

Defining Our Work: Families Learning Together



January 2019

National Center for Families Learning
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Since 1989, the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) has worked to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families. Engaging multiple generations of the same family in learning together has been a fundamental and distinguishing aspect of our work. We know this holistic approach yields results which deeply impact families as they work to achieve their full academic and career potentials.

Many organizations and educational entities define the involvement of parents and families in schools and community programming. Parent involvement, however, is not always synonymous with family engagement.

While the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 established no requirements for family involvement, every subsequent reauthorization has made stipulations for the inclusion of families in their children's education (Mapp, 2012). Additionally, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) shifted the requirement from "parent involvement" to "parent engagement" (Henderson, 2015). In accordance with ESSA regulations, school districts must adhere to the federal legislation definitions of what qualifies as parent engagement in a public school.

Historically, parent involvement in schools ranged from room mothers to volunteers to participation in parent-teacher organizations. While NCFL recognizes this important role of parents serving and working in their children's schools, we also strive to connect the family with the school—and parents with their children—at a deeper level of engagement. Family literacy and family learning programs represent that required level of effort to engage families with intensity and duration and move them toward positive educational and work outcomes. NCFL believes that shifting families from participation in school activities to an engaged approach of working with families to help them meet their own specific goals,

is the secret sauce of family engagement. This approach moves the needle from families being *involved at school* to families being *engaged with their children, each other, their schools, and their communities*.

NCFL defines family engagement in specific ways. This paper shares our perspective of family engagement and the models that have emerged from our three decades of family engagement work. We present strong evidence of what works for families most in need and what produces positive outcomes for families and programs. Those outcomes have informed the development of our models and continue to inform our practice.

Rationale

Why define terms like "family literacy"? Shouldn't family literacy be all-encompassing and broad enough in scope to describe a variety of family programming efforts? Many practitioners in the field appear to think so, as the term is used in dissimilar contexts and with a variety of intentions across the fields of education and human services.

At its core, the NCFL view of family literacy is targeted and specific:

Family literacy requires four integrated components that include children's education, adult education, parent education, and interactive parent-child (dual or multigenerational) literacy and learning activities. This four-component program is delivered to families most in need, over a period of time, with consistency and intensity of services.

Similarly, according to Ascend at Aspen Institute, family literacy is a two-generation approach where, a) education is the core, and b) economic supports (transportation to and from the program, child care, and

free and reduced lunch), and social capital (i.e., peer support, learning communities) “create opportunities for and address the needs of both vulnerable parents and children together” (Redd, Karver, Murphey, Moore, & Knewstubb, 2011, p 16).

The federal definition of family literacy services closely aligns with the philosophy of family literacy created by NCFL. The term family literacy means services that

are of sufficient intensity in terms of hours, and 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
- Parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency
- An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences (Workforce Investment Act of 1998).

NCFL’s history is grounded in this definition of comprehensive family literacy services designed for families most in need. The importance of working with families rather than individuals was the central element of the Parent and Child Education program (PACE) in 1985. The PACE program, developed by Sharon Darling, President and Founder of NCFL, was funded by the Kentucky Legislature and implemented in the Appalachian region of Kentucky. The immediate results were promising. The Kentucky Legislature funded PACE for the next year in six rural counties and for 18 counties in 1987.

PACE drew national attention through an award from the Ford Foundation and Harvard Kennedy School of Government for Outstanding Innovations in State and Local Government. The recognition attracted the attention of the William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust and funding followed to expand the model to other states. This national model, along with the passion for family literacy from Congressman William F. Goodling and Senator Paul Simon, laid the groundwork for the Even Start program.

Even Start, based on the federal definition of family literacy, emerged as the federally-funded family literacy program in the early 1990s and was designed to “integrate early childhood education, adult literacy (adult basic and secondary-level education and instruction for English language learners), parent education, and interactive parent and child literacy activities for low-income families.’ Today at least 18 federal programs (eleven in the U.S. Department of Education, six in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and one in the Bureau of Indian Education) include family literacy in the legislation as an allowable expenditure...” (Clymer, Toso, Grindler & Sauder, 2017, p. 1).

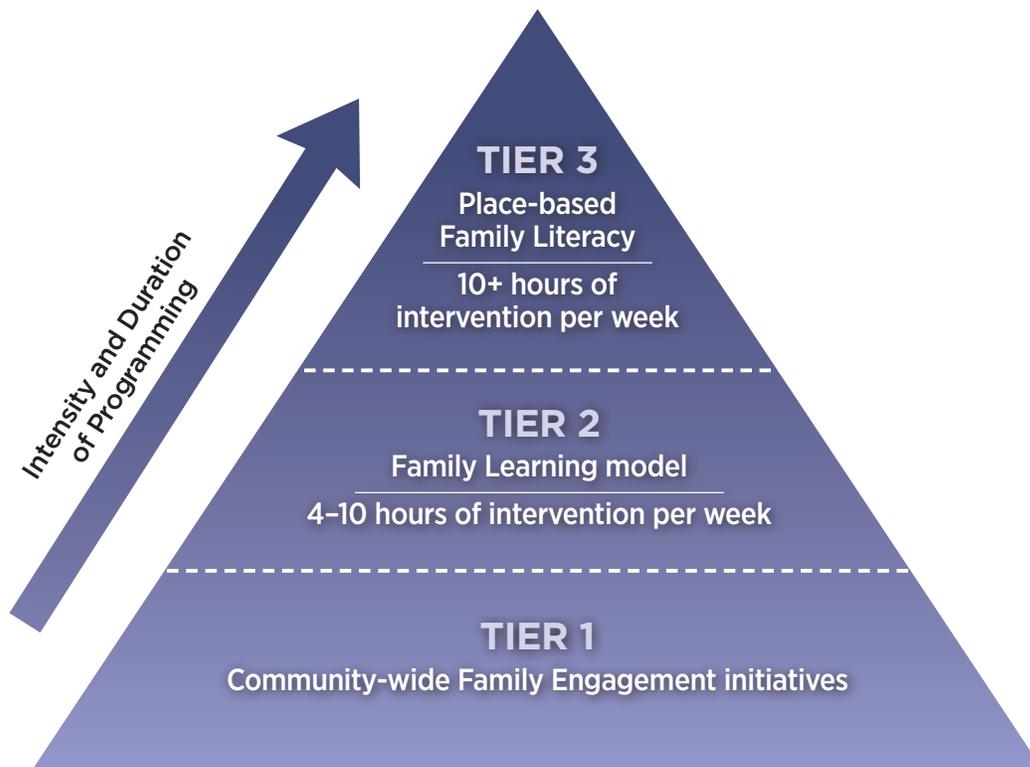
The federal definition brings continuity to traditional four-component family literacy programs. It defines four integrated components that exist within a program of intensity and duration that are designed to promote change within a family. NCFL holds the position that family literacy was never intended to define a variety of family engagement services—programs that run the gamut from simple to complex, from less intense to targeted involvement, or from a one-time family night event to programming efforts of considerable length and duration. The intent of the definition is to describe a research-based model of working with families that is specific, intensive, and requires a commitment of time—a model that makes a difference for families. This program model is best tailored to families with very low English language and literacy skill levels and for those who are held back by multiple barriers to success.

With supporting evidence and outcomes, we set out to share the differences in the terms family literacy, family learning, and family engagement from the NCFL perspective. We do this to better support our own work and contribute to the fields of education and human services.

The NCFL Intervention Model

NCFL’s evidence-based approach to family engagement is driven by research that demonstrates parents and caretakers have the greatest influence on the academic trajectories of their children, and that strong parent-child and parent-school relationships are catalytic to educational progress—particularly for families who are underserved and from diverse backgrounds (Henderson,

Intervention Model



Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). The NCFL approach builds capacity and transfers knowledge sustained through generations, resulting in compounding returns that help to break the cycle of poverty and build economic self-sufficiency for marginalized populations (Cramer, 2016).

NCFL has identified a three-tiered approach to family engagement. This tiered approach coincides with the intensity and duration of services needed and desired by families and is driven by their family, academic, and community-focused goals. The models within the tiers are designed to make a significant difference for families and help lift them out of poverty. Built out of nearly three decades of ground-level work with families, the models are based on evidence, founded in results from third-party evaluations and research projects, and informed by knowledge gained over time by listening to families and observing programs through technical assistance. The intervention spans community-wide impact to high individual impact for families, defined by the intensity

and duration of services provided. It encompasses broad, community-wide initiatives, and more targeted interventions through place-based programs.

The graphic represents this three-tiered approach to working with families, followed by a detailed discussion of the models and their components.

Family Literacy (Tier 3)

NCFL's signature model, family literacy, is explicit and adheres to the federal definition of family literacy services. It is not a one-size-fits-all term that describes a host of family reading program efforts. Family literacy requires integrated elements of implementation not found in other family engagement programs. Those elements are critical components to programming success that influence outcomes for programs and results for families.

Family literacy refers to the traditional, four-component family literacy programs based on the federal definition of family literacy. Family literacy includes adult education, early childhood education, parent education, and interactive parent-child activities. This model is built on intensity and duration of services and is focused on both child and adult outcomes.

Building on the success of the Kentucky PACE program, family literacy spanned the decades and the nation.

The William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust was intrigued by the program, visited the sites in Kentucky, and provided a major grant to establish model family literacy programs in both Kentucky and North Carolina (Kenan Family Literacy Model). An expanded grant in 1989 from the Kenan Trust established the National Center for Family Literacy (now the National Center for Families Learning) to promote and implement family literacy programming nationwide.

In the late 1980s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Indian Education Programs (BIA, OIEP) began to examine educational intervention strategies to address growing concern about the educational achievement of American Indian children. In 1991, the Family and Child Education (FACE) program was established based upon the principles of the PACE and Kenan models. The FACE program continues using this traditional four-component model in over 50 programs on reservations nationwide.

In 1991, Toyota funded NCFL to implement family literacy programs in 20 cities across the United States and created the pattern for future expansion of a variety of family literacy programs, again based on the four-component model, with proven impact and documented outcomes for families. These programs have influenced federal and state legislation and leveraged additional funding to replicate, sustain, and grow family literacy programming.

Family Literacy in Early Childhood Programs: The Toyota Families for Learning program was created as an innovative approach to improving the education of preschool children and increasing economic stability within our country's most disadvantaged communities.

This family literacy program maintained the four components of adult education, early childhood education, Parent Time, and Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time®, to support meaningful parent-child interactions, and help adults further their education while supporting their children's educational progress.

Family Literacy in School-Age Programs: Toyota Families in Schools was designed to increase achievement of disenfranchised children ages 5-12 years by implementing strong family literacy services in elementary schools. The program emphasized parents' roles as learners, as well as supporters of their children's education. This initiative targeted parents and their school-age children who were deemed at risk of academic failure. PACT Time in the elementary school embraced the same basic goals as the preschool programs.

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Family Literacy: In 2003, the Toyota Family Literacy Program expanded to address the growing educational needs of immigrant families. In 30 communities, programs focused on increasing English language and literacy skills for adults, while also supporting parents' involvement with their children's education.

The strength of the FACE and Toyota programs originates from their comprehensive family literacy and family-centered roots, built from the groundwork laid by the original PACE and Kenan models, and continuing to grow and develop into a wider base of programming possibilities.

Family Learning (Tier 2)

Since 1991, the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) has benefitted from Toyota's promotion of family literacy and learning at more than 286 program sites in 31 states. Most recently, the NCFL-Toyota partnership has forged a new movement of families learning together, gaining new skills, contributing to their communities, and sharing what they have learned with other families—within and beyond school walls, and by using technology.

Family learning programming is built from the traditional family literacy model and includes adult skill building, Parent Time, Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time®, and Family Service Learning that builds social capital. Family learning programs focus on child, parent, and family outcomes and is dependent on intensity and duration of services.

Through years of implementing family literacy programs across the nation, NCFL honed its insights into effectively operationalizing two-generation education solutions. The partnership with Toyota enabled NCFL to engage in continuous improvement of the model in laboratories of learning at a wide variety of partner organizations. The most recent collaboration, Toyota Family Learning, adopted in additional communities as NCFL Family Learning, rose from knowledge gained over three decades of family literacy implementation coupled with a desire to meet families where they are.

NCFL Family Learning was envisioned as family literacy beyond the classroom walls—offering this model in locations beyond traditional classroom settings because “families who have become disenchanting by formal educational institutions may be more likely to trust their physical and digital neighbors rather than individuals representing education or community service agencies” (National Center for Families Learning, 2015b, p. 1). Libraries and community centers were granted funding to implement the program. NCFL worked with partner organizations to help them integrate the model into work they were already doing with families. This is of vital importance for effective, sustainable programming, as The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2017) notes: “Being able to use funds and programs in more flexible, coordinated ways is critical to the success of two-generation efforts” (p. 2).

The family learning model supports families learning together anytime, anywhere. A deliberate theory of change underlies this model and yields a variety of outcomes. This theory begins with goal- and need-based skill building for parents. The 2017 Kids Count Data Book notes that “large numbers of American children have parents without the education necessary to obtain jobs that pay family-sustaining wages” (Annie E. Casey, p. 7). Family learning seeks to help parents build these skills through adult skill

building that meets their needs and goals and through Parent Time, which affirms and builds on their role as their child’s most influential teacher. Parents and children come together to learn through Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time® in a variety of contexts.

Results from NCFL Family Learning program evaluations clearly show increases in family engagement that lead to positive parent outcomes. An independent evaluation from the Goodling Institute showed a 90% increase in family engagement in education, 20% increase in family literacy activities within the home and community, and an increase in leadership skills and social capital for families (Cramer & Toso, 2015). In terms of parent goal attainment, 75% of parents improved their English language skills, 47% upgraded their skills to keep their current job, and 21% earned a GED certificate or high school diploma (Cramer, 2016).

This theory of change spreads opportunity to adults, their families, and their peers in the program. However, the full realization of the theory is its capacity to catalyze compounding change. To end the generational cycle of poverty in families, family learning programs help parents build skills and learn how to pass them on explicitly to their children. Families engage others in the community through Family Service Learning projects. Over time, these families move from perceived invisible and voiceless residents to engaged and confident community members and leaders. This is change that has potential to transform communities—and indeed the nation.

Family Engagement (Tier 1)

There are many models of family, school, and community involvement. The least intensive in terms of parents’ needs for educational supports are family engagement programs. Family engagement programs create opportunities for families, schools, and communities to build their capacity for home to school partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Family engagement programming includes two-generation learning opportunities, events, activities, and strategies that support children’s academic achievement and sometimes parent education, but not adult skill-building based on goal setting. Program

supports provided are often less intensive and with shorter duration than family literacy or family learning programs.

Many organizations provide frameworks and strategies for supporting family engagement; however, not all of these intend to engage parents as better supporters of their children's education and advocates for their school communities. Most family engagement programs have merit and address the needs of schools and families in a variety of ways.

High-quality family engagement programs have purpose, goals, and support outcomes. Research on children's success in school points to the importance of the family in children's development and academic achievement (Christenson & Reschly, 2009). We also know that when parents are actively involved in their children's education, their children do better in school (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein, 1996; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994). According to Henderson and Berla (1994), the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement is the extent to which that student's family can create a home environment that encourages learning, express high expectations for their children's academic attainment and future careers, and become involved in their children's education at school and in the community. More recently, Robinson and Harris (2014) have noted the importance of parent involvement for setting the stage for academic success (p. 199).

As stated earlier, not all parents and families need or desire the intensity of commitment of a family literacy or family learning program; however, many parents still want support when it comes to children's academic needs. Family engagement efforts are not designed to build adult skills apart from those designed to support their role as teachers of their children. They are most often designed to better support parents in addressing their children's academic needs. Many schools provide high-quality family engagement events or opportunities that are open-ended and allow parents to lead the way with their involvement and choose how to be involved. Families decide what works best for them, according to their needs, goals, and desires to move their family forward, or perhaps to better their community.

Evidence suggests that when schools and parents become partners, both entities benefit. Henderson and Mapp

(2002) state "When parents are involved both at home and at school, children do better in school, and they stay in school longer" (p. 208). In other words, when families get better, schools get better, and so do communities.

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships outlined by Mapp and Kuttner (2013) provides guidance for moving schools from ineffective to effective family-school partnerships that support student achievement and school improvement. The framework was formulated using the research on effective family engagement and home-school partnership strategies and practices, adult learning and motivation, and leadership development. It focuses on challenges to be addressed, conditions that are integral to success, desired capacity goals, and capacity-building outcomes for staff and families.

Family engagement may include family events, parent-teacher conferences, school open-houses, teacher outreach and information sharing, classroom visits and meal sharing, and other school-sponsored or community events. Whatever path a school or community-based education organization may take to engage families, NCFL recommends some minimum principles of high-quality family engagement.

Programming or content should:

- target the needs voiced by families, including their cultural and linguistic needs, and those of the communities in which they live;
- be evidence-based and include practices that show promise;
- connect families to their children's school or community-based education programs;
- focus on children's academics, oral language or vocabulary development, and/or reading and literacy development;
- connect families to a greater community-wide network; and
- advocate for parent inclusion, input, and leadership.

Family engagement opportunities vary from school-to-school and within communities. They should ideally be driven by the needs and goals expressed by the families who live, work, and attend schools in those communities.

Model Components of Family Literacy/Family Learning Programs

Both the Bureau of Indian Education's (BIE) Family and Child Education (FACE) program and the original Toyota-funded programs are considered comprehensive, four-component family literacy programs based on the federal definition of family literacy services. They include the essential components of adult education, early childhood education (preschool through grade three), Parent Time, and Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time®. Family Service Learning was recently introduced into family literacy programs with success.

NCFL Family Learning is built on the cornerstones of adult skill building, Parent Time, and PACT Time, all of which interact with children's education. The deliberate use of technology and the intentional focus on the building of social capital with families are woven throughout family learning programming.

Descriptions of these essential components of both signature models, family literacy (Tier 3) and family learning (Tier 2) programs, follow.

Adult Education

Increasing the educational level of a parent is perhaps the greatest indicator of improved child outcomes. Adult Basic Education is built on the premise that when parents increase their own education, the entire family benefits. Numerous studies show that the educational attainment of the mother is important for influencing children's academic outcomes. In their 2014 report, *Mother's Education and Children's Outcomes: How Dual-generation Programs Offer Increased Opportunities for America's Families*, Hernandez and Napierala share statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics 2013a and 2013b that show an enormous disparity of 16% to 49% in reading proficiency for children whose mothers did not graduate from high school compared to those whose mothers had a bachelor's degree. They noted similar outcomes for mathematics—19% proficiency for children of mothers without a high school diploma to 52% proficient for children with mothers who earned a bachelor's degree.

Kirsch et al. (2016) argue that today's workforce demands skills requiring parents to think beyond a high school equivalency diploma. Parents often must complete some level of postsecondary training to earn a livable wage. The federal definition of family literacy

services recognizes this requirement for adult education by requiring parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency.

Parents participate in adult education coursework while enrolled in a family literacy program for several reasons, which often include: improving basic literacy and English language acquisition skills; earning a High School Equivalency credential; transitioning into postsecondary training; or obtaining a job or acquiring a better job. Adult education helps parents gain the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be successful in the goals they set for themselves and their families.

Adult education students represent a diverse population often affected by various barriers to success. Situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers due to systemic inequities can impede parent retention in adult education classes. Impoverished living conditions, lack of transportation, abuse, addiction, and learning differences, along with poor self-efficacy and self-esteem can impact parents as they strive to reach their goals. Comings (2007) states that barriers become distractors and hinder a student's ability to succeed. Instructors in family literacy programs create safe, supportive spaces for parents to manage the positive and negative forces that can delay academic success. They offer family and community supports to parents when they are needed and increase persistence through the creation of strong learning communities.

In traditional family literacy programs, parents spend up to four hours daily in adult education coursework to prepare for academic and employment opportunities. Based on initial assessments and with the help of an adult education instructor, students create a plan for the goals they hope to achieve. As students progress, their goals are reexamined and readjusted as necessary, but always with an eye toward moving forward.

Outcomes for adults are measured through both formative and summative assessments. Successes in parenting education, employment skills, jobs gained, and the development of self-efficacy are examined.

Data from an evaluation report of a four-component family literacy program, BIE's FACE program, provides an example. In school year 2017, 59% of adult students set goals of becoming more involved in their children's schools, and 81% of those adults achieved that goal. Of the adults who set education and employment goals,

68% improved academic skills needed for college, 84% improved reading skills, 80% improved employability, and 69% got a job (Research & Training Associates, 2017).

Changes within the federal Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act of 2015 (WIOA) have shaped the way family literacy programs prepare parents for the workforce. Adult education programs now partner with local businesses and postsecondary education institutions to best meet the long-term educational and employment goals of parents. In return, parents can take advantage of the opportunities presented by these collaborations to gain the academic and employability skills needed for economic success. Contextualized instruction in the adult education classroom links academic and occupational skills demonstrating their “real-world” application. Through the family learning model, parents practiced 40 of 42 federally recognized employability skills necessary for employment that can lift a family out of poverty.

Parent Time

According to the federal definition of family literacy services, Parent Time supports parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children. This definition has broad application for family literacy and family learning programs that depend on information transmission directly to adults. The definition also serves as a platform for the parent-to-parent and community-to-parent transmission of social capital. Parents empowered with knowledge and relationships will be able to form new networks that can be accessed for the economic (Coleman, 1990) and social-emotional benefit of the family.

Research suggests that parents are more likely to help their children navigate successfully through their education when they know what their children need in everyday life, including their school life, and when parents know what it takes for children to be successful in school (Jeynes, 2011). Parent Time serves as the hub of communication for adult-to-adult information sharing in family literacy and family learning programs (National Center for Families Learning, 2015a, p. 1). Based on 30 years of experience, NCFL recommends that Parent Time take place twice a week, for at least one hour per session. It is important that Parent Time topics are based on parent-generated goals and that curricular objectives are linked to intergenerational family engagement activities, such as PACT Time. Within the context of

PACT Time, Parent Time is very helpful for the planning and preparation components of the process.

In each Parent Time session, parents and program staff discuss topics such as how teachers work to meet each child’s unique learning needs, how the operation of a school or community organization works, the safe use of technology as a learning tool, what the program expectations of parents are, the importance of reading aloud to children, and how to help a child with his or her homework. During Parent Time, program staff work with adults to set high expectations, focus on their children’s progress, and extend learning into the home and community. Parent Time sessions also prepare parents to participate in their children’s school and out-of-school time activities. These sessions encourage volunteerism, improved communication with teachers and other school staff, advocacy for their children, and participation in Family Service Learning, parent leadership programs, and family mentoring.

A recent independent evaluation of NCFL Family Learning noted increases in parents volunteering for school activities, a 14-percentage point increase in taking children to community, religious, or ethnic events, and a 14-point increase in communicating with their child(ren)’s teacher by email (Goodling, 2017).

Parent Time connects parents to their children’s learning in an intentional way. Meaningful engagement of families in their children’s learning supports school readiness and long-term academic success (Henrich & Gadaire, 2008; Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006). Increased family engagement can also counterbalance the risk factors such as low maternal literacy, low socioeconomic status, and lack of English language skills while improving parental self-efficacy (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006). The improvement of parental self-efficacy has been shown to have a compounding positive effect on student literacy achievement over time (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Hindman, Skibbe, Miller, & Zimmerman, 2010).

For programs that intend to support family engagement and children’s learning, it is crucial to implement strategies for developing partnerships with families (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Parent Time should be conducted in a culturally responsive manner, including facilitation in parents’ native languages, that reflects the diversity of populations served. Such an approach

should include a commitment to outreach (Colombo, 2006; Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006). Parent Time is intended to strengthen the role of parents, foster collaborative time to reach family goals, and increase effective engagement in their children's development.

In addition to connecting parents to their children's learning, Parent Time also connects parents to each other. These new and deliberate connections will result in the formation of new social capital. This social capital includes the relationships and aspects of relationships that allow for the transmission of resources and institutional support (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Sociologist James Coleman has defined social capital as a resource that can be leveraged as a capital asset (1990). Parent Time is a forum for the creation of social capital. When parents meet for at least two hours per week, natural relationships are formed. The leader of Parent Time is tasked with teaching parents how to maximize these relationships for their own family's gain. Systematic efforts to build and maximize social capital are particularly important for vulnerable families who may experience higher rates of social isolation.

Adult Skill Building and Parent Time

In the family learning model, adult skill building is primarily learner-centered to help parents reach their educational and employment goals. The adult skill building component in family learning programs is often less intensive in terms of hours than in family literacy adult education components. Often, the learning is broader in scope and guided by the interests and the needs of parents. Within Parent Time and through community partnerships, facilitators guide parents toward the needed classes, programs, and resources to meet their goals.

The adult skill building component of Parent Time is integrated within programming so that adult learners take the skills they currently possess, build upon their social capital, and develop their goals to facilitate their transition into the workforce or postsecondary training. Some students attending family learning programs have previously worked, received degrees in other countries, or have earned a high school diploma or college degree. Family learning programs work to meet these students where they are as they build their social capital—so they ultimately can find employment that pays a livable wage.

To mobilize a family out of poverty, parents must

have the resources and abilities to properly care for their children (Lower-Basch & Schmidt, 2015). Two-generational programming provides the resources and supports to meet the needs of families enrolled in the program. Family learning programs provide the opportunity for families to make connections with other families, which further strengthens the quality of the programming. "Participants in focus groups remarked on how sustained friendships were formed through the NCFL Family Learning program. The relationships provided social, emotional, and knowledge-development support" (Goodling, 2017, p. 40). Additionally, The Search Institute argues that social capital building should occur within the family unit to efficiently support the family (Pekel, Roehlkepartain, Syvertsen, & Scales, 2015). Topics such as family relationships, goal-setting, teaching responsibility to children, and making connections with partners to open doors of opportunity, should be integrated into the curriculum to build social capital.

Children's Education

An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences is one of the four components described by the federal definition of family literacy services. While adult family members come to school to improve literacy skills and attain academic goals, children come to school to better prepare for their own educational journey. In traditional family literacy programs, preschool and/or early-elementary age children come to school alongside their parents. Goals for preschool children are generally related to language development and kindergarten readiness. Goals for elementary children are related to ensuring their academic achievement with family support. Often reading proficiency by third grade is a primary goal.

Preschool classrooms in family literacy programs focus on children's language and literacy skill development as an essential part of kindergarten readiness. Teachers are trained to provide high quality early childhood experiences, interactions, and instructional practices that meet early learning standards. In traditional family literacy programs, three- and four-year-old children spend a minimum of 3.5 hours daily in the preschool classroom.

The Family and Child Education (FACE) program is a strong example of a preschool-based family literacy program with proven outcomes. During the 2003-04 school year, FACE implemented dialogic

reading, a research-based reading strategy, to improve children's language development (Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith & Fischel, 1994). NCFL and FACE leadership made the decision to extend and integrate dialogic reading strategies throughout all four components of the family literacy model. Early childhood teachers and co-teachers, adult education instructors, and parents were trained to use the strategy with children at school, in PACT Time, and at home. In each subsequent program year, children have shown significant gains in expressive language as measured by the Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test (EOWPVT) from the point of entry in the program to the point of exiting the program. On average, student vocabulary, language, and comprehension scores in 2005 increased from the pre-test PY (program year) 04 score at the 7th percentile to the post-test PY05 score at the 45th percentile. (Research & Training Associates, 2008, 2012) That trend has continued to date.

Another outcome relates more closely to kindergarten readiness. Nearly 1,200 children entered kindergarten at FACE schools in fall 2015 and were assessed with the Northwest Evaluations Associations' (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) in reading and mathematics. Approximately one-third of the entering kindergartners at FACE schools had participated in the FACE family literacy program as preschoolers. Students who had participated in FACE family literacy programs scored significantly higher on the MAP Reading and Mathematics Assessments at kindergarten entry than compared to their peers who did not participate in the program (Research & Training Associates, 2015).

Levesque and Scordias (2018) studied the impacts of NCFL's family literacy model in Detroit, Michigan. An analysis of pre-test and post-test data found a significant positive change in the families' home literacy environments. The frequency of at-home reading to or with children increased for families who regularly attended and fully participated in all four components of the family literacy model. Additionally, parents experienced an increase in self-efficacy in terms of their ability to support their children's education. In a quasi-experimental, between-groups design formed by matched pairs, children whose families participated in the program had *significantly higher rates of school attendance and of reading growth rates* when compared to children in non-participating families. The study also examined the interaction between parental and child

outcomes. Parents' level of attendance was significantly associated with students' attendance, academic mindset, and reading achievement (Levesque & Scordias, 2018).

Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time®

Parent-child interactions are the heart of family literacy and family learning programs. Whether at home, in the classroom, or in the community, bringing children and parents together to work, play, read, and learn can lead to stronger parent-child relationships and positive child outcomes in language, literacy, emotional growth, and cognitive development of children (Jacobs, 2004).

NCFL defined Parent and Child Together Time early in the organization's history and has subsequently tested its implementation with diverse parents and children, from preschool through elementary and middle school, and from across the country for nearly 30 years. PACT Time has been consistently affirmed as an essential strategy to maximize the benefits of families learning together. Whether in the context of a comprehensive family literacy or family learning program, a family engagement program, or as stand-alone activities designed to model family engagement in the home, school, and community, fidelity to the PACT Time component can deepen the impact of families learning together.

The first component in the federal definition, interactive literacy activities between parents and their children represents the meaningful parent-child interactions, or the PACT Time component of comprehensive programs. In these programs, parents and children come to school to learn together. Children attend their own preschool or elementary classes, while parents attend adult education or adult literacy classes. Then during PACT Time, parents come to their children's classrooms to engage in joint learning activities with their children. Parents and children spend at least one hour daily interacting together in the child's classroom in a typical family literacy program.

This structured time was designed to support parents in the following ways:

- assist parents in their role as first teacher of their children;
- help parents gain awareness of how children learn;
- provide parents with tools and strategies to support their children's learning;

- provide parents with an opportunity to practice interacting with their children in a supportive environment, and
- support parents and help them feel comfortable with new ideas for parent-child interaction at school, home, or in the community.

PACT Time is a dual or multi-generational approach to learning that includes parents, children, caregivers, and extended family members in reciprocal learning. It is a deliberate attempt to structure family learning using five components of an effective PACT Time experience:

1. planning,
2. preparation,
3. experience,
4. debriefing, and
5. transfer to home, school, and community (Jacobs, 2004).

Meaningful parent-child interactions build upon parents' observations of children and their knowledge of children's needs, interests, and development. When parents transfer that knowledge into quality interactions with their children, they are better able to support children's development, readiness, and learning proficiency. When PACT Time is implemented with fidelity to the five components—planning, preparation, experience, debriefing, and transfer home—tangible outcomes for families can be expected. Outcomes include improved language and literacy skills, increased parental self-efficacy, overall growth in family well-being, and improved academic achievement for children.

As funding and program policies have changed and evolved, NCFL has sought alternative ways to support meaningful parent-child interactions, or PACT Time experiences, that reach beyond the school walls and into the home and community. Family Service Learning, as described in the following section, is a high-impact, parent-child interactive experience.

Family Service Learning

Family Service Learning was created in response to the need for authentic project-based learning across NCFL family literacy and family learning programs. As families became more confident and stable through program participation, they often began to look beyond their personal family goals and needs to those

of their own communities and the changes they would like to see there.

This six-step process called Family Service Learning (Cramer & Toso, 2015) is woven through the fabric of family literacy and family learning. It is an intergenerational approach to deeper engagement as learners that puts families in a position to identify and address challenges in their communities. Throughout the process, families engage with technology and digital resources in meaningful ways to carry out the project. A deliberate focus on building and leveraging social capital also yields power for adult participants working to gain employment and advocacy skills that will sustain their families.

The Family Service Learning process is based, in part, on the work of Rohlkepartain (2009) and brings together a focus on civic engagement as a family with the contextualization of learning. The steps of the process are closely aligned to the steps of PACT Time.

1. Investigation—families investigate their community to determine challenges they may decide to address
2. Planning and Preparation—families work together to learn about the chosen challenge and determine the tasks needed to complete the project successfully
3. Action—families implement the project to address the chosen challenge
4. Reflection—families reflect on the project they have implemented, what they have learned, and how they have impacted the community
5. Demonstration of Results and Celebration—families share the results of the project with others in the community and celebrate the accomplishment of the project
6. Sustainability—families determine how they will ensure that the project's effects endure into the future, including resources and partnerships needed

Both family literacy and family learning programs largely target low-income populations, which may suggest why the process has transformative power on participants. While service-learning opportunities historically tend to be reserved for K-12 and university students, learners from minority groups have demonstrated increased positive outcomes over their peers (Miller, Berkey, &

Griffin, 2015; Ellerton et al., 2015). Engaging the whole family in the process provides opportunities for skill building for very young children (Fair & Delaplaine, 2015), K-12 students (Furco, 2013), and adults (Kelly, 2013).

Through independent evaluation of the process and the family learning model, The Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy at Pennsylvania State University found that participants gained experience with key employability skills through this contextualized learning experience (Toso & Krupar, 2016). As a result, NCFL now intentionally supports programs implementing the Family Service Learning process to incorporate a focus on developing goals identified by the Perkins Collaborative Research Network in the Employability Skills Framework (Department of Education, 2015).

The Impact of Social Capital

An important product of building family networks is the creation of social capital. As adults increasingly desire to move towards their full potential, newly developed social capital can be leveraged to achieve a myriad of benefits. In *Foundations of Social Theory*, Coleman (1990) defined social capital as a resource that comes from relationships that can be leveraged as a capital asset.

Social capital is:

“not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common; they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure” (Coleman, p. 302).

Social capital can also be exchanged for favors or new information (Resnick, 2001). Social capital is lodged within relationships. Ricardo Stanton-Salazar (2001) defined social capital as “relationships and networks that transmit vital forms of resources and institutional support that enable young people to become effective participants within mainstream institutional spheres, particularly the school system,” (p. 20). Over the last decade, the importance of social capital has transcended dispute and propelled it into a field of its own (Kwon & Adler, 2014).

The ability to translate social capital into capital assets through the direct engagement of newly empowered parents is a major focus for Parent Time activities. As adults and families move through a family learning

program, they will have new opportunities to leverage their online and offline networks to reach their personal academic and economic goals. Recent evidence suggests that digital social networks such as Facebook create an easy opportunity for the exchange of social capital, especially if one’s network is actively managed (Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014).

Family literacy and family learning programs can be very impactful. When parents pursue academic goals that result in the improvement of a mother’s reading level, family learning is addressing the most important factor contributing to a child’s academic success (Sastry & Pebley, 2010). Additionally, when parents are involved in their child’s education, the gap in literacy performance between children of more educated and less educated mothers can be diminished (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006). Finally, when goals to improve the economic situation of the family are realized, overall family well-being is positively influenced, and student achievement rises (Swick, 2009). The probability of achieving these powerful outcomes is magnified when social capital is exchanged for personal gain.

Summary

Over 50 years of research links the various roles families play in a child’s education, including supporters of learning, encouragers of grit and determination, models of lifelong learning, and advocates of proper programming and placements for their child (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

Comprehensive family literacy and family learning programs are the most intensive family engagement programs available. In addition to building and supporting comprehensive family literacy programs, NCFL is a leader for the implementation and replication of best practices in high-quality family engagement across America.

This paper represents the NCFL perspective on how family literacy, family learning, and family engagement programs meet and support families at three varying levels of service, for different purposes, and with clear expectations and targeted outcomes. NCFL supports the three-tiered family engagement model as a guide for schools and community education services when determining intervention levels with families. Based on

our 30-year experience of working with families, we see family literacy and family learning models as the two family intervention programs most likely to move families out of poverty and onto a pathway of positive family

engagement, academic achievement, and employability. In turn, families thrive and celebrate their unique contributions to their communities and to society.

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Suggested Citation:

Jacobs, K., Cramer, J., Noles, T., & Lovett, P.A. (2018) *Defining our work: Families learning together*. Louisville, KY: National Center for Families Learning.

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