



# Family Literacy *in Pennsylvania*

A REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

## Why is Family Literacy critical?

Family Literacy is Pennsylvania's only federally and state-funded program that provides *integrated* and *comprehensive* educational services to the entire family. It is a partnership that brings together existing community resources to create a new range of services to at-risk families. Instruction is based on the most current evidence-based educational research. Family Literacy provides a supportive environment to help parents gain essential educational and employment skills to support their families and their children's school success—and to break the cycle of low literacy and poverty.

## Why do we need Family Literacy?

During 2008–09, the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) administered a \$10.5 million Family Literacy program to support 54 programs in communities across the Commonwealth. Services were provided to 162 of 501 school districts, two non-public schools and one charter school. Programs enrolled 2,306 families, including 2,364 adults and 2,965 children. For these families:

- Median family income was \$7,500; 43% earned less than \$6,000.
- 74% were in poverty and 64% were receiving public assistance.
- 62% were unemployed.
- 75% of English-speaking parents were without a high school diploma GED® credential, with 26% having completed only up to grade 9.
- 53% of English language learner (ELL) parents were without a high school diploma or GED® credential, with 44% having completed only up to grade 9.

## What happens in Family Literacy programs?

- Parents learn how to support their children's learning.
- Parents improve their reading, writing and math skills; transition to work or prepare for better work opportunities; and prepare for postsecondary education or training.
- Children acquire the skills and knowledge they need to enter and succeed in school.
- Families have a nurturing place to learn and play together.

## Program improvement and outcomes

Pennsylvania's Family Literacy programs have participated in formal continuous program improvement activities since 2000. In 2007, they began using a Practitioner Action Research (PAR) model, analyzing program data to identify improvement areas, design interventions and determine the success of the interventions. PAR has helped to increase enrollment and time spent in all components, boost educational gains, improve parent-child literacy and language interaction and increase community collaboration. The successful implementation of PAR state-wide and the outcomes achieved have demonstrated professionalism and a commitment to improving program quality.



## As a result of their participation in Family Literacy programs:

- ★ Parents meet educational, economic and community participation goals.
- ★ Young children develop skills needed to enter school ready to learn.
- ★ School-age children gain skills needed for success in school.
- ★ Parents become more involved with their children's learning.

*“As a first-time parent, I am learning more and more how to be involved with my child. I realize and understand that I am my child's first and most important teacher.”*



## Meeting educational and employment goals

Both English-speaking and English Language Learner (ELL) adults in Family Literacy programs experienced significant gains in reading, math and listening as measured by state-approved standardized assessments.<sup>1</sup> The Family Literacy program helped adult participants meet their employment and educational goals.<sup>2</sup>

- 91% obtained a GED® credential or high school diploma (target: 61%).
- 73% retained employment (target: 56%).
- 36% advanced to postsecondary education/training (target: 29%).
- 31% entered employment (target: 43%).

## Preparing children for success in school

Infants, toddlers, and pre-school children continued to experience significant gains in all developmental domains as measured by state-approved standardized assessments. Gains occurred in:

- Language
- Emergent literacy
- Cognition
- Gross motor skills
- Fine motor skills
- Social and emotional behavior
- Math
- Pre-writing
- Music and movement
- Self-help
- Creative representation

In 2008–09, 4-year-old children in participating families showed significant gains in oral language and other language skills such as writing their names, recognizing uppercase letters, awareness of the beginning sound of words and rhyming and nursery rhymes—evidence that Family Literacy is contributing to school readiness.

School-age children also benefited from Family Literacy programs. Their teachers reported that 98% were promoted to the next grade level and 66% were reading at or above grade level.

## 'Parent involvement' outcomes<sup>3</sup>

- 77% read more to their children.
- 75% increased contact with their children's teachers.
- 74% helped their children more with schoolwork.
- 74% increased involvement in their children's school activities.
- 71% visited a library with or for their children.

## 'Quality of life' outcomes<sup>3</sup>

- 67% increased their community involvement.
- 66% learned U.S. citizenship skills.
- 61% registered to vote.
- 53% reduced or eliminated public assistance.
- 46% voted for the first time.

<sup>1</sup> Gains occurred at a statistical level of  $p < 0.001$ , meaning the probability of these gains occurring by chance is in 1 in 1,000.

<sup>2</sup> These figures represent actual state data matches. Past reports indicated "set-met" goals.

<sup>3</sup> Figures represent percentage who achieved the goals they had set for themselves.

*"I've learned a lot from my Family Lit program. It is teaching me things that I couldn't help my children with until I learned through doing it myself."*



*"When the school has 'Parents Café' or 'meeting' I try to talk in English. When my kids need me in their homework, I feel more knowledgeable."*



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Pennsylvania's Family Literacy programs are funded by state and federal grants through:

**Pennsylvania Department of Education  
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