

Is Family Literacy Achieving Its Intended Outcome?

Excerpted from

Does Family Literacy Work?

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The intended outcome for family literacy is to break the intergenerational cycle of failure. How do we know if the cycle is broken? If parents continue to support children's education after exiting the family literacy program, and if the children go on to graduate from high school, then we can say that the cycle has been broken. If those children grow up and have children who succeed in school and in life, we will have further proof. Do we have to wait two generations before we know whether family literacy works?

No, we can institute follow-up studies that follow the success of family literacy children as they enter school and move through the grades. We can track variables that have a high probability of predicting future school success. Are children entering school prepared to learn? Are they being promoted from grade to grade? Are parents involved in school activities and supporting their children's education?

Partnership for Family Education and Support has been doing a follow-up study of families as they exit Even Start family literacy programs. Our database includes over 450 families from Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

One part of the study asked children's current teachers to rate Even Start children in relation to peers in the classroom. Children were rated in eight areas: academic performance, motivation to learn, support from family, relations with other students, attendance, classroom behavior, self-confidence, and probable success in school. Ratings were done on a five point scale, ranging from "much below other children" to "much above other children."

Without the early experiences provided by Even Start, the Even Start children would be expected to be at risk for school failure. They came from homes that showed many risk factors--low income, high unemployment, and an intergenerational history of school failure. It would be expected that Even Start children, without early intervention, would have a low probability of success in school. They would be expected to perform below the level of most of their peers in their classes (a 1 or 2 on the five-point rating scale).

Results of the teachers' ratings showed that a majority of Even Start children were exceeding expected levels in all areas:

- 69%** exceeded expected levels in **Academic Performance.**
- 76%** exceeded expected levels in **Motivation to Learn.**
- 76%** exceeded expected levels in **Support from Family.**
- 84%** exceeded expected levels in **Relations with Other Students.**
- 89%** exceeded expected levels in **Attendance.**
- 79%** exceeded expected levels in **Classroom Behavior.**
- 68%** exceeded expected levels in **Self-Confidence.**
- 71%** exceeded expected levels in **Probable Success in School.**

Teachers also rated Even Start parents in relation to other classroom parents in four areas: home-school communication, attendance at school events, attendance at parent-teacher conferences, and parents' level of comfort with school personnel. Ratings were done on a five point scale, ranging from "much below other parents" to "much above other parents."

Without the influence of Even Start, it would be expected that most Even Start parents would have shown low ratings (a 1 or 2 on the five-point scale). There was an intergenerational history of school failure in the families. Before participation in Even Start, parents were uncomfortable in school settings and reluctant to talk to teachers.

Results of the teachers' ratings, however, showed that a majority of the Even Start parents exceeded expectations in each of the assessed areas.

- 76%** exceeded expected levels in **Home School Communication.**
- 65%** exceeded expected levels in **Attendance At School Events.**
- 71%** exceeded expected levels in **Attendance at Teacher Conferences.**
- 72%** exceeded expected levels in **Comfort Level With School Personnel.**