



## **Coronavirus exposes major lack of support for parents in children's education**

*States should use CARES Act education funds to expand high-impact family engagement and family literacy*

Never in our history has the home been more important as the family becomes the main source of learning, comfort, and stability during this coronavirus outbreak.

As all families with school-aged children struggle to balance their new routines with the added responsibility of their child's education, parents who are under-resourced and most vulnerable are in need of significant support that is sorely lacking. Consider Flora, a single mother with three school-aged children who just lost her minimum wage job. From a tiny apartment, she is navigating online instruction for her children with one smartphone and little, if any, support for her new role.

Flora's children need her, so they don't fall behind; but she needs help to provide that support.

At the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL), we have joined many others in providing families with free digital learning tools, but we know that this is not enough. It is not enough for Flora and her family. It is not enough for the millions of families in rural communities where internet is neither available nor reliable. And, it is not enough for the estimated 30 million parents and caregivers who lack basic literacy or English skills.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provides \$13.5 billion for local K-12 school districts that will be distributed through state departments of education. This relief comes with a tremendous amount of flexibility to meet local education needs.

Now, more than ever, is the time to leverage a significant amount of these funds to expand high-impact family engagement programming. As states develop plans to spend its funding, they must look at the reality on the ground and ensure families have the tools to support learning at home.

Parents' literacy levels are the biggest indicator of a child's future academic – and life – success. Through high-impact family engagement programs such as family literacy, caregivers learn together with their children and acquire parenting and workforce skills while their kids attend preschool or grade school. Outcomes include parents learning English, how to help their children with school, and strengthening family bonds.

Research shows this leads to:

- Better attendance. Children whose parents participated in a family learning program attended school on average *16 more days annually* than their peers. That equals an entire school year by the time kids get to 11<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Narrowing the gap on kindergarten readiness. Children living in the most impoverished parts of our country, who regularly attended preschool while their parents participated in family literacy,



increased their school readiness. On average, they moved from the 37<sup>th</sup> percentile to the 55<sup>th</sup> percentile on school readiness and scored significantly higher in reading and math than children who did not participate.

- A partnership between teachers, parents and students. With better attendance, students' test scores increase, and parents are more involved in school.

NCFL has spent 30 years researching, refining, and implementing family education solutions for more than 4.5 million parents and children. Steps must be taken now to empower parents – both those currently in poverty and those who will fall into it because of the economic shutdown. These needs will extend beyond the pandemic.

High impact family engagement and family literacy can no longer be treated as add-ons to education – they must be a critical part of the process. We have been forced to turn homes into schools. We owe it to families to build an infrastructure that supports them.

Right now, states have the chance to determine their own fate. Writing a plan that incorporates high-impact family engagement will drive generational change for families. And, NCFL is ready, willing and able to aid any state education leadership in writing a comprehensive and meaningful family engagement plan aimed at helping all families as they scramble to support their children during this crisis.

In doing so, parents can navigate these uncertain and challenging times and ultimately become agents of generational change with the end goal of being lifted out of poverty.

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