



National Coalition For Literacy

Family Literacy Facts

—Developed by the National Center for Family Literacy

<http://www.familit.org/>

What Is Family Literacy?

Family literacy is lifelong learning for the entire family. Parents and children – both generations – learn best when they learn together. Adults and children receiving family literacy services not only strengthen their learning skills among their peers, but also come together to support and inspire each other’s educational success. Adults also learn how to support their children’s education as their child’s first and most important teacher.

Of the 93 million adults in the U.S. functioning at or below basic levels of literacy, 30 million are the parents or primary caregivers of children ages 0-8. The effects of low literacy – dropping out of school, minimum wage jobs, and homelessness – are cyclical, continuing from one generation to the next. This multi-generational problem needs a multi-generational solution—family literacy. Comprehensive family literacy programs serve the entire family by including children’s education, adult education, parent time and interactive literacy activities between parents and their children.

Why Is Family Literacy the Solution?

Consider these facts:

- A mother’s reading skill is the greatest determinant of her children’s future academic success, outweighing other factors, such as neighborhood and family income (NIH, 2010).
- Children whose parents are involved with them in family literacy activities score 10 points higher on standardized reading tests (Sénéchal, 2006).
- A single year of parental education has a greater positive impact on the likelihood of a son or daughter attending a postsecondary institution than does an extra \$50,000 in parental income (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2011).
- Children spend five times as much time outside the classroom as they do in school, so parents and caregivers must be equipped to support their learning (Trelease, 2006).

Who Benefits From Family Literacy?

Families in poverty. Immigrants struggling to learn a new language. Children unlikely to succeed in our educational system. Adults in need of skills to get a job or increase their educational attainment. These are only a few of the beneficiaries of family literacy services. Independent research from cities and rural communities throughout the nation prove that a family literacy solution may be the best way to impact multiple generations. Ultimately, schools, communities and the economic health of the nation are the beneficiaries of a strong family literacy initiative.

What Should Policy Makers Do?

During these tough economic times, family literacy has never been more important or in a better position to provide families, schools and communities with the tools they need to be successful in a 21st century workforce. Local, state and federal policy-makers should:

- Adopt family literacy strategies as the proven method for true parental engagement. Across the nation, there is an increased emphasis on parental engagement and the role that parents must play. However, schools are struggling with how to get parents with less than proficient language and literacy skills to join them as partners in their children's education. Family literacy is a model that meaningfully engages these parents; it's been successfully evolving and innovating for more than 20 years.
- Integrate the provision of family literacy services more explicitly in the existing WIA, Title II system. Family literacy prepares the most vulnerable families for self-sufficiency, by providing wrap-around supports and services that adults need to access ABE, ESL or workplace literacy services.
- Make family literacy a component of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). It is a necessity for Title 1 families. Increasing funds for parent engagement in ESEA is important, but the parent engagement activities and services schools provide must be relevant and meaningful for parents and families. Advocate for intensive family literacy services to help parents become full partners in the education of their children and to assist children in reaching their full potential as learners. Through these services, parents will be truly equipped and empowered to influence student achievement.
- Integrate family literacy beyond K-12. Family literacy is a strong influencer and proven partner for reaching the nation's ambitious goals for college completion across multiple generations.

Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.(2011, February).*Parental education key determinant of who pursues higher education*. Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/3wu2z95>

National Institutes of Health.(2010, October).*Improving mothers' literacy skills may be best way to boost children's achievement*. Retrieved from <http://www.nih.gov/news/health/oct2010/nichd-25.htm>

Sénéchal, M. (2006).*The effect of family literacy interventions on children's acquisition of reading from kindergarten to grade 3: A meta-analytic review*. Developed by the National Center for Family Literacy. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.

Trelease, J. (2006) *Read-aloud handbook: Introduction*. Retrieved from <http://www.trelease-on-reading.com/rah-intro.html#nclbfailure>