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ABSTRACT

A study produced a profile of family literacy in Colorado to provide information on current services and baseline data for evaluating future development. Surveys were sent to 84 adult basic education (ABE) programs, 5 EvenStart programs (a national family-focused program), and 2 programs that were both ABE and EvenStart. Surveys were completed by 72 programs, for a response rate of 79%. Results indicated that (1) 44% of the programs conducted family learning programs in 1995; (2) 993 families participated in family learning programs; (3) 66% of the programs provided all 4 family literacy components (adult basic skills education, child development education, parents and children learning together, and "parent time"); (4) although programs served children from birth through high school, the median age was 8 years; and (5) 50% of collaborating partners of surveyed programs provided funding. (RS)

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Family Learning Survey

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Family Learning Survey

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Colorado Definition Of Family Literacy

approved by the Adult Literacy Commission
December 1992:

Family literacy is an approach to intergenerational learning focused on the family. It acknowledges family and culture as the foundation of learning for the child. Family literacy recognizes the parent as the child's first teacher and the literacy of the parent as crucial to the development of the literacy of the child. Family literacy provides instruction to enrich the home environment through interactive intergenerational learning that models, supports, values and promotes literacy and lifelong learning skills.

Family literacy program delivery utilizes models that provide the following four components: Early childhood and/or school-age educational assistance; Adult basic skills education; Parents and children learning together; Parent time together; Parent support and education.

Background

Family literacy programs have operated in Colorado since the 1960's. However, as an effective means to promote adult and family learning, family literacy has increased rapidly in importance since 1985. It not only encourages the educational achievement of adults and children, but also helps parents provide a learning environment in their homes which supports the success of their children in school.

In the late 1980's, the Office of Adult Education (OAE) promoted the development of family literacy projects in its network of adult basic education programs. In 1990, only four programs had developed such projects. By 1994, 32 programs had initiated some form of family learning project. The OAE concluded that a survey which would produce a profile of Family Literacy in Colorado was needed to provide information about current services and baseline data for evaluating future development. Mary Willoughby, State Family Literacy Coordinator, designed the Family Learning Initiatives Survey and coordinated the survey project.

To broaden the sample, EvenStart programs were invited to participate along with adult basic education programs. EvenStart, a national family-focused program, is intended to improve the educational opportunities for children, adults and families. Paul Johnson, the State Coordinator for EvenStart, distributed the survey to local EvenStart programs and encouraged them to be a part of the survey.

The Family Learning Initiatives Survey was conducted by telephone interview between May 26, 1995 and June 15, 1995. Ninety-one Adult Basic Education (ABE) and EvenStart program directors or coordinators in Colorado were sent copies of the survey approximately one and a half weeks before phone interviews were conducted. Of the 91 programs, 84 are ABE, five are EvenStart and two are both. Ms. Laurie Nusbaum, who completed the survey for the Colorado Department of Education, Office of Adult Education, was able to conclude interviews with 72 programs, a 79% response rate.

This report includes three sections:

- ***Survey Highlights***
- ***Statistical Summary***
- ***Narrative***

Survey Highlights

This survey is the first of its kind for Family Literacy in Colorado. The information it provides fulfills the intention of the Office of Adult Education in profiling family learning in Colorado in 1995. Five facts which stand out are stated below.

- Of the 72 programs surveyed, 32 programs (44%) conducted family learning programs in 1995.
- A total of 993 families participated in family learning programs. They included 1,419 parents and 1,561 children.
- Twenty-one of the family learning programs (66%) provided all four family literacy components: adult basic skills education, child developmental education, parents and children learning together (PACT) and Parent Time.
- Although programs served children from birth through high school, the median age was eight years.
- 50% of collaborating partners of surveyed programs provide funding. This kind of shared responsibility and support indicates effective collaborations.

Statistical Summary

Below is a restatement of each survey item followed by responses. Questions may be modified in form, but not meaning, from the way they appeared on the survey. Questions 1 through 5 and 7 gave information which can be represented by statistics.

1. Are you currently operating a family literacy/learning program?

	Number	*Percentage*	
Yes	32	44%	
No	40	56%	
Planning to begin	14	43%	of "No" responses

2. In your family learning program, which of the following components are in place: Adult Basic Education (ABE), Children's Developmental Education, Parent and Child Time (PACT), Parent Time?

Percentages are based on the number of programs (32) which have family literacy projects.

	Number	*Percentage*
Programs with:		
All four components	21	66%
Three components: *ABE, Children's, and Parent Time or PACT*	10	31%
Two components: *ABE and Children's*	1	3%

Ages of Children in Children's Component

Range of ages	Birth to High School
Median Age	8 years old

3. **Which agencies/organizations are partners in providing your family learning project? See the narrative for more information on this question.**

Types of Agencies and Frequency of Occurrence

Public school districts and programs including Title I	13
Government/public agencies and services	11
Funding sources *(e.g., foundations, Read to Me Colorado, Toyota grant and United Way)*	9
Head Start	8
Health organizations and agencies	7
Businesses	6
Community Organizations *(e.g, Zonta and Rotary)*	5
Child focused programs	4
Colleges *(e.g., Community, Jr. and 4 year)*	4
Job Training	4
Libraries	4
Women's resource organizations	3
Family Centers	2

Partner Obligations

	Number	*Percentage*
In-kind support	24	75%
Funds	16	50%
Sharing expenses	12	38%
Other support	10	31%

4. **Since last June, how many clients have been enrolled in your family learning project?**

Families	993
Adult Learners	1,419
Children	1,561

5. **Have you identified a family learning staff person?**

Number of programs answering "yes"	20

6a. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your family learning program and your services?

See **Narrative**, page 7 and 9.

6b. What specific outcomes are you documenting?

See **Narrative**, pages 7 and 9-10.

7. How can the Office of Adult Education assist you with your family learning project?

All 72 respondents were asked this question.

Assistance Requested	*# Requests*
Program Development	25
Training	25
Marketing Techniques	20
Other	16
Specific Assistance with Current Project	9

The largest category under "Other" was assistance in locating funding. There were five requests for this kind of assistance.

Narrative

This section includes comments on the survey qualifications and on aspects of the survey which could not be captured through statistics.

Survey Qualifications

Length of the survey. Although we had anticipated that the survey might be too long for a telephone interview, most program directors and coordinators seemed able to complete the telephone interview without difficulty. It was neither noticeably complicated nor excessively lengthy. Interviews lasted an average of fifteen minutes for those programs that indicated they were currently operating a family learning program.

Problematic Questions. Two questions created problems for the interviewer because it was difficult to gather discrete information about them. They are described below.

Question 3: Which agencies/organizations are partners in providing your family learning project?

Respondents gave varied responses to the first part of this question because the partnering relationship was not clearly defined, especially with regard to the degree of formality. Answers reflected informal supports as well as formal ones.

In the second part of the question, there was confusion over how to classify types of involvement or support. Answers which were categorized as "in-kind" by one respondent were classified as "shared expenses" by another. Also, respondents sometimes added partners to the second part of the question that they had not mentioned in the first part.

Questions 6a and 6b. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your family learning program and your services? What specific outcomes are you documenting?

Answers to 6a and 6b were frequently intertwined; answers to questions about methods of evaluation of services often included placement testing for learners. The items tested became the outcomes being documented. It seems that 6a and 6b might be collapsed into one question, with a subsequent question being, "How are you monitoring or documenting program or individual successes or changes?"

Program Self-identification. Included in the 32 family literacy programs are five which did not identify their programs as offering family literacy even though they provide programs which fit the Colorado definition. In a few other cases, programs considered themselves to be family learning programs although they clearly were not providing family literacy. This indicates a need for continued clarification of the Colorado definition as approved by the Adult Literacy Commission (December 1992)

Narrative Responses to Individual Questions

Question 1. The first question asks those programs that are not involved in family learning if they provide any kind of family activities.

The most common activities mentioned are daycare, baby-sitting, and informal social events, especially around holidays. In many correctional facilities, books are provided in visitor's rooms. Other answers were family therapy in mental health facilities and giving assistance with home-work assignments to children of adult learners.

Question 2. Following are activities, curricula and/or specific programs used by family literacy programs for each of the components mentioned in Question #2.

Adult Basic Skills Education. Most programs provide instruction in life skills (94%), basic skills (81%), General Education Development (GED) (78%) and English as a Second Language (ESL) (66%). Programs identified an array of fourteen other areas of instruction which they provide in the adult education component. The highest concentrations under the category "Other" are employability/job skills and helping their children learn.

Children's developmental education. Curricula being used include Highscope, Head Start, Children's World Preschool, Language Experience Stories, and Storybook. Many programs report following the public school curriculum. Others mentioned the involvement of community members reading to children.

Parent-Child Time. Family story hour was the most often mentioned activity in this category. Responses about specific programs included: Reading is Fundamental, and Parents as Teachers. Also listed were bilingual story hours, writing in journals, outings, games, and other like activities.

Parent Time. The most frequently stated activity in this section was parenting classes. Programs seem to be participant-centered, with parents determining which topics will be most useful for them. It is common to offer the opportunity to hear outside speakers and

to participate in discussion groups on these selected topics. Parents as Partners was among the specific programs mentioned.

Question 4. This question asked for information about data collection.

In terms of student enrollment and registration, the Colorado Department of Education, Office of Adult Education form is used most often; however, this is frequently in conjunction with a program-specific form which may ask more questions about previous experience with formal learning environments and the learner's reaction to those environments. Computerized data collection is duplicated with hard copies in most cases. Statistics are reported to funding sources and collaborators.

Question 6. As was mentioned in the survey qualifications, the difference between 6a and 6b was not always clear. An attempt has been made to categorize the answers according to what seems the most appropriate classification.

Question 6a asks how effectiveness of programs and services is being evaluated.

Family Services. Interviews, weekly reports, surveys, home visits, activity calendars, exit assessments, and anecdotes are used to evaluate services.

Adult/Parent Services. Interviews, individual evaluation forms, home visits, testing, and competency completion are the means for evaluating these services.

Child Services. Programs utilize testing, home visits, and anecdotal evidence from teachers to evaluate child services.

Community Services. See answers for 6b.

Question 6b asks about outcomes being documented. Currently, family learning programs are tracking the indicators listed below for families, adults, children and communities.

Families. Success indicators include: increases in reading time together, involvement with children and schools, comfort in educational settings, improvement in retention in the program, decrease of violence in the household, and acquisition of library cards.

Adults. Indicators of parent success in adult education include: job acquisition or improvement, achievement of educational or behavioral goals, completion of GED, continuation in other educational programs, discontinuance of public assistance, and increase of self-esteem.

Children. Indicators include: progress in school, increase in reading activities, improvement in behavior at schools, and improvement in tests used as pre-tests in the family learning program.

Community. Information which programs collect relating to community support includes: the numbers of collaborations, requests and referrals, presentations made in the community, and increases in funding and in-kind support. While this information indicates community support, it does not identify outcomes or impact of family learning in communities.

Question 7. Answers about kinds of assistance the Office of Adult Education can offer were divided fairly evenly among the options of program development, training and marketing techniques. Only nine programs (12.5%) requested assistance with a current project.

The most common request was for the opportunity to find out what other programs are doing that works well. This is true both for established programs and for those which anticipate initiating programs.

Other requests from family literacy programs included: materials and training in using them; information on how to increase funding and get more "buy-in" from the community; computer-aided instruction for families; and working with learning disabled.

Sites currently not providing a family literacy program but with the intention to do so requested assistance with grant-writing, coaching on how to get started, program manuals, and training videos.

For more information:

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