

Ideas that Work! to
achieve school readiness
and student success from
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
in partnership with the
Northeast and Islands
Regional Educational LAB.



December 1999

Parent Education and Support

Parents are their child's first and most influential teachers. Long-term child outcomes are significantly improved when parents are knowledgeable about their child's early development and have access to the resources they need to support them in their parenting.

What Works

Parent education and support programs promote healthy development in young children through activities that give parents a greater understanding of child development, connect families with available community resources, and assist families in developing strong home-school relationships. Parent education and support programs help parents provide more nurturing, sensitive, and attentive care by reinforcing positive behaviors of parents and helping parents change non-productive or harmful behaviors. Programs strengthen parenting skills, promote healthy child development, and help to prepare young children for school.

Background

Positive parent-child interactions are critical to language, cognitive and social development. All parents can benefit from parent support and education during their child's infancy and preschool years. Parenting guidance and support is especially important for parents and children at high risk. Teen parents and parents who were not nurtured as children benefit from

programs that model healthy parent-child play, appropriate discipline, and communication. Single parent families and families with limited economic resources benefit from parent education that includes individual support and opportunities to share experiences with other families. Interventions for the highest risk families (particularly those with multiple risk factors, psychological problems, or substance abuse) are most effective when parent education and support are combined with comprehensive case management services.

Research indicates that the most successful parent education and support programs target specific ages of children and outcomes, are provided at critical transition points for families, build on parents' strengths and don't focus on their failures, incorporate parents in decision-making, develop collaborations to provide services to parents, and address the family's comprehensive needs including issues such as parents' work and job training. Parent education and support programs have been shown to improve school readiness, reduce child abuse, and increase parental knowledge and school involvement.

Parents who participate in the Parents as Teachers Program are more involved in their children's schools, and are more confident in their parenting skills and knowledge.

Promising Program

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is an early childhood parent education and support program. Major goals of PAT include increasing parents' knowledge of child development, preparing young children for success in school, and increasing parents' feelings of competence and confidence. To achieve its goals, PAT uses individual home-based instruction and group interactions to inform parents about principles of child development and good parenting practices. The program is voluntary and families are often enrolled shortly after the birth of their child. Parents are involved in learning activities with their child that encourage language and intellectual growth, physical and emotional skills. Program components include home visits by certified parent educators, group meetings with other parents, periodic developmental, language, hearing, and vision screening, and a resource network. PAT has been adapted to enhance quality infant/toddler care in child care centers and has a special program to offer guidance to teen parents. The PAT National Center is responsible for all curriculum research and development.

There are nineteen school and community-based Parents as Teachers programs in Rhode Island. Programs are funded through a combination of resources from a federal Goals 2000 grant, the Rhode Island Department of Education, and local school districts. There is a PAT program for teen parents funded through the Adolescent Self-Sufficiency Program of the Rhode Island Department of Human Services. Currently, 2,700 families are being served by Rhode Island PAT local sites, including 1,400 high-risk families. Over the last 10 years, 15,840 families have received PAT services. The Rhode Island program includes home visiting programs for prenatal to three-year-olds and three to five-year-olds, a teen

parent program, and a child care center-based program. Rhode Island PAT is currently being evaluated by researchers at the University of Rhode Island.

Lessons from the Field

Experience shows that parent educators are most successful if they have prior experience working with parents of young children. The most effective parent educators are outgoing, comfortable with strangers, able to handle new situations, well-organized, non-judgmental, and tactful.

High-risk families that receive PAT services benefit most when PAT is combined with comprehensive case management services designed to help parents improve their life course.

Resources

Gladys Tiede
Rhode Island Parents as Teachers
Rhode Island Parent Information Network
(401) 727-4144

Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc.
(314) 432-4330
www.patnc.org

"The Parents as Teachers Program: Results from Two Demonstrations" in *Home Visiting: Recent Program Evaluations, The Future of Children*, Vol. 9., No. 1 (1999).
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

LAB

Northeast and Islands

Regional Educational Laboratory

A Program of The Education Alliance at Brown University

222 Richmond Street, Suite 300
Providence, RI 02903
800-521-9550 or fax 401-421-7650
email: lab@brown.edu
www.lab.brown.edu

in partnership with Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

One Union Station, Providence, RI 02903
401-351-9400 or fax 401-351-1758
email: rikids@rikidscount.org
www.rikidscount.org

