

Family Literacy is an Integral Part of Parent Involvement

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The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 defines family literacy as follows:

The term "family literacy services" means 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:

- (A) *Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children.*
- (B) *Training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children.*
- (C) *Parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency and financial literacy.*
- (D) *An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.*

This definition outlines the four components of family literacy and should inspire programs to use a wide variety of approaches to incorporate it throughout the program. Below are examples of how family literacy can be integrated into children's and families' Head Start and Early Head Start experiences:

Interactive Literacy Activities Between Parents and Their Children

Host a family friendly fun event in conjunction with the regularly scheduled Parent Committee(s). The first half hour is an adult business meeting; the second half hour is a family/child activity. Depending on the age of the child, it could range anywhere from learning baby massage techniques, creating lullabies, to playing with toys, building structures or making a nutritious snack. All of this includes language development, varied vocabulary development, phonological awareness, communication, sound discrimination, print knowledge, etc. Programs will want to document this in the Parent Committee minutes as a family literacy event and if necessary cross reference it in each family file. This type of activity could also be expanded by including additional activities parents can do at home with their child. Programs should make special efforts to include fathers in these activities. *Head Start Building Blocks Two for Father Involvement* (DHHS, 2004) states, "to achieve the highest possible outcomes for children, Head Start programs must make every effort to involve fathers in the lives of their children" (p. 4).

Training for Parents Regarding How to be the Primary Teacher for their Children and Full Partners in the Education of Their Children

This provides a great opportunity for programs to practice what is preached by really capitalizing on parent strengths and resources. Parents are with their children virtually every day, therefore, programs can help parents recognize that they are already teaching, guiding,

and modeling daily. Head Start parents should fully understand the child outcomes initiative and the role they can and should play in the process. T/TAS has a newly developed Parent Committee Handbook that outlines things parents can do at their meetings and at home to help their children in the Head Start child outcomes process. Programs want to encourage parents to have positive, meaningful conversations with their children, regardless of age. Call **1-800-882-7482** to order booklets for each parent, or visit www.ttas.org.

Parent Literacy Training that Leads to Economic Self-sufficiency and Financial Literacy

Whenever a Family Partnership Agreement goal is developed with a parent that relates to individual parent growth, there is always potential for a better job, higher pay, and self sufficiency. This component is evident by preparing parents for positive school experiences (GED, trade school, college). It is also an example of modeling for children. However, very often programs should work on helping parents prepare for work experiences. Learning how to dress for success, what to say and do on a job interview, and preparing a resume, are all excellent activities in this area. A wonderful resource in the financial literacy area is the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) *Money Smart Curriculum*. This curriculum highlights a wide range of financial literacy areas such as bank accounts, home buying, predatory lending, etc. Program staff can become trainers and incorporate their efforts with local banks for entire communities. Programs can become powerful players with information on financial literacy.

An Age-appropriate Education to Prepare Children for Success in School and Life Experiences

This area really does combine parents, staff, and children in the educational process. Programs want to ensure that they have the best, and most highly trained, teachers committed to age appropriate early childhood practices. Parents play a role by participating in the screening and recruitment of staff at their child's center (as defined by the personnel policies). Programs can continue to provide teachers with professional development experiences that support language rich classrooms. Supervisors can model and observe classrooms where language, words, and sounds, are equally heard by children and teachers. Teachers can strive towards less directive language and more interactive conversational language with children. The National Head Start Family Literacy Center (NHSFLC) at Sonoma State University is available to provide additional information. Programs can visit their website at www.sonoma.edu/cihs/familyliteracy.

References

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