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

What age groups of children will you be serving? This is a big decision. By educating adults through adult learning and parenting skills you will be impacting the learning of the children and their future success in school. 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? Do you want to serve parents with children who are infants and toddlers, preschoolers, and/or school-agers?

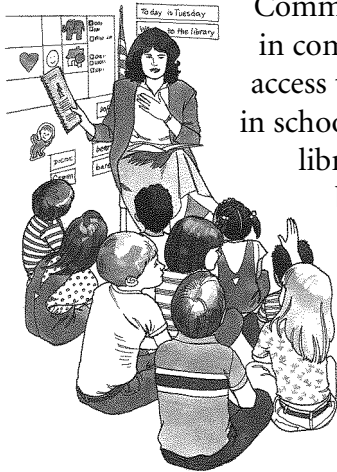
Remember that the children have to be in a quality childcare program or attending school while the parents are engaged in the other family literacy components. If you choose to serve only families with children in school then you will need to plan for childcare before and after the school day, during school breaks, on early dismissal days, and during holidays and summer vacations.

What early childhood or school age programs can you use? It depends on the partnerships established during your planning phase and the age levels of children you plan on serving. Program options include the following:

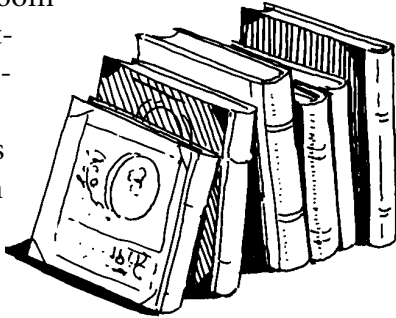
- Early Head Start
- Head Start preschool that are full or part day
- Title I preschool
- Missouri Preschool Projects funded by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education School Districts
- Before and after-school programs or
- Locally owned programs by individuals or by organizations that are for profit or not-for-profit

By using an established program component, you meet almost all of the hurdles required for providing families with quality services. Quality programs have a positive rapport with their families, meet licensing requirements, develop ways of recruiting and training their staff, provide a safe, accessible site facility, food service, etc. There are drawbacks to consider as well. Facilities have adequate space for children throughout the year. They are willing to have parents working

40 The Four Components of Family Literacy



Communities ranking high in achievement tests have several factors in common, such as an abundance of books in public libraries; easy access to books in the community at large; and a policy of investing in school libraries, of having large classroom libraries, and a large number of textbooks per student. Moreover, students in these communities more frequently borrow books from the library and engage in silent reading, and teachers regularly read aloud to their students.



Elley, 1992

in classrooms on a regular basis during the Parent and Child Together time. Effective staff members are trained in the “family literacy way” and are consistently and actively involved in regularly scheduled team meetings.

If you don’t have the luxury of having an established early childhood program, you’ll need to start a program. Starting from scratch is not impossible it just takes time, focus, resources, and well-designed goals. To start the process, first determine how your program will function throughout the day. Where will it be housed? Who will sponsor it? How will you get equipment, supplies, staff, food, tuition costs, etc.? We suggest you talk with other family literacy providers and the LIFT family literacy specialists to get an idea about how to get started. Refer to Chapter 10, Resources, for contact information for LIFT. Contact your local licensing representative, small business organization, city planners, etc. for ideas on how to start.

IMPORTANT: With all the early childhood or school age programs you will be working with, expectations need to be discussed and agreed upon *in writing prior* to committing to provide services. This will eliminate a lot of confusion and misunderstandings.

Funding early childhood programs

Funding in Missouri for early childhood programs can be located through federal or state programs. For each program listed, complete contact information can be found in Chapter 10, Resources. To start a new program or enhance an existing early childhood program, you can apply for the following:

Even Start Family Literacy Program. Grants are made to local educational agencies, not-for-profit community based organizations, and other eligible groups based on a competitive application process. These funds can be used in numerous ways to “fill in the gaps” for all areas of a family literacy program, not just for the early childhood component.

Missouri Preschool Project. Funding is provided for school districts and other providers to increase capacity of preschool children served. Requirements include staff training, adopting a developmentally-appropriate curriculum, providing developmentally-appropriate classrooms, being licensed by the time services are begun, being accredited by the third year, and meeting the minimum teacher requirements.

School Age Child Care Block Grants. Can be used for an existing program or for a new child care program. Only public schools can apply, but they may submit an application for a child care program administered by a not-for-profit entity that is utilizing school facilities, such as the YMCA, YWCA, 4-H Youth Development, PTA, or other not-for-profit entities. Funding up to, but not exceeding \$10,000 may be awarded per site to a public school district. However, a school district will not receive more than \$20,000 for School-Age Child Care programs and \$20,000 for Early Childhood Child Care programs.

Early Childhood Child Care Block Grants. Guidelines for these grants are the same as the guidelines above for the School Age Child Care Block Grants.

Title I. Enacted to break the self-perpetuation cycle of poverty by providing the supplemental instructional services necessary for educationally deprived students. The key elements of the program focus on high standards for all students, enriched and accelerated instruction, strong professional development, coordination and integration of services, expanded family involvement, extended learning time, and early intervention.

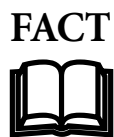
Title I Preschool. Early intervention is encouraged for meeting the needs of preschool children who are identified as having developmental delays. The program requires home visits, coordination with other preschool programs, and activities that are developmentally-appropriate.

Missouri House Bill 1519. The Early Childhood Development, Education, and Care Fund was established from a percentage of riverboat gaming fees. This piece of legislation set aside funding to increase capacity of, and access to, quality early childhood programs for all Missouri families via a combination of grant programs, certificates for families, and an increase in state child care subsidies for child care programs accredited by a recognized accrediting organization. Grant funding is available through the Department of Social Services, via a competitive bid process, to start a new child care program, expand an existing program, and/or enhance a new or existing program through provider education and training, leading to accreditation and/or implementation of a research-based curriculum.

Staffing

Whether you use an established program or create your own, any staff member who works with children must be adequately trained and/or certified in early childhood education. This also true about staff members working with children in school age programs. An appropriate teacher/child ratio must be maintained. The teaching staff is expected to model developmentally appropriate activities (NAEYC guidelines), set reasonable expectations for student performance and even model discipline for the family literacy parents.

42 The Four Components of Family Literacy



FACT In 1995, 27% of Missouri's children lived with parents who did not have full time, year-round employment. Approximately 17% of Missouri's children live in poverty.

1999 Kids Count

Prior to serving children and their families, you need to determine the following:

1. How will early childhood education teachers be paid?
2. How will new staff be hired and trained?
3. How will any new additional staff be paid?
4. What are the program hours?
5. Who will be communicating with the family literacy coordinator?
6. How will differences be worked out?

Training

Every staff person who works with the participant needs to be trained in the “family literacy way.” All it takes is one person who doesn’t understand the essential philosophy of family literacy education to make your program suffer. Training can be provided in Missouri by the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) trainers through LIFT-Missouri. Staff may also attend training provided by NCFL in Louisville, KY. Typically, LIFT conducts at least two training sessions a year. Each staff member needs to attend beginner training *prior* to working with participants and then participate in advanced training within the next year. Additionally, attending family literacy conferences and early childhood conferences for continued professional development are critical for developing “a talented, dedicated and well-prepared teacher in every classroom.”⁴ Refer to Chapter 10, Resources, for contact information for LIFT and NCFL.

Prior to serving children and their families, you need to determine the following:

- How will the staff be paid to attend specialized family literacy training?
- How will training be conducted?
- Who will pay for the training (hotel, meals, time, registration, books, supplies, and mileage)?

Supplies

All classrooms need to be full of a rich variety of literacy opportunities. Literacy learning includes the use of developmentally-appropriate equipment, toys, games, etc. The classrooms are examples of what is “good” for children and their families. This is another area that needs to be designed and clarified prior to working with children. Who will pay for books and equipment, as well as consumable supplies such as toys, formula, diapers, food, etc.?

⁴ U.S. Department of Education Initiative on Teaching, 1999.