

# Office of Special Services

William Windler  
Assistant Commissioner

Anita M. Foxworth Ph.D, Author

November/December 2002



## Research You Can Use

### “Family Support for Learning and Literacy”

#### Introduction

On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. (NCLB) The Act is the most sweeping reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) since it was enacted in 1965. The aim of NCLB is to assist in closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. The provisions of the act are intended to ensure that every student will be meet the State’s challenging content standards as evidenced by proficiency on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP).

One of the four pillars of NCLB is accountability for results. Each school must make adequate yearly progress in reading and mathematics so that all groups of students reach proficiency on CSAP in 12 years.

The challenge of raising every student to proficiency level is daunting. It can not be met by schools alone. According to Epstein (2000), “The nation’s schools must improve education for all children, but schools cannot do this alone. More will be accomplished if schools, families, and communities work together to promote successful students.”

The focus of this month’s “*Research You Can Use*” is family support for learning and literacy. It details ways in which families can work with their children and with schools to increase student achievement.

## Research Synopses

Research over the last 30 years has established the link between parent involvement and increased academic achievement. According to Hall (1999), “Children whose parents are more involved do better in terms of grades (grade point average and test scores), attendance, attitudes, and behavior.” Hall’s comments are further substantiated by the National PTA (2000), Sanders and Epstein (1998), and Michael-Hiatt (2001).

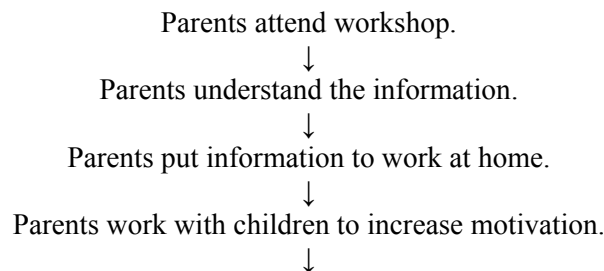
Sometimes, schools have the mistaken notion that any parent involvement activity will increase student achievement. Epstein (2000), states that: “Not all family and community involvement activities will improve student learning, achievement, and test scores.” Activities that provide opportunities for parents or significant family members to be directly involved in student learning are more likely to increase student achievement than others.

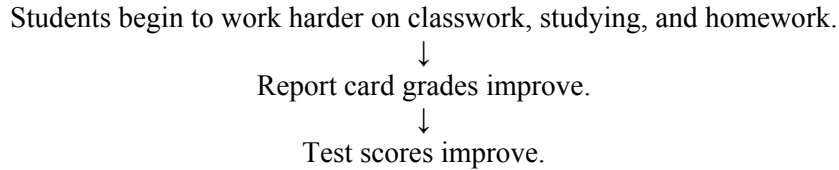
Epstein (1995), defined a framework for working in partnership with families and community. The types of partnerships are summarized here:

1. **Parenting:** Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding of child and adolescent development and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level.
2. **Communicating:** Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.
3. **Volunteering:** Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.
4. **Learning at home:** Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.
5. **Decision making:** Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.
6. **Community collaboration:** Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services t the community.

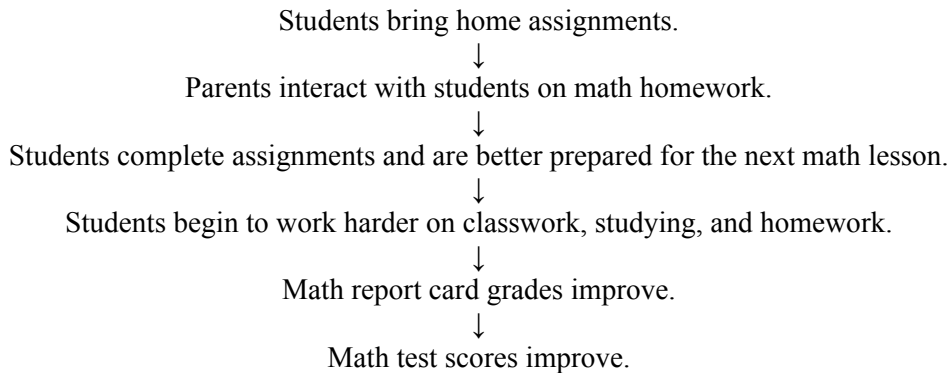
In her latest publication (2001) Epstein indicates that Type 1 (Parenting), and Type 4 (Learning at Home), are most directly linked to increased student achievement. Since schools are in the business of raising student achievement, it is important that they examine working models that will assist in that effort.

The narrative below shows the connection between improving parenting skills and increased student achievement. The illustration is based on an example of parents attending a workshop on child/adolescent development:





The next example shows how weekly interactive homework in math can increase student achievement:



Listed below are models for involving parents and others in student learning.

## **Models for Family Involvement in Student Learning**

### **1. Family Literacy**

Congress felt so strongly about the benefits of family literacy that it took affirmative action to ensure that family literacy was integrated into a number of the legislative requirements of the recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has family literacy woven into its legislation for the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy program, Title I Part A, Reading First, Early Reading First, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (Title II of the Workforce Investment Act) and the Head Start Act.

Family literacy refers to a continuum of programs that address the intergenerational nature of literacy. As stipulated in a number of federal programs, family literacy services are defined as 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: (1) interactive literacy programs between parent and child; (2) training in parenting activities regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children; (3) literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency; (4) age appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.

In the family literacy model, parents and their children come to school together. Parents improve their literacy skills in the adult education classrooms while children learn in nearby classrooms. At a designated time, there is an opportunity for families and children to come together during Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time. PACT Time uses interactive literacy activities to help parents learn how to support their children's learning.

## 1. Even Start Family Literacy

The Even Start Family Literacy program is funded through Title I Part B, Subpart 3. Colorado's Even Start program has these purposes:

- To help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by improving the educational opportunities of the state's low-income families, through the integration of adult literacy (e.g. Adult Basic Education or English Language Learning), early childhood education, and parenting support into a unified family literacy program;
- To assist parents in gaining the literacy and parenting skills they need to become full partners in the educational development of their young children, from birth through age seven, through family-centered education programming;
- To help children in reaching their full potential as learners;
- To support the implementation of the Colorado Basic Literacy Act; and
- To support the Colorado Department of Education's Organizational Commitment and the attainment of the state's Accreditation indicators in particular.

Research cited by the National Governor's Association (2002) indicated that *"the link between a parent's educational support and a child's success in school is well documented. According to the Nation's Report Card: Fourth- Grade Reading, students who reported discussing their studies with a parent daily, weekly, or monthly, had higher average scores than students who reported never or hardly ever having such discussions. Family literacy facilitates this sort of supportive interaction between parents and children."*

Other research shows that:

### **A) The parent's educational attainment is one of the best predictors of a child's academic success.**

Research on kindergarteners shows that as the mother's education increases, so do the reading and math scores of her child (Denton & Germino-Hausken, 2000). One study specifically correlates the education level of the mother with the child's vocabulary skills (Britto & Brooks-Gunn, 2001).

### **(B) Family literacy breaks the cycle of low educational attainment and poverty.**

Lives are changed through family literacy, according to the results of a study of Even Start programs. The study found that 54% of the adults seeking educational credentials received the GED or its equivalent and 45% of those eliminated or reduced their need for public assistance (National Center for Family Literacy, 1997). Family literacy helps create a home environment that values education. Because children spend more time outside school than in school, what happens in the home has a profound impact on how children learn in the classroom.

### **(C) Family literacy helps children succeed in school.**

Children who attended family literacy programs had higher standardized test scores than comparison children in reading, language and math (Hayes, 2001). Children participating in family literacy programs sponsored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs score significantly

higher on standardized tests in early elementary grades (Yarnell, Pfannenstiel, Lambson & Treffeisen, 1998).

## **2. Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)**

TIPS are homework activities that require students to talk to someone at home about something interesting that they are learning in class. TIPS require students to share their work, ideas, and progress with their families. Families comment on their children's work and they ask teachers for additional information.

These interactive homework activities were developed by Joyce Epstein and a team of practitioners at John's Hopkins University. There are TIPS homework packets for math, science, and language arts, for students in grades K-8. Additional TIPS' packets can be developed by teams of teachers at a school working together, once they understand the format and development process.

There are goals for interactive homework in any subject. The goals are as follows:

### **Goals for students:**

- **Increase** students' ability and willingness to talk about schoolwork at home
- **Increase** students' knowledge of the uses of school skills in the real world
- **Improve** students' skills and homework completion

### **Goals for parents:**

- **Increase** parents' awareness of what children are learning in class
- **Increase** parents' confidence in talking with their children about schoolwork
- **Increase** parents' involvement in children's learning activities at home

### **Goals for teachers:**

- **Enable** teachers to design homework that helps students share their work with family partners
- **Increase** teachers' positive attitudes about families' interest in their children's schoolwork

### **Goals for all partners:**

- **Increase** positive attitudes about homework
- **Increase** opportunities to celebrate mastery of skills and progress in learning

In 1997, Joyce Epstein and staff conducted research on the effectiveness of TIPS at the middle grades. Researchers asked the question:

How does TIPS Language Arts Interactive homework influence middle school students' writing skills, language arts report card grades, and completion of TIPS interactive homework assignments?

The findings of the study were that:

“Students who completed more homework assignments had higher language arts report card grades. Students whose parents were involved on more TIPS activities had higher writing scores in the winter and spring. The research showed an increase in students’ holistic writing scores, specifically in the area of organization of writing, development, language richness, and language mechanics.

In a more a more recent study, (Van Voorhis, 2000), investigated the results of the use of TIPS science homework with sixth and eighth-grade science students in 10 classrooms in a suburban middle school. Her study showed that the TIPS students had higher science report card grades and that the TIPS process was effective in increasing family involvement and boosting the science achievement of students who involve family partners in homework.

### **3. School Home Links**

The School-Home Links were initially developed by the U.S. Department of Education through the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE). The school home-links are research based activities designed to help families reinforce the reading and language arts skills that their children are learning at school. There are 100 activities per grade level for students in grades K-3. The links are available in English and Spanish.

The skills addressed in the school home links are based on the National Academy of Sciences’ report *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. The links also draw from the reading framework developed by Edward Kame’enui and Deborah Simmons of the University of Oregon.

In 1999, a project team of teachers from several school districts and CDE staff aligned the school home links to the Colorado Model Content Standards for Reading and Writing. The Colorado school home links are now available on CD-ROM and will be distributed to each district’s Title I director. The links will also be posted on CDE’s website on the State and Federal Grants webpage.

### **4. Family Math**

According to Schwartz (1999), family math programs are based on family literacy programs. She indicates that family math programs teach basic math skills to both children and their parents.

Family math programs are based on a set of guiding principles:

- All children, regardless of sex, cultural background, or socioeconomic status, can learn higher mathematics.
- Students are more apt to learn when math is “real”; when the curriculum is exciting, meaningful, based on personal experiences, and relevant to their lives.
- Math tasks are an integral part of daily life, and families can learn math together as they engage in their usual activities.

Family math programs have been researched since the late 80's. In her article, Schwartz includes a summary of significant findings related to math content, materials and resources, structure, group work, homework, recognition of family differences, and language differences. The family math programs are available through the Lawrence Hall of Science at Berkeley. See the website section.

## Conclusion

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 holds the possibility and the dream of every child achieving. Its focus is on accountability and meaningful action. Every child deserves families, schools, and communities that envision a great future for him or her.

The fulfillment of that dream can serve as a powerful motivator for families, schools, and communities to work together to ensure that truly, no child is left behind. Family support for learning and literacy models are well researched vehicles for making dreams a reality.

## Acknowledgement

Thanks to Mr. Frank Fielden, Colorado State Even Start Coordinator, for the additional research on the effectiveness of Family Literacy Models.

## References:

Britto, P.R. and Brooks-Gunn, J.R. (2000). Beyond shared book reading: Dimensions of home literacy and low-income African-American preschooler's skills. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*. # 92.

Epstein, J.L. (1995). "School /family/community partnerships:Caring for the children we share." *Phi Delta Kappan* 76. 701-712

Epstein, J.L., Simon, B.S., and Salinas, K.C. (1997). Effects of teachers involve parents in schoolwork(TIPS) language arts interactive homework in the middle grades. *Research Bulletin*, #18 (September). Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappan/Center for Evaluation, Development, and Research.

Epstein, J.L. (2000). Home page for Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships: National Network of Partnership Schools. (See the website listed below).

Epstein, J.L. (2001). "School, family and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools." Westview Press: Boulder, CO

Hall, G. (1999). Quoted in Cooper, C. "Beyond the bake sale: How parent involvement makes a difference." Learning Point: North Central Educational Laboratory.

Michael-Hiatt, D. (2001, October). "Preparing teachers to work with parents." ERIC Digest. EDO-SP-2001-2 Available: <http://www.ericsp.org>

National Center for Education Statistics (Feb. 2000). America's Kindergarteners: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Class of 1998-99, Statistical Analysis Report. Washington, DC: US Department of Education.

National Governor's Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices (2002) Issue Brief: Family literacy: a strategy for educational improvement.

National PTA. (2000). "Building successful partnerships: A guide for developing parent and family involvement programs." Bloomington, Indiana: National Education Service

Sanders, M.G., and Epstein, J.L. (1998). School-family-community partnerships in middle and high schools: From theory to practice. CRESPAR Report 22. Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR), Johns Hopkins University.

Schwartz, W. (1999). Family math for urban students and parents. Available: <http://www.eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/digest/dig146.asp>

Van Voorhis, F.L. (2000). The effects of interactive (TIPS) and non interactive homework assignments on science achievement and family involvement of middle grade students. *Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, Gainesville.*

Yarnell, V., Pfannenstiel, J., Lambson, T. Treffeisen, S. (1998). Bureau of Indian Affairs Family and Child Education Program: 1998 Evaluation Report. Overland Park, KS: Research & Training Associates, Inc. for the Office of Indian Education Programs, Bureau of Indian Affairs, US Department of the Interior.

## Web Connections

Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships: <http://www.csos.jhu.edu>

Colorado Department of Education Even Start Family Literacy Program  
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdecare/evenstart.htm>

Family Math  
<http://www.lhs.berkeley.edu/equals/whatisFM.html>

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

National Network of Partnership Schools  
<http://www.partnershipschools.org>

No Child Left Behind Website for Parents  
<http://www.ncbl.gov/parents/index.html>

U.S. Department of Education Publications for Parents  
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/hyc.html>



## ***Upcoming Events***

***CONSOLIDATED FEDERAL PROGRAMS'  
CONFERENCE  
MARCH 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> 2003***

***RADISSON HOTEL S.E.  
DENVER***

***Registration and Agendas coming soon!***

