

The Even Start directors would like to express their support for the work of the Early Childhood Planning Team and the progress that they made toward unraveling an awkward and uncoordinated array of early childhood programs. We believe that the Office of Early Childhood will provide an organized and intentional system that will benefit all of Connecticut's children, families and early educators.

However, there are several programs that are notably excluded from the plan and have, in fact, been de-funded in the Governor's budget. One of these is the CT Even Start program.

A 2010 *National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development* study indicates that "a mother's reading scores and average neighborhood levels of income accounted for the largest proportion of inequality in children's achievement."

Yet, the 2009-2011 *US Census, American Community Survey* reports that across Connecticut, an average of 25% of "unmarried women who had a birth in the last 12 months" had less than a high school education. In Middletown the percentage is 40% .

Even Start provides an intensive dual- generational learning model that addresses the needs of adult learners and their children. The components include adult education, infant/ toddler early education and of great importance, the time and opportunity for parents to learn and practice sound, positive parent/ child interactions that promote the strong developmental growth of their children. In fact, the comprehensive Even Start program model is becoming the standard bearer for other dual- generational programs, not just in Connecticut, but across the country. However, in this climate of challenging budgets and difficult decisions, the bottom line is our results.

For more information, documentation or questions please contact Elizabeth Fraser
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We have a rigorous evaluation process that measures adult outcomes, children's outcomes and "parenting towards literacy" outcomes. Included in our testimony is the *Prevention Report to the Child Poverty and Prevention Council*. It gives a brief overview of the program and the 2012 RBA results. For year 2012, 83% of adults and 81% of children showed significant learning gains. 88% of parents showed significant progress in their "literacy parenting" practices.

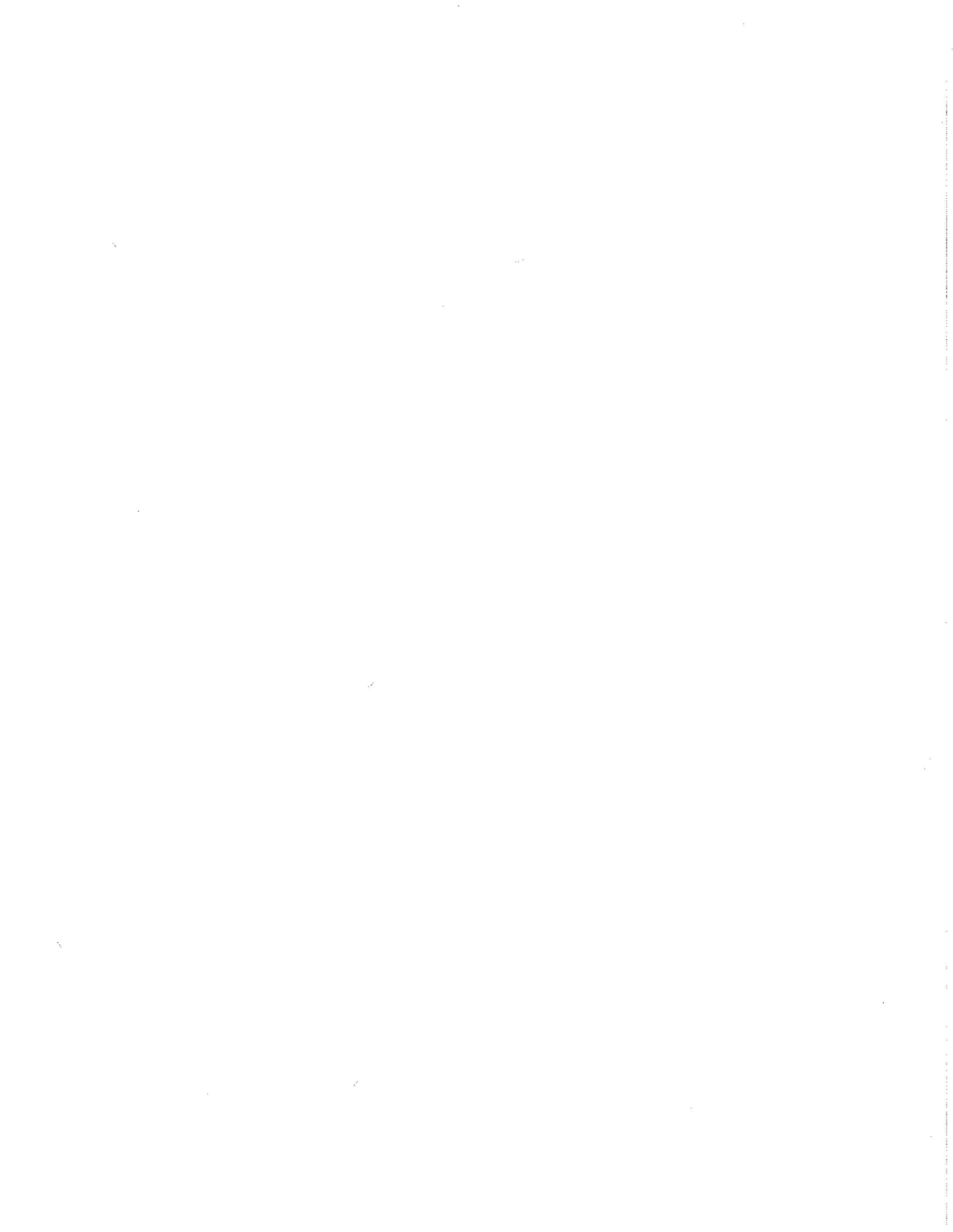
As you will note, we have consistently solid outcomes in all measured areas. We believe that much of this success can be attributed to focusing on the needs of parents and children together as a family, rather than separating adult and child into individual unconnected programs.

Because of the Even Start dual-generational approach, results have direct impact on our communities with both immediate and long term results. There is an immediate community benefit when parents graduate, are employable, are better able to provide for their families and no longer need as many social services. In the long term, with a solid early start and more intentional parental involvement, their children are more successful in school.

To further research the effects of Even Start, we applied for and received a Newman's Own grant. The grant enabled us to commission a Return on Investment Study which is being conducted by the Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis. (Dr.'s Fred Carstensen and Kate Parr) Much of the data has been collected and the final results will soon be available for distribution. Early data is promising.

In closing, our results show that Even Start is a valuable program in Connecticut's educational toolbox. It will easily fit into an early childhood system that supports children and families. With the documented successes of both parents and children, Even Start should not only be included in a comprehensive plan but allowed to grow into other Connecticut communities.

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Additional information:

- Even Start is required to identify the “most in need and hardest to serve” families and targets a population that is not served by any other comprehensive family learning program; they are of low income with one adult in need of adult education and at least one child age 6 weeks to three years.
- To ensure we serve the families who are most in need, applicants complete a weighted eligibility questionnaire that quantifies the need for the program based on barriers to education including: income level, educational level of the parent, the need for infant/toddler care, housing /food insecurity, social service involvement (DCF, DSS), family structure/support, agency referrals and disabilities.
- Our mothers and fathers are adult learners, an underserved and often invisible population. Most of our participants left high school before becoming pregnant. With only several exceptions, our families do not qualify to attend public high schools; their options to complete high school are limited.
- Many families have come from other countries and need to learn English in order to be employable and to be a strong partner in their children’s education. Many of the English Language Learners have not finished high school in their native country.
- The Even Start early childhood focus is on infants and toddlers. We choose to serve this community because there are very few affordable infant toddler programs with very limited availability and also, as research shows, the earlier parents begin to model strong language and provide positive interactions, the stronger the child’s development.
- We are recognized within our communities; in fact Middletown Even Start was recently honored with the *Middlesex United Way Community Impact Award*.

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Even Start Family Literacy Of Connecticut

A State of Connecticut Family learning Program

Purpose: To provide intensive family literacy services that help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by improving the educational opportunities of low income families through programs that integrate early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education and parenting education into a unified family literacy program.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Even Start is a unique family learning program that promotes the academic achievement of children and adults through a two-generation education model. The purpose of Even Start is to help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by improving the educational opportunities of families most in need. The program has three inter-related goals:

- ❖ to help parents improve their literacy or basic educational skills;
- ❖ to help parents become full partners in educating their children; and
- ❖ to assist children in reaching their full potential as learners.

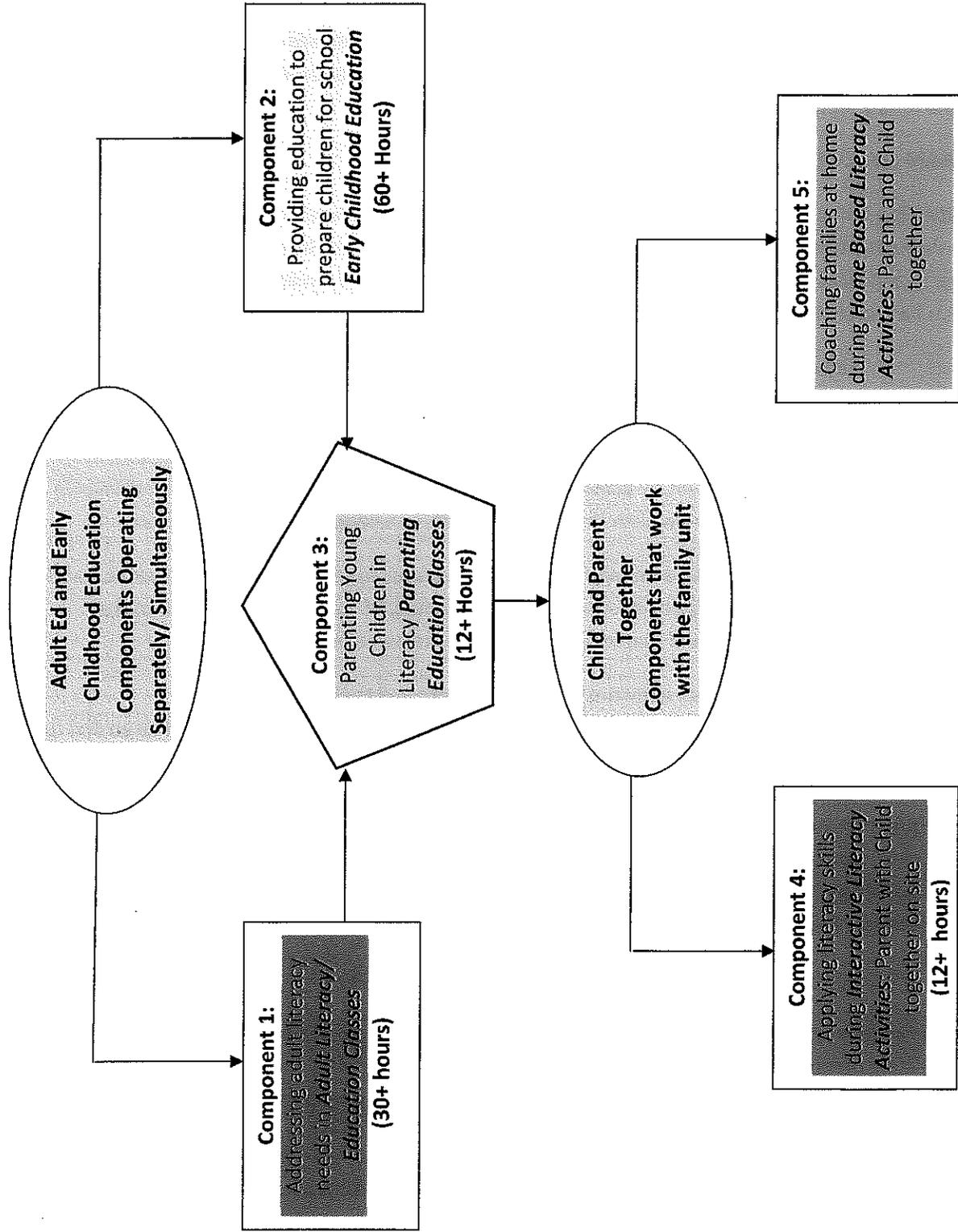
Even Start accomplishes these goals by providing comprehensive family literacy services that involve parents and children, generally from birth through age seven, in a cooperative learning effort.

The term "family literacy services" is defined in federal legislation as services provided to participants on a voluntary basis that are of sufficient intensity in terms of hours, of sufficient duration to make sustainable changes in a family, and that integrate all of the following activities:

- ❖ Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children;
- ❖ Training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children (literacy-based parenting education);
- ❖ Parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency (adult basic or secondary education, or English language training); and
- ❖ An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences (early childhood education, including supplemental services for school-age children). (Section 9101(20), ESEA).

Local programs are implemented through cooperative projects that do not duplicate but build on high-quality existing community resources, creating a new range of services for low-income children and parents. At the present time Connecticut programs are available in Middletown, New London and Torrington.

CONNECTICUT EVEN START FAMILY LITERACY: A DESIGN FOR PROGRAM SERVICES FOR FAMILIES



PREVENTION REPORT TO THE CHILD POVERTY AND PREVENTION COUNCIL

Even Start Family Literacy Program: The overall goal of this program is to break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy for low-income families. In FY 2012, Even Start moved from a federally funded program to a Connecticut State funded program so that programs may continue to provide opportunities to increase literacy in families that are most in need. The program integrates four components: a) adult education which provides parents of young children the opportunity to complete their own education; b) early childhood education which provides children with quality classrooms that are monitored each year; c) parenting education which focuses on helping parents develop skills to be their child's first teacher and understand the importance of partnering with their child's teachers and schools; and, interactive literacy activities which provides parents the opportunity to apply teaching literacy skills to their children under Even Start staff guidance. The program also includes home-based instruction where Even Start staff works with parents on these same skills within the home setting. Local programs are implemented through cooperative projects that build on high-quality existing community resources, creating a new range of services for low income children and parents.

Even Start helps children and families achieve the academic standards set forth by the state and uses scientifically-based reading research to develop and implement quality instructional programs that:

- Enrich language development, extend learning and support high levels of educational success for children birth to age seven and their parents;
- Provide literacy services of sufficient hours and duration to make sustainable changes in a family;
- Provide integrated instructional services for families where children and their parents learn together to develop habits of life-long learning; and,
- Support families committed to education and to economic independence.

Number Served: Even Start in Connecticut operated with three programs serving high-need areas of Middletown, New London, and Torrington. Programs served 53 families (54 Even Start adults and 60 children) through all Even Start components. The number of programs supported has dropped significantly each year from a previous service level of 10 program in FY 2003. One program operational in FY2011 closed due to lack of funding, leaving the remaining three programs.

Program Cost FY 2012: \$479,919

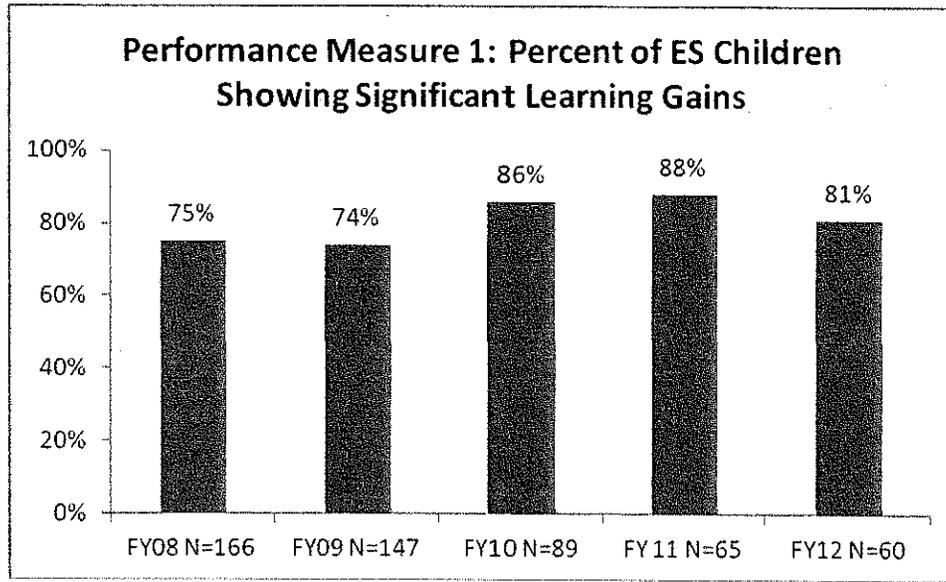
Performance-Based Standards:

1. It is expected that 50 to 65 percent of the Even Start children birth through k-bound will meet the reading readiness standards for their age group.
2. It is expected that 40 percent or more of the adults will meet adult literacy goals in adult Basic Education or English as a Second Language reading and 60 per cent of the adults in a high school diploma or General Educational Development program will make progress toward attaining a high school diploma or its equivalency.
3. It is expected that 40 to 60 percent of the parents will meet standards for skill development in family literacy such as reading to child, encouraging child to read with them at home, etc.

Performance-Based Outcomes:

After federal funding for this program was cut at the close of FY 2011, Even Start became fully funded by the state of Connecticut in FY 2012. Funding for this program was set at the FY2011 level of \$479,919. Even Start families at all three programs operational during FY2012 continue to make solid gains.

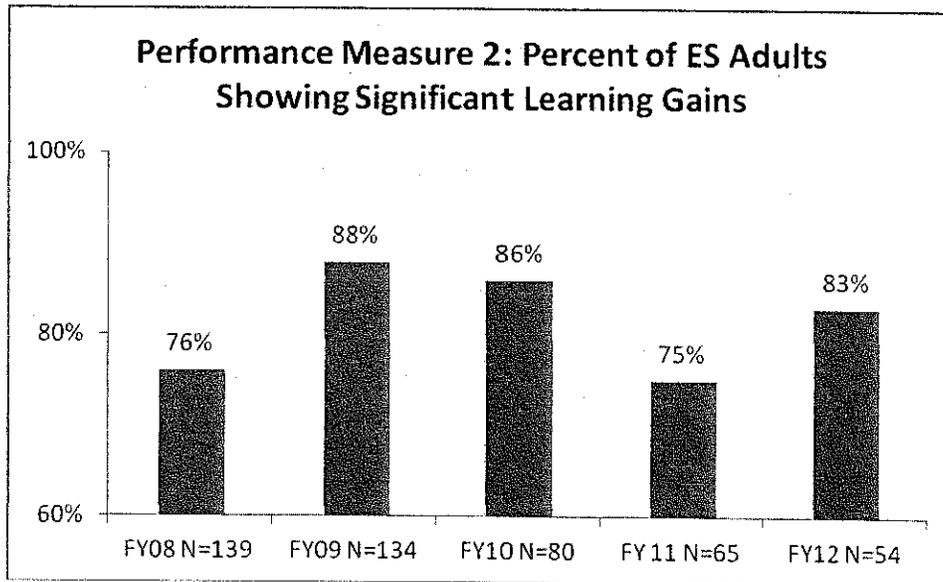
Performance Measure 1: Percent of Even Start children meeting standards in reading/reading readiness skills.



Even Start program performance data over five years show that on average, 81percent of the children met or exceeded standards in reading readiness for their age group (birth to kinder-bound). Children participated an average of 55 hours per month in early childhood classrooms, interactive literacy activities and during home based instruction. This year, over 83% of the children were infants and toddlers and were assessed every four months using the Agas and Stages Questionnaire. Other assessments used for older children include: Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), Concepts About Print, and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA).

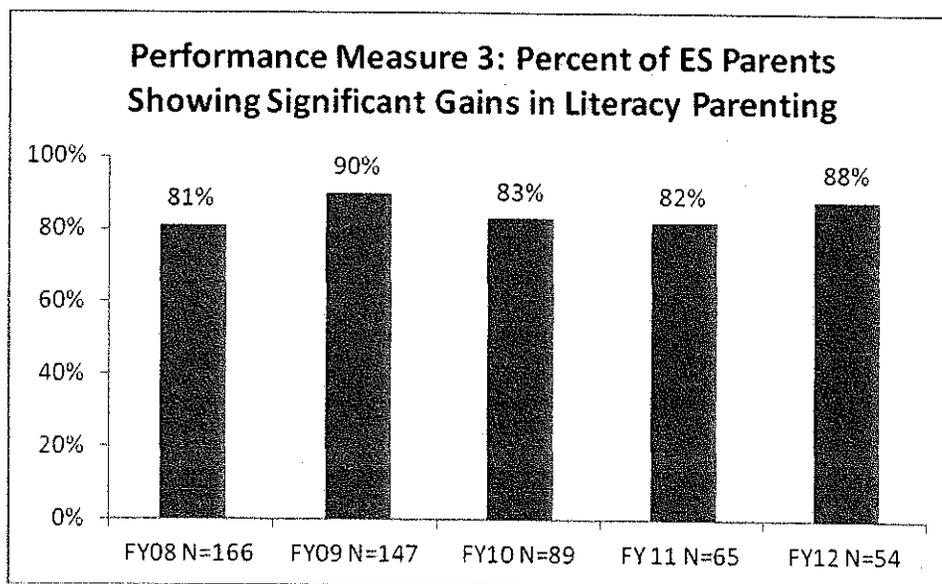
Although research data are not available for Connecticut, research from other states indicates that children who receive Even Start services outperform children who do not participate in Even Start. These studies suggest that Even Start children score significantly higher on measures of reading readiness and are twice as likely as non-Even Start children to be reading at or above grade level (Link, D.E. and Weirauch, 2005)

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



Over the past five years, adults in Even Start have consistently made significant gains. Every year, the program has exceeded its expected standard by more than 30 percent. The average percent of adults making significant progress during the year on their goals is 82 percent, exceeding the overall standard for adult literacy by 40 percent or more. These are impressive gains on measures of high school completion and English language acquisition.

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



Results show that in the past five years, on average, 88 percent of the parents were observed to learn and apply parenting skills related to family literacy. Parents participate in parenting education classes, interactive literacy activities (with their child), and home-based instruction visits averaging 13 hours per month. Parents are encouraged to work directly with the child during interactive literacy activities and home-based instruction under the guidance of Even Start staff or collaborators. Parenting education

classes are aligned with what children are learning in their early childhood classroom. Concepts underscored in parenting education are enhanced through application during interactive literacy activities and home-based instruction.

Performance-Based Vendor Accountability:

Even Start is required to contract for local program evaluation. All programs must report on attendance and outcomes. They receive 3-5 visits per year from the evaluator who monitors the quality of Even Start components. To ensure quality, programs must develop local objectives that are measurable and meet standards. Local evaluation visits include participant record reviews, observations of components (protocol developed for each component), ECERS and ITERS reviews of early childhood classrooms, review of lesson plans, and conduct focus groups and interviews with participants and staff.

References:

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.

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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.

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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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