

Connecticut Even Start

Even Start is a free program that has helped hundreds of families achieve three National Even Start goals:

- For parents to attain their educational goals, (high school diploma, GED, ESL, basic skills , External Diploma) and be responsible members of their community
- For children to make progress toward educational goals and enter school ready to learn
- For parents to become full partners in their child's education

Adult Education

Parents work to complete their personal educational goals!

Guidance counselors help students develop an educational plan.

Programs include:

- Credit Diploma Program (CDP)
- English as a Second Language (ESL)
- GED
- External Diploma Program (EDP)
- Basic Skills (ABE)



Early Childhood Education

While parents attend adult education classes, children are cared for by qualified teachers in a warm and inviting environment!

- High quality NAEYC accredited programs.
- Uses the nationally acclaimed *Creative Curriculum*
- Children are assessed for developmental growth and progress toward goals

Parenting Education

Parents meet as a group, two afternoons a week.

Presentations and discussions occur on topics such as:

- Family cultures and values
- Child development
- Dealing with stress
- Discipline
- Health and Nutrition
- Community resources

Interactive Literacy and Home Visiting

Time is put aside each school day for parents to share meaningful activities with their children. Activities include:

- Reading books
- Art projects
- Cooking
- Music and Movement
- Field trips

The home visitor helps families bring learning from the classroom into their daily lives.

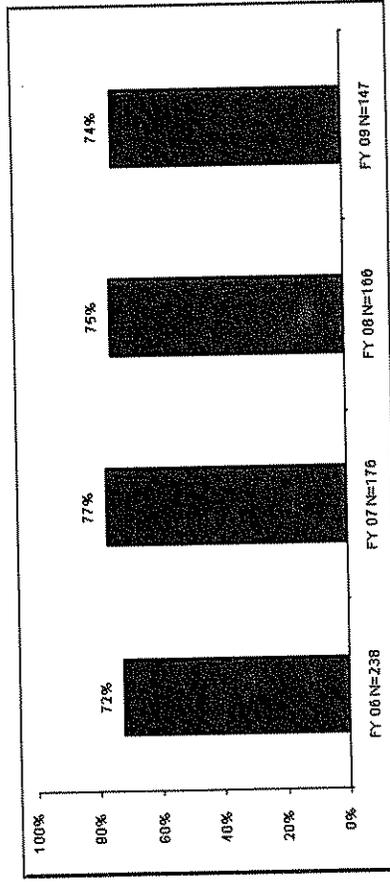
Program Report Card: State Department of Education / Even Start Family Literacy Program

Program Purpose: Even Start (Title 1, Part II, federal initiative) helps break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by improving the educational opportunities of families most in need by combining early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education and parenting education into a unified family literacy program.

Contributes to Population Quality of Life Result: Even Start contributes to the population goal of ensuring that all children are healthy and ready to learn by age 5 by simultaneously providing services for parents and young children to help parents improve their literacy or basic educational skills; to help parents become full partners in educating their children; to assist children in reaching their full potential as learners; and to assist families in moving toward self-sufficiency and out of poverty.

Although we see solid gains in Even Start, the number of participants continues to decrease due to federal budget cuts. The state's federal allocation has decreased over 70 percent from \$1,615,000 in 2005-06 to \$442,556 in 2009-10. Level federal funding is anticipated for 2010-11. In order to accommodate rising program costs and maintain fidelity to the federal program requirements, the number of participants will continue to decline in 2010-11.

Performance Measure 1: Percent of Even Start children meeting standards in reading/reading readiness skills.



Story behind the baseline:

Even Start program performance data show that between 65 percent to 77 percent of the children met or exceeded standards in reading readiness for their age group (birth to 6). Children participate an average of 69 hours per month in early childhood classrooms. While there was a slight decrease in the number of children meeting or exceeding standards in reading/reading readiness, the program saw a decrease in the number of children served and an increase in the number of children with special needs. The trend in program performance is considered stable. Reading/reading readiness skills are assessed with the following measures, depending on the child's age: the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, the CT Preschool Assessment Framework, the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), the Peabody

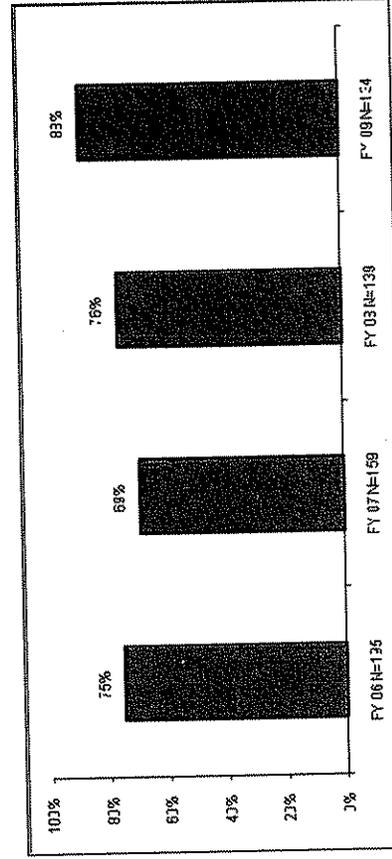
Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), grade promotion, Concepts About Print, and the Developmental Reading Assessment.

Although research data are not available for Connecticut, research from other states indicates that children who receive Even Start services outperform children who do not participate in Even Start. These studies suggest that Even Start children score significantly higher on measures of reading readiness and are twice as likely as non-Even Start children to be reading at or above grade level.

Proposed actions to turn the curve:

Early childhood classrooms will complete a second round of Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale or the Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale in FY 10. A response to the results will be required from each program on their program improvement plan.

Performance Measure 2: Percent of Even Start parents showing significant learning gains or earning a high school diploma.



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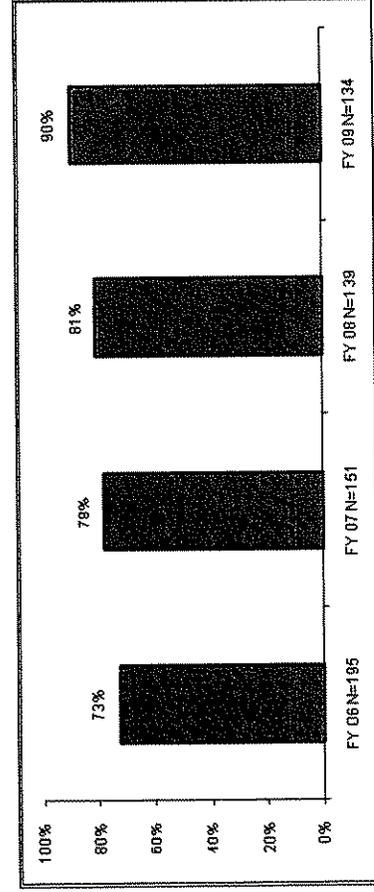
Over the past four years, adults in Even Start have consistently made significant gains. Even Start adults average 39 hours of adult education per month.

Compared to the entire population of adult education students, Even Start participants make impressive gains on measures of high school completion and English language acquisition. The percent of Even Start parents attaining a measurable educational outcome has been significantly greater than that of all adult education participants statewide by about 25 percentage points annually.ⁱⁱ

Proposed actions to turn the curve:

SDE will continue to increase the percentage of Even Start children and adults meeting the performance measure by reviewing and revising the standard to ensure that it is challenging; continued monitoring (compliance reviews, local evaluations, state performance indicator monitoring, etc.); and professional development.

Performance Measure 3: Percent of Even Start parents demonstrating gains in family literacy skills.



Story Behind the Baselines:

Results show that in the past four years, three-quarters to 90 percent of the parents were observed to learn and apply parenting skills related to family literacy. The trend is improving showing an increase of 9 percent from FY 08 to FY 09. Parents participate in parenting education classes, interactive literacy activities (with their child), and home visits 17 hours per month.

Evaluation in FY 09 focused on parenting classes and interactive literacy activities. Results show that programs demonstrate planned and purposeful lessons and activities in book reading, language development, and reading readiness. Parents are guided by staff and encouraged to apply language and literacy skills regularly with their children in the classroom and at home; thereby, preparing their child with the skills that support reading and learning and setting a strong foundation to link home to school. Feedback on the each program's classes was provided. Additionally, Even Start staff participated in an SDE sponsored professional development workshop, 'Let's Talk' to develop and reinforce language and literacy instruction in working with parents.

Proposed actions to turn the curve:

As a continuation of FY 09's activities, SDE will provide additional professional development for all staff in FY 10 to strengthen parenting and interactive literacy across all program components. Additionally, programs will be completing a review of their parenting education curriculum.

ⁱ Link, D. E. and Weirauch, D. M. (2005). Questioning the validity of the evidence against family literacy programming: A critical analysis of the National Even Start Evaluations. Literacy Harvest/Family Literacy Forum, 12, 33-38. New York: Literacy Assistance Center.

ⁱⁱ Source: Connecticut Adult Reporting System (CARS)

Even Start Family Literacy of Connecticut

Parents are the child's first teacher. It is widely recognized that, from birth, children are influenced by the actions, attitudes and sensibilities of the adults surrounding them. Parents, extended family and early caregivers provide a foundation on which the child will grow and develop. Whether this foundation is stable or insecure, all new experiences are built on this base. We know that early experiences and the environment in which infants, toddlers and children are immersed leave a lasting effect and are documented predictors of future success

In a perfect world, the foundation upon which all children grow and develop would be secure, nurturing and filled with the rich experiences that contribute to solid developmental growth. However, as stated, social and economic challenges often provide barriers to a secure family footing. For many of the ***most- in- need parents, a lack of education and the problem of illiteracy obstruct their personal and economic success, limit the pre-literacy skills of their children and contribute to a cycle of poverty that repeats through future generations and is of community concern.***

It is documented that the educational level of the mother is a predictor of her economic success and the future academic success of her child. In order to support the developing brain and pre-literacy skills of low-income infants and toddlers, the educational level and supports in the life of the mother and father must be addressed. Comprehensive family literacy programs provide a vehicle for helping parents support the optimal growth and development of their children as they work towards self-sufficiency. Reaching families at the earliest point of intervention, when their children are infants and toddlers, allows for optimum learning opportunities for both parent and child.

The Even Start Family Literacy Program includes wrap- around components that immerse families in an environment of literacy, including:

- ***High quality education, with measurable results, for both parent and child.*** Educational opportunities for most- in- need parents, including, basic skills, GED, high school completion, vocational training, ESL instruction, and possibly, access to Connecticut's community colleges and universities. Adult education is co-located with high quality early education for their infants and toddlers, allowing parents to increase their educational level and workplace skills while their children are receiving a sound, language- rich foundation in pre- literacy skills. Needed early intervention for children is recognized and services received during this critical phase of brain development.
- ***Parenting education.*** Parents receive the knowledge and peer support necessary to promote the optimal growth and development of their child.

For more information, documentation or questions, please contact
Liz Fraser, Early Childhood Coordinator, Middletown Even Start
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- *Mentored inter-generational literacy activities.* Concepts and activities discussed in parenting classes are applied in a safe, non-judgmental learning environment, the early childhood classroom.
- *Home visits that connect school to the home.* Families receive regular visits that bring books and literacy activities into the home, ensuring that parents have resources they need for success.
- *Community collaborations.* Connecting parents with community resources is essential in providing support to help families to overcome barriers to participation. Assistance, from state and local workforce development agencies and social service agencies,(both financial and informational), supports families as they are immersed in family education and provides needed links to successfully transition into the workforce, higher education and quality early childhood programs.

Even Start Family Literacy programs provide a “family learning bridge”, emphasizing the important connection between parent learning and early childhood growth and development .Only by providing this learning bridge can we hope to solve the problem of illiteracy and the cycle of poverty in our communities.

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This article is featured on the School Chapters website at www.schoolchapters.com

School Chapters provides a tool to help early childhood programs develop their NAEYC portfolios.

A Quality Success Story:

Featured Program: Middletown Even Start

At School Chapters, we are dedicated to advancing quality in Early Childhood Education with technology. We believe that education has the power to transform lives and we are looking forward to sharing quality success stories here on the site going forward.

Our first featured success story is that of Middletown Even Start in Middletown, CT. Middletown Even Start was recently re-accredited while using School Chapters online solutions.

What is it?

Middletown Even Start is a part of the federally subsidized **Even Start** program. The stated Even Start goal is to “help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by improving the educational opportunities of the nation’s low-income families through a unified family literacy program that integrates early childhood education, adult literacy and adult basic education and parenting education.”

Community Impact

At Middletown Event Start, part of Middletown Adult Education, adults are provided with access to education with opportunities to earn a GED a High School Diploma or learn English as a second language—all while their children are provided with access to a quality early childhood program. As Elizabeth Fraser, Even Start’s Early Childhood Education Coordinator and a veteran in the NAEYC process put it, “The first step in breaking the cycle of poverty is education. Providing the opportunity for parents and children to learn together and for parents to be part of the educational experience of their young child is essential to future success.”

“Parents come from a variety of backgrounds but all are low- income and need to improve their skill level in order to make positive changes in their lives and the lives of their children ”

The Education professionals at Even Start work hard to develop trusting relationships with adults in the program. At Even Start, adults are mentored in the benefits of interactive literacy with children and learn additional best practices through a Sociology of Family Class. The Child Care center is required to go through NAEYC accreditation, the gold standard of quality in Early Childhood Education. Even Start professionals also make visits at the home to provide literacy enrichment with books and resources for the families.

The results of the program are evidenced throughout the community. **A---** who is now employed as a bank teller, is just one example of the program’s success. **A---** was a struggling single parent with no high school diploma and no real way to provide for her then toddler. She began attending Even Start, and credits the professionals there with making a significant difference in her and her child’s lives. With the help of Even Start, she completed her degree,

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while knowing her child was thriving in a NAEYC accredited center in the same adult education facility. After A...received her diploma, the Even Start staff provided encouragement and a reference when she applied for a job at a local bank. A few months after starting her job, she was asked to donate to United Way. Hesitant at first because any additional costs were still a burden, she was immediately swayed when she realized that the local Even Start program received funds from the United Way. She committed to contribute weekly to the United Way, making clear that if it were not for Even Start, she and her son would still be in poverty.

A community study conducted by Wesleyan University students entitled , *Measuring Parental Involvement in Education*, highlighted the importance of programs like Even Start. It concluded, "This study has shown positive effect of Even Start on measurements of parental involvement in children's education, which has been shown in other studies to have positive effects on children's achievements"

"When parents expectations rise for themselves and their children, that's when we begin to end the cycle of school drop-outs and poverty. When parents learn what quality is, they want it for themselves and their children."—Fraser.

As one graduate expressed, "I want my son to have the best of educations because I don't want him to have to struggle. Getting an early start on his education will help him to achieve a better life. My son is very bright and he needs to be in school to expand and stimulate his mind. I want him to grow up to be a positive member of society."

The Path to NAEYC Accreditation

Middletown Even Start was recently re-accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Elizabeth Fraser, the Early Childhood Education Coordinator for Even Start, has participated in the NAEYC process for more than 15 years.

"While going through accreditation is an arduous and sometimes daunting process, it does have positive outcomes. By aligning early childhood work to the NAEYC standards, educators are able to methodically and analytically describe what they intuitively may already be doing and correct weak points. We have an added benefit. Because our parents are on site they are truly involved in the accreditation process and learn what it means to be a quality program. When the time comes for their child to be placed in a new program they will know the meaning of quality and will look for that in a program.

"Using School Chapters during the self-study really made the task of portfolio building more efficient and manageable. Throughout the process we were impressed with the quality of the product and the phenomenal customer service. It was also reasonably priced for our center. Even our validator thought School Chapters was easy to use.

While we always referenced the NAEYC site, we were relieved to know that School Chapters had filtered all the criteria behind the scenes for each class type. The color-coded reporting made it easy for us all to track where we were in the process. Having the ability to view the portfolios online and as printable files with a table of contents just made the process so much more organized and alleviated stress from our teachers so they could stay focused on the children.

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At a few different points in the process we made requests for different features to be modified or included, and were thrilled to see how School Chapters implemented changes based on our feedback. They are really dedicated to supporting clients.”

Future

While the mark of accreditation indicates that a program has achieved goals and met certain standards, the actual quality of a program is felt throughout the community and leaves an impact on children indefinitely. The impact of the Even Start program is especially poignant because the Even Start model provides access to quality education for the entire family. Unfortunately the future of this program is in jeopardy. Despite their strong results, the federal subsidy that supports this valuable program is slated for elimination. Hopefully, the value of family education will be recognized and Even Start will continue and grow.

To learn more about Middletown Even Start, or Even Start Programs in your area go to http://www.maect.org/content/Family_Learning_Even_Start.asp