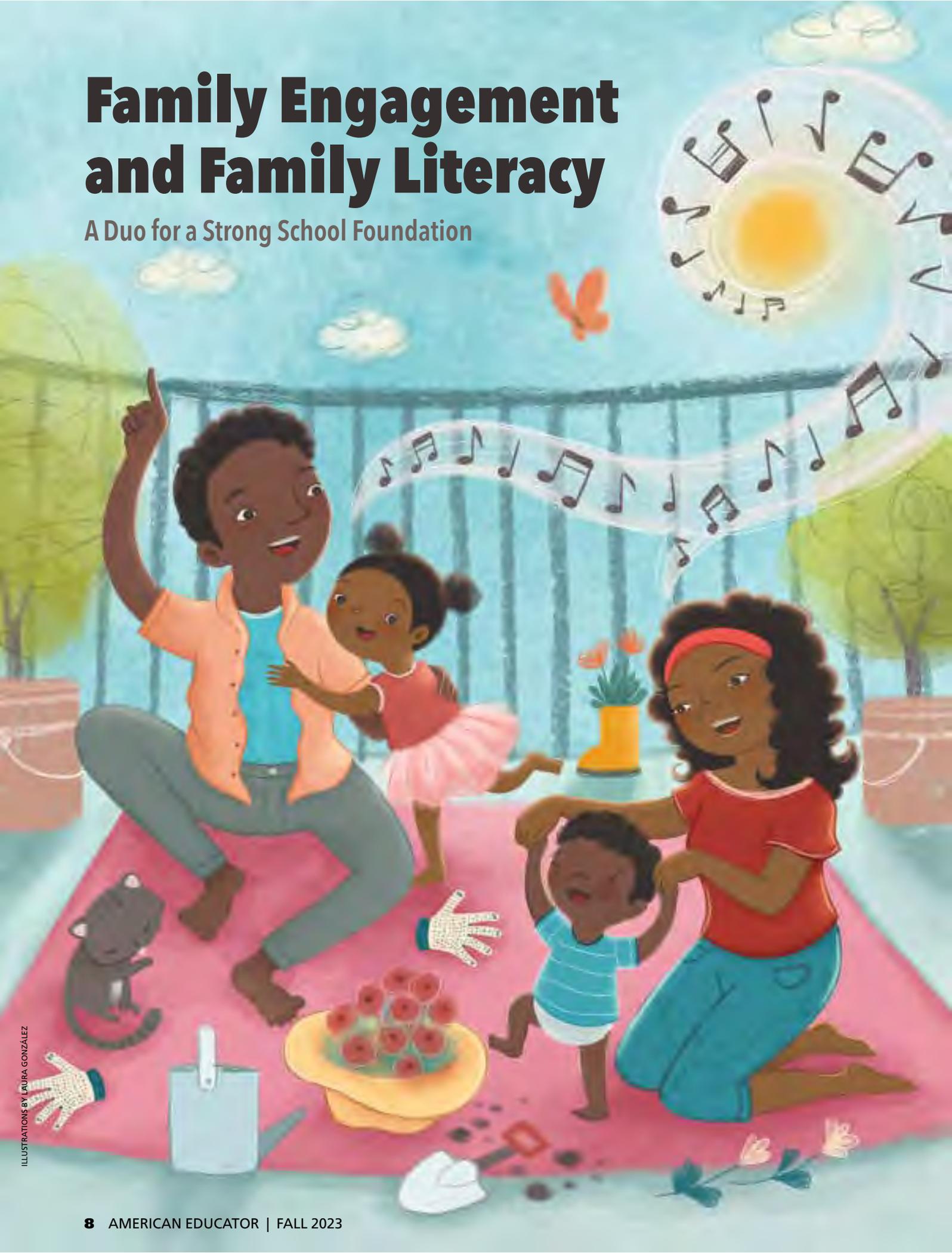


Family Engagement and Family Literacy

A Duo for a Strong School Foundation



ILLUSTRATIONS BY LAURA GONZÁLEZ



Family literacy is about supporting your child’s literacy development by providing a print-rich environment, reading aloud, and using print to spark conversations. This does not have to cost any money. Print is all around us! In the kitchen alone, there are words on can labels, box tops, cereal packages, and so much more. Families can use these items (that are usually thrown away) to develop their children’s understanding of words and numbers. With your child, you can read a recipe from the back of a box, talk about the farms where foods are grown, or talk about the life cycle of plants in your yard or a nearby park. And, with your help, your child can cut out labels and draw pictures to place in a journal, capturing a daily story about what you are cooking together.

As families talk with their children throughout these everyday experiences, they are building strong language skills that will help their children in school. To make sure your child becomes a confident reader, there are six key skills for you to help them develop from birth through elementary school and beyond:

- **Oral language:** listen to and speak with family members and friends;
- **Vocabulary:** learn and use words to convey meaning at a rich level (for example, after learning *big*, your child is ready for *gigantic* and *enormous*);
- **Phonological awareness:** hear sounds within the language (for example, the word *sounds* begins and ends with the /s/ sound);
- **Sound-letter relationships (alphabetic principle):** connect the sounds in words to the letters that represent them (for example, the /s/ sound is represented with the letter *s*, as in *sound*, and the letter *c*, as in *circle*);
- **Fluency:** read accurately and quickly with ease (starting with basic texts in early elementary grades and progressing to complex texts in high school and beyond); and

By Rebecca A. Palacios

Family engagement and family literacy are two of the most important keys, or components, for building a strong foundation for children’s academic success. In the years from birth through prekindergarten—before your child even sets foot in an academic school setting—you are their first and most important teacher.

Family engagement is about spending quality time with your child every day: talking, playing, and asking questions. As you interact, you build bonds and promote your child’s language development. Many of our earliest memories are of spending time with loved ones and doing things together. This engagement can be whatever you enjoy: reading together, taking walks, gardening, caring for pets, playing games, cooking together, or singing together. While these activities might seem more natural with three- and four-year-olds, little ones from birth through age two also need you to read, sing, and talk to them—just as much as they need your smiles, kisses, and hugs. Through these warm interactions, you’ll also be teaching your child how to talk. Listening to you is how babies and young children learn patterns of language and vocabulary.



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This important time between birth and age four is critical for developing your child’s foundation for success in school. In fact, about 90 percent of their brain’s growth happens before kindergarten.

The four Es that are important for families to remember as you play, teach, and talk with your child are

- **Experiences:** do things with your child;
- **Expressions:** talk to your child;
- **Explanations:** answer questions and encourage curiosity; and
- **Extras:** take your child to free or low-cost opportunities like a park, a farmers’ market, the beach, a forest, or the mountains.

- **Comprehension:** understand what is being read and heard (from picture books to classroom discussions to college textbooks).

Below are some examples of fun ways you can support your child in developing these six crucial skills.

These four Es cover many of the bases for helping your child become a strong reader and succeed in school. They include, of course, family engagement and family literacy. More importantly, you’ll spend a lot of quality time together! □

Oral Language	Phonological Awareness	Sound-Letter Relationships (Alphabetic Principle)	Vocabulary	Fluency	Comprehension
Talk to your child about your day and ask them about their day.	Have your child listen for words that have the same initial sounds as you talk about your day, like <i>me/my, rain/run,</i> and <i>car/care.</i>	Look for words that begin with the same letter, like <i>Mary/Monica</i> and <i>cook/clean,</i> or end with sounds that make the words rhyme, like <i>hat/mat</i> and <i>day/stay.</i>	Make a list of words that are new that day. Add to the list every day on a calendar or in a journal.	Read aloud every day, showing your child how to read smoothly. You can take turns: you read a few words or a sentence and then your child repeats you.	Ask questions about your child’s day: <i>What did you do at school that was different? Did you like a particular activity at school today?</i>
Explain what you are doing as you are cooking.	Have your child play a game clapping out the syllables of words that you are using in the kitchen that end in <i>-ing,</i> such as <i>cooking, washing, stirring, grilling, mashing,</i> and <i>chopping.</i>	Write down the <i>-ing</i> words used as you cooked. Have your child clap the syllables again, then talk about and show how they all end with <i>-ing</i> and sound the same.	Ask your child to say as many <i>-ing</i> words as they can think of. Write them down (and you can use this list on another day to clap the syllables).	Read aloud parts of the labels used as you are cooking. They have math (like portion size), geography (where the food comes from), and literacy (so much to read) in them.	Ask questions about the cooking process and the ingredients, such as <i>What happened first, second, third, next, last? What was needed to make this food? Where did the food come from?</i>
Discuss the environment, such as the weather and the seasons of the year.	Have your child sing rhyming songs about the weather and listen for the rhyming words, like <i>sunny</i> and <i>funny.</i>	Write down weather words, like <i>sun, wind, fog, rain,</i> and <i>snow,</i> then sound them out.	Write down new weather vocabulary words in a journal or on a calendar.	Read aloud a book on clouds, weather, or the seasons of the year several times so your child can hear you read with fluency.	Discuss what you read in the book on clouds, weather, or the seasons and ask questions about what you read. When the weather is like what it is in the book, take your child outside to experience it.