

Parent Groups, Service Clubs, and Faith-Based Organizations

Parent groups such as the Parent Teacher Association are very helpful in providing support at every elementary school. Their efforts to improve children's school readiness and transitions to school are especially helpful in terms of early literacy. The organization's Web page is <http://www.capta.org>. Most preschool programs offer parent organizations as well.

Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS), a national organization that meets the various needs of mothers with children from birth to kindergarten, has a number of groups in Orange County. The groups meet to discuss and share information, mentor each other, provide instruction on areas of common interest, and help mothers gain confidence in their leadership skills. Similar support groups for fathers may also provide useful information about dads' important role in stimulating literacy development.

Service clubs frequently offer important assistance to schools and prekindergarten programs. Providing eyeglasses to disadvantaged members of the community, volunteering for health or education fairs, distributing books, contributing scholarships, and sponsoring family literacy classes are just a few ways that service clubs help communities build literacy. The Yellow Pages list these organizations under "Associations, Clubs or Fraternal Organizations."



Faith-based organizations promote their own vision while encouraging literacy development for young children. They offer early childhood education in many communities, sponsor training for teachers, educate parents, and partner with community organizations for health and education fairs. They also may offer lending libraries for books, videos, and computer programs for parents and children to use to raise literacy levels.

Public and School Libraries

Many public and school libraries offer special storytime activities for young children. These may be offered during day or evening hours and, in the case of the school library, offer the preschool-age child an opportunity to also become familiar with the school. These events provide access to books and model storytelling and reading techniques that parents may use. Some libraries provide a mobile van that periodically delivers books to the community. Families who participate tend to take a more active part in preschool or elementary school activities.

Public and school libraries offer adult literacy classes so that parents may learn to read and participate in their children's literacy activities. Librarians also take part in community fairs to provide library cards, acquaint people with the local library system, and help people access reading materials. In some communities, the local transit system provides free fares when riders show they have used the local public library.

Children and Families Commission of Orange County Early Literacy Development Guidelines for Children Ages 0-5

Orange County children deserve the best. To get a good start in school and life, they must be good listeners, speakers, readers, and writers. The Children and Families Commission of Orange County convened the Early Literacy Task Force in 2003 to examine current research, national/state reading initiatives, and local resources in order to develop literacy guidelines and descriptions of best practices.

Best Practices for Early Literacy Development for:

- Parents and Day Care Providers
- Early Childhood Teachers
- Physicians, Nurses, and Other Health Care Providers
- Kindergarten Teachers
- Community Organizations

are available at www.occhildrenandfamilies.com



The Commission offers the following Guidelines for those interacting with children ages birth to five. Early Literacy development efforts should:

1

Be comprehensive and age-appropriate for young children. Literacy includes listening, speaking, writing, and reading activities that are appropriate for a child's age. Literacy development also includes activities to foster children's social, emotional, and physical development.

2

Acknowledge that young children learn in different ways but all build on prior learning. Each child is unique, with an individual pattern and timing of development influenced by family and life experiences; however, new understanding builds on prior understanding.

3

Individualize decisions about next steps for listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Observations of young children's literacy activities enable parents and educators to plan future literacy actions.

4

Support the use of home language for children and families and, if needed, acquisition of English. Young children who have rich language experiences, regardless of the language, will more easily acquire English and learn to read fluently.

5

Base literacy activities on research and best practices in early childhood education. When adults use proven and effective methods, children will become good listeners, speakers, writers, and readers.

6

Create positive, secure, and engaging learning environments. Children's desire to be literate for their own enjoyment, information and communication should be nurtured and promoted.

While infants and toddlers do not read, they eagerly acquire listening and speaking skills that will help them become readers. Three- and four-year-olds expand their literacy skills as they converse, enjoy words and stories, and write pretend letters. Adults encourage children to be good readers by practicing the six early literacy guidelines shown above.

When we are clear about what we should do, and why we should do it, it is more likely that we will accomplish our goals. When children expand their language skills and become socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually developed, their adjustment in elementary school will be easier and their success more assured. When all adults who interact with young children work together on early literacy, children will be the better for it!

Best Practices for Early Literacy Development for Community Organizations



A wide array of community organizations may and do support early literacy development while furthering their organizations' visions and goals. A sampling of these types of Best Practices are shown below:

Colleges and Universities

To better educate its students, colleges and universities coordinate community service programs, internships in infant, toddler, preschool, and elementary schools, and referrals for student teaching experiences. AmeriCorps is one example of a program that is frequently organized by college professors to give units and/or funding for college students to tutor young children on reading or mathematics. Its Web site is <http://www.americorps.org>. Orange County's Volunteer Center is at <http://www.volunteer-center.org/services/youth.asp>.

College faculty may also direct various intervention programs, such as HABLA (Home-based Activities Building Language Acquisition), a language intervention program designed to improve school readiness of Latino children. College students and community members serve as work-study home visitors who use toys and books (Spanish or English) to model parenting techniques that increase verbal interaction and promote child learning and expressive language.

College professors also conduct research on prekindergarten and elementary issues or may serve as evaluators of program quality. Their professional status is broadened and the programs they serve receive valuable services that help them sustain or improve literacy development efforts.

Hospital, Business, and Other Partnerships

An Orange County hospital encourages staff to volunteer as readers to children in early childhood settings by allowing release time from work each month. In return, the school district provides English as a Second Language classes and adult literacy classes to hospital employees who may need them. Thus, the hospital supports children's literacy and receives a better-trained and more motivated workforce.

Another collaboration occurs between Children's Hospital of Orange County and the University of California, Irvine Child Development Center and the UCI Children's Hospital with a grant from the Children and Families Commission of Orange County. CUIDAR (CHOC-UCI Initiative for the Development of Attention and Readiness) offers free inservice(s) for preschool staff on management of ADHD and problem behavior in the classroom. The goal of CUIDAR is to improve children's social and emotional development by focusing on the role of the teacher, structuring the daily schedule, and planning the classroom environment. Information is available at (714) 289-4778.

Another example of community literacy efforts is the Kit for New Parents, provided by the California Children and Families State and County Commissions for local hospitals to distribute to new parents. The kit offers important information to help families raise children who are healthy, learning, and ready to reach their greatest potential. The kit includes a children's book, six videos and parent guides on health/nutrition, child safety, early literacy, discipline, and finding quality childcare. Information on the Kit for New Parents is available at the Web site at <http://www.cfcf.ca.gov/kit.htm>. Brochures in English and Spanish that are part of the Kit are also available online at <http://www.cfcf.ca.gov/parentinfo.htm>.

Several local businesses provide funds and/or materials for preschool-age children to receive backpacks filled with educational materials before they start kindergarten. Parents receive the backpacks at a meeting coordinated by early childhood representatives from child development programs, family child care home providers, Head Start, and kindergartens. The Web site showing information about the backpacks, educational materials selected, and tips in English and Spanish for parents to use the materials are at the California Department of Education, Elementary Education Transition to School at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/elementary/transition>.

Other partnerships with local businesses and early childhood organizations support parents as children's first teachers. Preschool or elementary school staff members invite parents to attend training sessions on literacy topics, such as "Choosing Good Books" or "How to Ask Good Questions after Reading a Book." These parents later host literacy parties on the same topic in their homes for other parents. Local businesses provide refreshments and/or literacy treats for the host and participating families. These parties tend to be in parents' home languages, a fact that helps schools when they find it difficult to obtain

interpreters/translators. Parents use these new skills with their other children as well and tend to become more involved with the elementary school that initiated the program.

Some businesses and education entities partner with foundations, such as the Bring Me A Book™ Foundation. The program benefits all employees with families as well as individuals who are English language learners. By bringing this resource into the workplace, employers provide an easily accessible selection of quality hardcover children's books and audio tapes that enhance reading skills and language acquisition. Information is available at <http://www.bringmeabook.org>.

Businesses may allow parents, grandparents, and guardians to take time off work to participate in activities at a licensed child care center or K-12 school attended by their children. The Family-School Partnership Act of 1994 and the subsequent amendment have enabled many families and businesses to be a part of young children's educational activities. Participants may read to small groups of children, assist the teacher in a classroom center, produce helpful materials for children's use, or be part of career education activities.

Another example is that of senior citizens – either as individuals or as members of a Senior Center – volunteering to read or tell stories to young children, take dictation about their drawings or work, or be an important presence for the social/emotional development of a young child. In some cases the senior citizens drive themselves to child development centers. In other instances, transportation is provided so that larger numbers of adults may participate. Such volunteerism can help the seniors as much as the youngsters.

Family Resource Centers

Family Resource Centers provide families with needed information, resources, and opportunities to improve their lives. Typically located at or near a school site, these community-sponsored partnerships promote healthy development and responsible, caring communities. The Orange County Web site for Families and Communities Together is <http://www.factoc.org>. Family Resource Centers offer a wide range of services, including preschool, after-school care, and classes in family recreation, safety and health education, English as a Second Language, adult literacy classes, and parenting classes.

Resource and Referral agencies in each county also provide many literacy-related services for families of all income levels. They may train day care home providers in appropriate early literacy activities, refer needy parents to health care providers so children may have their vision or hearing tested and, if necessary, corrected. They may provide toy, book, or video lending libraries to help parents be their child's first teacher. They are knowledgeable about numerous community programs and services to help parents.

Housing complexes – especially in residences for low-income families – may be a site for training on literacy, parenting skills, health issues, and other family interests. The complex may have a family resource center or a learning center. For more information, one contact is Project Access, a non-profit organization that renovates apartments and houses and then sells them to low-income families at <http://www.project-access.org>.

Local Newspapers and Media

The local or regional newspaper and media play a large role in informing the public about children's development, education issues, and available resources. The Orange County Register offers Resources in Education (RIE), a program that offers K-12 teachers ideas for using the newspaper in the classroom. Preschools and day care homes also use the newspaper to teach letter recognition, to read a variety of stories, cartoons, poems, interesting facts, and other information to children, and to share with families about local literacy activities and cultural events.

Public television offers a variety of early childhood programming, lessons and guides for parents and educators, and professional development opportunities for educators on early literacy. Locally KCET and KOCE offer such programs as Sesame Street, Barney and Friends, Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, Between the Lions, Help Me Grow, Blues Clues, Dora the Explorer, and Teletubbies to improve language and literacy. The public television Web sites offers information on children's television programming and how families can be involved together in literacy activities, events, and Internet links at <http://www.koce.org/education.htm> and <http://www.kcet.org> and <http://www.pbs.org>.

Many Internet Web sites offer parents ideas for interesting and fun literacy activities with young children. The U.S. Department of Education offers resources, such as the Helping Your Child Series of booklets (one is Helping Your

Child Become a Reader) that may be ordered or downloaded at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html>. Another book is Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success for parents and teachers of infants through third graders. It may be ordered at <http://www.nap.edu>. Other parent resources are available through the National Parent Information Network Web site at <http://npin.org>.

School-Prekindergarten Linkages

The Children and Families Commission of Orange County partners with the Orange County Office of Education and those 26 school districts with elementary schools to maximize young children's readiness for school. Commission-funded School Readiness Coordinators in each district work with families, educators, and community service providers to prepare children to enter school healthy and ready to learn. Information about the county initiatives is available at the Commission's Web site at <http://www.occhildrenandfamilies.com>.

Educators at all levels realize the benefits from collaborating. One district builds special relationships by providing technical assistance to develop new licensed family child care homes in low-income neighborhoods. These family child care home providers know about the schools' programs and pass information along to the parents of children in their care. These providers attend training opportunities at the neighborhood school to learn ways to promote early literacy.

Some school districts partner with Migrant Education and international teaching programs to offer intercultural educational opportunities for children, beginning at age four. Bilingual teachers from Mexico come to Orange County during the summer months and offer extensive, intensive educational and cultural opportunities for migrant children. Orange County teachers also use this opportunity to become familiar with instructional models to better teach Latino students who are learning English. Several school districts and community-based organizations offer Even Start Family Literacy Programs to improve adult literacy and parenting skills while also improving children's access to appropriate literacy and other early childhood experiences. More information may be found at the California Department of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/iasa/es/html>.

Head Start agencies and local schools are required by federal Title I regulations to collaborate on planning disad-

vantaged children's transition to school. Typically this collaboration includes staff sharing professional development on topics such as early literacy, examining student work and discussing similarities and differences of curriculum and instructional practices. The Orange County Department of Education and the Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center offer a Web site on transitions at <http://www.ocde.k12.ca.us/conprog>.

Youth and Cultural Organizations

Youth organizations may offer a safe environment and enriching activities for school-age students before and after school. In the hours when these students are in school, the site may provide prekindergarten children with quality early childhood education. High school or college students may volunteer at these sites to provide community service. The youngsters receive many opportunities to develop language and literacy knowledge. They have access to appropriate and interesting books, have stimulating conversations, and learn the purposes of reading and writing.

Cultural organizations may offer Saturday school to teach children their language, history, and culture. These same organizations are very helpful to educators who seek to know more about these children and families. For example, Native American tribes have sponsored conferences for educators to learn about their history, cultural attributes/qualities of their students, and their day-to-day lives. Tribal elders volunteer to speak to young children, bring tribal artifacts to the classroom, and tell Native American stories. These organizations also help educators plan more culturally appropriate activities for children's social, emotional, and physical development.

Artists and performing arts students also partner with programs for children. Ballet, chorus, and orchestra members may demonstrate famous music pieces, teach young children about these arts, or act as field trip docents. Painters, sculptors, and designers in various media teach young children about art, its place in our everyday lives, and its relevance to literacy. The Orange County Children's Therapeutic Art Center offers a multicultural and bilingual arts curriculum and therapeutic program for special needs and at-risk youth. The Artist Village Open House features an exhibition of children's art work and hosts performances for families. The Community Development Arts Program also provides families the opportunity to participate in free monthly community art workshops. Its Web site is at <http://www.aplaceforart.com/education/occtac>.