



## Even Start: Addressing Literacy During Early Childhood

The Even Start Family Literacy Program is a national initiative that builds on community resources to integrate early childhood education, parenting education, adult literacy and basic education into a unified family literacy program for low-income, high-risk families. Even Start programs can use Parents as Teachers tools and resources, such as the home visiting component and the *Born to Learn*® Curriculum, to meet federal requirements. Parents as Teachers, like Even Start, embraces literacy as a cornerstone of child development.

The Parents as Teachers program model supports Even Start's three overarching goals to:

- Improve parents' literacy or basic educational skills;
- Help parents become full partners in educating their children; and
- Assist children in reaching their full potential as learners.

According to the National Center for Family Literacy, "A great deal of historical evidence demonstrates the connections between low adult literacy, family poverty and the academic performance of children living in poverty. The staggering numbers [among poverty and education rates] indicate an urgency for family literacy programs that are targeted to the educational needs of parents and their children." (Source: Hayes, 2001.)

Even Start programs partner with early childhood and parent education programs, such as Parents as Teachers, to provide literacy and language development services and assist parents in fulfilling their role as their child's first and best teacher. These programs rely on community resources, along with state and federal funding, to provide structured parent-child literacy activities in addition to adult and parent education. At its core, Parents as Teachers is literacy-focused, introducing and reinforcing research-based concepts of language and literacy during every personal visit.

## Parents as Teachers National Center's Position

Parents as Teachers National Center has long collaborated with Even Start and endorses increased federal funding to maintain Even Start programs and increase the number of families served. Parents as Teachers is an integral part of comprehensive family literacy services and supports Even Start's intergenerational approach, which recognizes the critical link between adult literacy, parental involvement, school readiness and sustained school success. The philosophies of the two programs complement each other without duplicating services.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, now incorporated into No Child Left Behind, requires Even Start projects to include a home-visit component, ensuring that each family receives personalized services on a regular basis. Approximately 250 programs offering Parents as Teachers services are currently blended with Even Start. These programs incorporate both home visits and group meetings and work with parents to serve children during the infant and toddler years, a developmental period that research shows is critical for building literacy skills through speaking, reading, writing and comprehension.



## Supporting Points

- 1. Home visits, comprehensive literacy programs and parent involvement through Parents as Teachers and Even Start maximize school readiness.**
  - Parents as Teachers children showed better school readiness at the start of kindergarten, higher reading and math readiness at the end of kindergarten, higher kindergarten grades, and fewer remedial education placements in first grade. (Source: Drazen and Haust, 1995.)
  - The University of Idaho conducted a rigorous analysis of the Parents as Teachers model and found that the curriculum “offers a comprehensive early literacy program for families and their young children.” (Source: Shaklee and Demarest, 2003 and 2006.)
  - A study conducted with a multicultural group of low-income families and their children, ages 13-25 months, found that the children in the literacy intervention group had higher receptive and expressive vocabulary scores than children in the control group. (Source: National Institute for Literacy, 1996–1997.)
- 2. Even Start provides economically and educationally disadvantaged high-risk families with the tools and resources, often through Parents as Teachers, to get ahead in school and in life.**
  - Approximately 84 percent of families enrolled in Even Start are at or below federal poverty level.
  - 84 percent of adults enrolled in Even Start do not have a high school diploma or GED. (Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2000–2001.)



## Additional Resources

U.S. Department of Education program overview:  
<http://www.ed.gov/programs/evenstartformula/index.html>

National Even Start Association:  
<http://www.evenstart.org/>

National Center for Family Literacy:  
<http://www.familit.org/>

National Institute for Literacy:  
<http://www.nifl.org>



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