



Introduction

As efforts increase to reform education and raise the achievement of all students, literacy is at the forefront. Family literacy, which enhances the educational opportunities of all family members, continues to gain recognition as an effective strategy aimed at breaking the cycle of illiteracy and poverty.

Recognition for the value of family literacy from policymakers, parents, educators and communities has come in a variety of forms; from the requirement that family literacy be a component of programs funded through the No Child Left Behind legislation such as the Reading Excellence Act (REA) and 21st Century Community Learning Centers Programs, to an increase in the availability and number of families served through family literacy programs.

New York State Alliance for Family Literacy

The Alliance for Family Literacy was established in 1999 to advocate for and support a system of high quality family literacy services across New York State. Prior to the development of the Alliance, there was no comprehensive effort to coordinate, integrate, strengthen or expand family literacy services to meet the needs of low-income families in New York State. Recognizing the untapped potential for comprehensive family literacy programs to effectively address the complex issues of poverty and under education, New York State took the challenge to create the New York State Alliance for Family Literacy. A partnership among the New York State Council on Children and Families, State Education Department (Even Start), and the New York State Head Start Association, the Alliance is supported by over 40 organizations, programs, and agencies throughout the state, all working to promote family literacy.

Continuing into its second and final year of funding, the New York State Alliance for Family Literacy has undertaken the challenge to:

- + improve the quality of family literacy services through training (and the implementation of performance indicators.)
- + strengthen and expand family literacy services in New York State by stimulating and supporting local family literacy alliances.

- + coordinate and integrate existing federal, state, and local family literacy resources.

Evaluation Procedures

MAGI Educational Services Inc. of White Plains, New York, an independent research and evaluation firm, was contracted to perform an independent evaluation of the New York State Alliance for Family Literacy. During Year 1, MAGI conducted a formative evaluation of the New York State Alliance for Family Literacy focusing on the process of establishing state-wide partnerships along with identifying accomplishments of the partnership. Year 2 will focus on a summative evaluation for this two year grant.

Year 2 of the grant saw a change in focus from the building of a state-wide alliance to:

- 1) the building of 11¹ local family alliances selected and funded through the New York State Alliance for Family Literacy,
- 2) incorporating family literacy into state and local policies and programs to create a culture that fully supports literacy development for all family members, and,
- 3) developing, refining, and implementing the New York State Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training.

Within the context of those goals and objectives, the final year evaluation examines changes that have occurred as a result of the work of the NYS Alliance for Family Literacy and specifically examines the question: How well has the Alliance progressed in meeting its overall goals and objectives and what is the nature of that progress?

- + What progress has been made in improving the quality of family literacy services through training and the implementation of performance indicators?

¹ Syracuse, the 11th local alliance, joined after funding was awarded.

- + What progress has been made in strengthening and expanding family literacy services in New York State through the stimulating and supporting of local family literacy alliances?
- + What progress has been made in policy and funding areas in order to coordinate and integrate existing federal, state, and local family literacy resources?



Methodology

MAGI approached the evaluation by designing both qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments to be administered across multiple respondents. In addition, historical documents pertaining to activities of the local alliances and the State Alliance taking place over the course of the year were reviewed. Individual and group interviews were conducted with local alliances and the management team. Surveys evaluating the NYS Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training were developed, distributed and analyzed using descriptive statistics. By organizing the evaluation this way, the study was able to respond to the primary inquiries listed in the previous section.

Group Interviews and Follow-up Individual Interviews

Group interviews with five of the local alliances were conducted using a structured interview protocol. The five local alliances were selected to represent rural, suburban, and urban areas. The purpose of the group interview was to probe: 1) the make-up and goals of the local alliance partners; 2) reactions to and expressed needs for training; 3) the perceived support provided from the State Alliance to the local alliances; 4) perceptions of impact and change as a result of funding of the local alliances; 5) issues related to sustainability; 6) obstacles encountered or predicted; and 7) recommendations. All group interviews were conducted by two MAGI staff. Five of the six group interviews were conducted on site, and one group interview was conducted during a pre-arranged conference call. The group interviews, lasting between 1 – 1½ hours were recorded in field notes, taped, and transcribed. Follow-up interviews via telephone were conducted with 2 of the previously interviewed local alliances.

Individual Interviews

Interviews with the management team both together and individually were conducted during the course of the year, generally during pre-arranged conference and telephone calls. The purpose of the interviews was to document activities and issues that arose related to the implementation of Alliance objectives.

Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training-Participant Evaluation Survey

The purpose of this survey was to gauge overall participant reactions and levels of satisfaction with the New York State Alliance's Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training. The surveys were distributed following the completion of the 4 day training at each of the three training sites (Valhalla, Batavia and the Bronx), with the second year of training beginning in December 2001 and the last training ending in August 2002. In total, eighty-seven (87) surveys were completed and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Follow-up Survey of New York State Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training. The purpose of this survey was to gauge levels of actual implementation as well as the nature of and issues related to, implementation of the training received. This survey was sent to all individuals (303) identified as participating in training over the last two years. Ninety-seven (97) surveys were completed and analyzed using descriptive statistics. This represents a 32% response rate.

Observation

School Based Leadership Team Conference. Strengthening of relationships between community based organizations and school districts was a particular focus of the State Alliance; therefore, the observation of a kick-off event introducing the funding and purpose of a local family alliance was conducted.



Findings

I. What progress has been made in improving the quality of family literacy services through training and the implementation of performance indicators?

Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training

Critical to accomplishing the Alliance goal of improving the quality and quantity of family literacy services in New York State is the development of a continuum of training opportunities for providers and collaborators of family literacy services. Discussed in the First Year Evaluation Report, the Alliance continues to be successful in offering a statewide series of 4 day Basic Implementation Training sessions using the National Center for Family Literacy materials and the New York State Basic Implementation Training Participant Manual and companion Trainer's Guide. In addition to the four training sites offered in 2001, training in 2002 was offered at three sites; Valhalla, the Bronx, and Batavia. Participants completed surveys at each of the sites that probed their satisfaction with, and their intended uses of, the training and materials they received. Below are results of the survey.

Overall, the training continues to be rated very highly.

Results of the Year 2 training survey administered at all three sites indicated that participants were clearly satisfied with the Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training they received. This is reflective of the very positive results found last year as well. The results in **Figure 1** show that 85% to 100% of the participants (N=87) responded "good" or

“excellent” when asked to rate particular aspects of the training. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, the mode score for these same variables was 4.7.

Figure 1
Participant Ratings of Particular Aspects of Training
(N=87)

Aspects of Training	% Rating “Good/Excellent”
+ The quality of trainers	100%
+ Achievement of stated goals of the training	99%
+ The materials used in the training	99%
+ The overall usefulness of the training	95%
+ How well the training met your expectations	93%
+ The pace of the training	85%

**Source of data: Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training Participant Evaluation Form*

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being a low rating and 5 being a high rating, the mean rating for trainer’s mastery of the subject as well as clarity of the presentation was 4.8, indicating very high levels of satisfaction.

These positive findings are also reflected in participants’ reported intentions to:

- + implement what they have learned (100% very likely/likely to implement), and
- + recommend the training to a colleague (100% very likely/likely to recommend)

Further,

- + almost three-quarters of participants (72%) reported that they had made connections at the training with other potential collaborators in their community;
- + 90% of respondents felt the training did a good or excellent job at addressing individual organizational needs; and
- + 96% of the participants gave the training an excellent or good overall rating.

A significant goal and achievement of the New York State Alliance was the development of training materials to support and reinforce the Basic Training program. A cornerstone of the Basic Training is the training manual, "A Comprehensive Approach to Family Literacy: New York State Guide for Program Development." **Figure 2** includes questions and responses pertaining to the training materials received:

Figure 2
Participant Perception of New York State Family Literacy Training
Materials
(N=87)

Perception About Training Materials	% Rating "Good/Excellent"
+ How well did the materials match the training you received?	98%
+ How useful did you find the materials?	95%
+ Please rate the content of the materials	94%
+ How useful do you think the materials will be in your day-to-day work?	87%

**Source of data: Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training Participant Evaluation Form*

Participants were asked what they would like to see added to the New York State supplement materials. Among their suggestions: 1) additional activity ideas in each of the four components, 2) focus on special needs populations and home visits, 3) evaluation planning, 4) literacy assessment, 5) collaboration strategies, 6) program management and administration, 7) additional materials (i.e. videos, handouts, websites), 8) follow-up training, and 9) research on family literacy.

Asked what aspects of the training they think they will implement, comments varied from staff development, brain research, integration of all components, parent/child interactive literacy, team planning, recruitment ideas, standards and learning experiences, evaluation planning, and use of lessons and the manual. As one participant commented, "To be honest, everything."

Asked what features of the training they liked best and least, 98% of respondents included comments on what they liked best about the training, while only 41% of respondents included a comment about what they liked least. Among the many features of the training participants reported as liking best were:

- + Trainer's passion, enthusiasm and knowledge
- + Interactive activities
- + Handouts, videos, other materials
- + Meeting other participants; expanding networks, sharing ideas

- + Variety of ideas for activities, lesson planning and meeting NYS standards
- + Balance of theory and practice
- + Learning about NYS standards

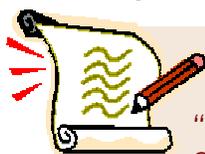
Responding to what they liked least about the training, participants most often indicated physical accommodations, lengthy training sessions, and “lecture” components. In addition, they noted components of the training that they felt did not pertain to them or in which they had previous training. One respondent indicated concern about promoting standardized testing over assessing individual needs of students.

To improve the training, participants suggested specific areas of interest including:

- + adding information on special needs children,
- + providing follow-up training and more frequent training,
- + allowing for collaboration of those working in the same area,
- + coordinating NYS and National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) materials into single manual,
- + providing more information on Family Literacy research and best practices,
- + information sharing about individual programs, and
- + adding more training in teaching literacy.

In terms of general suggestions, some participants recommended increasing the number of training days to slow the pace and provide more time for processing, while others suggested shortening the training. Suggestions also touched on physical accommodations, such as selecting different locations and having smaller training groups.

Comments² such as those below reflect the views of many of those participating in New York State's Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training:



Participants - Cornell Cooperative Extension - Valhalla Training

“Trainers please don't stop doing training- you are changing our life and we will change others lives.”

² *“A wonderful job!”*
 Source of data: Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training Participant Evaluation Form

“Good pace, good mix of video, activities and participation”



Participants -- Batavia Training

"Excellent training! I enjoyed it and learned a lot. I'm looking forward to sharing [what I learned] about the training and implementing new ideas and information. Thank you!"

"I enjoyed working with other agencies."

"I would like to recommend this training to other Family Literacy programs."

"This program should be mandated for all new programs."

"Thank you for sharing your expertise with us. You empower us. we empower families. families"

In focus group interviews with local alliances, feedback on training was very positive with all those who participated extremely enthusiastic about the knowledge they had gained and, in many cases, shared with their agencies. Many commented that it was their involvement with the alliance that precipitated their taking the training; they would not have done so had they not been involved with the local alliance. In one local alliance, some attending the training felt that the areas of cultural diversity and adult education were only touched upon and needed further elaboration. However, during the course of an alliance meeting, they collaboratively decided that through their joint expertise, they could take the initiative to have two of their local alliance members develop and implement training on cultural diversity for their members.

The Alliance is looking ahead to institutionalize the training by recognizing that in order to sustain the training beyond the two-year grant period, the training needs to be housed and administered by an agency other than the State Alliance. The New York State Even Start Program is likely to oversee training in order to free up the State Alliance to focus more on policy.

Follow-up Evaluation Survey of NYS Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training

In addition to the participant evaluation survey administered on the last day of each training session, a follow-up survey was mailed to all those who had participated in any of the trainings over the two years. While the initial survey probed intentions to use what had been learned from the training, the follow-up survey probed what aspects of the

training, if any, had actually been implemented, as well as what, if any, changes (such as in knowledge or delivery of services) may have been an outcome of the training received. In addition, survey questions examined the occurrence and nature of participants sharing knowledge and information gained from training with colleagues in the form of staff development.

Participant Work Environments

An analysis of the work environments of participants reveals a broad range of participation (**Figure 3**). This reflects an intentional effort to expand the literacy audience to reflect the comprehensive view of family literacy and the diverse environments in which it needs to be effectively implemented. The diversity of participants also reflects the intention of creating training environments where human service professionals from divergent work environments can meet and make connections with potential collaborators.

Figure 3
Work Environments of the Respondents to the Follow-up Survey of the
New York State Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training
(N=97)

Work Environments	% of Respondents
+ Even Start	62%
+ Adult Education	48%
+ Parenting Education	37%
+ Early Childhood	34%
+ Pre-Kindergarten	20%
+ Elementary Education	15%
+ Head Start	13%
+ Family Services Organization	12%
+ Other	12%
+ Childcare Center	9%
+ Pre-school/Nursery School	8%
+ Family Care Center	6%
+ After-school Program	6%
+ Middle/Intermediate School	3%
+ High School	3%
+ State Agency	3%
+ School District Office	3%
+ Post-Secondary Education	1%

**Source of data: Follow-up Survey of the New York State Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training*

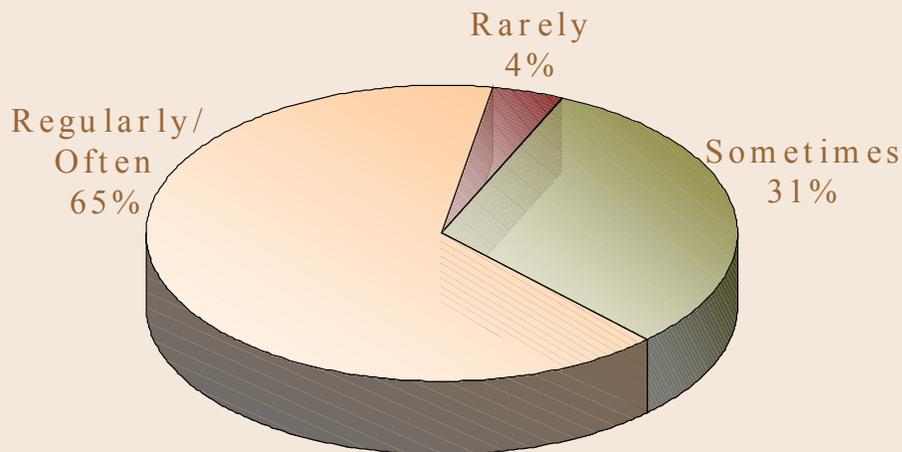
*** Participants' work environments often provide multiple sources; therefore, more than one response was selected, yielding a total of more than 100 per cent.*

Changes in Quality and Quantity of Family Literacy Services

Survey results indicate that training had a direct impact on changes in the quality and quantity of family literacy services, a clear objective of the New York State Alliance for Family Literacy.

While 100% of respondents indicated that they have implemented or incorporated what they learned about family literacy into their work, 96% indicated implementing what they learned “often” or “sometimes” (see **Figure 4**).

Figure 4
Extent to Which Respondents Implemented Family Literacy into their Work
(N=97)



Source of data: Follow-up Survey of the New York State Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training

Figure 5 shows the wide range of areas of family literacy in which respondents implemented activities/strategies/ideas from the training they received:

Figure 5
Areas of Family Literacy in Which Respondents Implemented
Activities/Strategies/Ideas Learned in Training
(N=97)

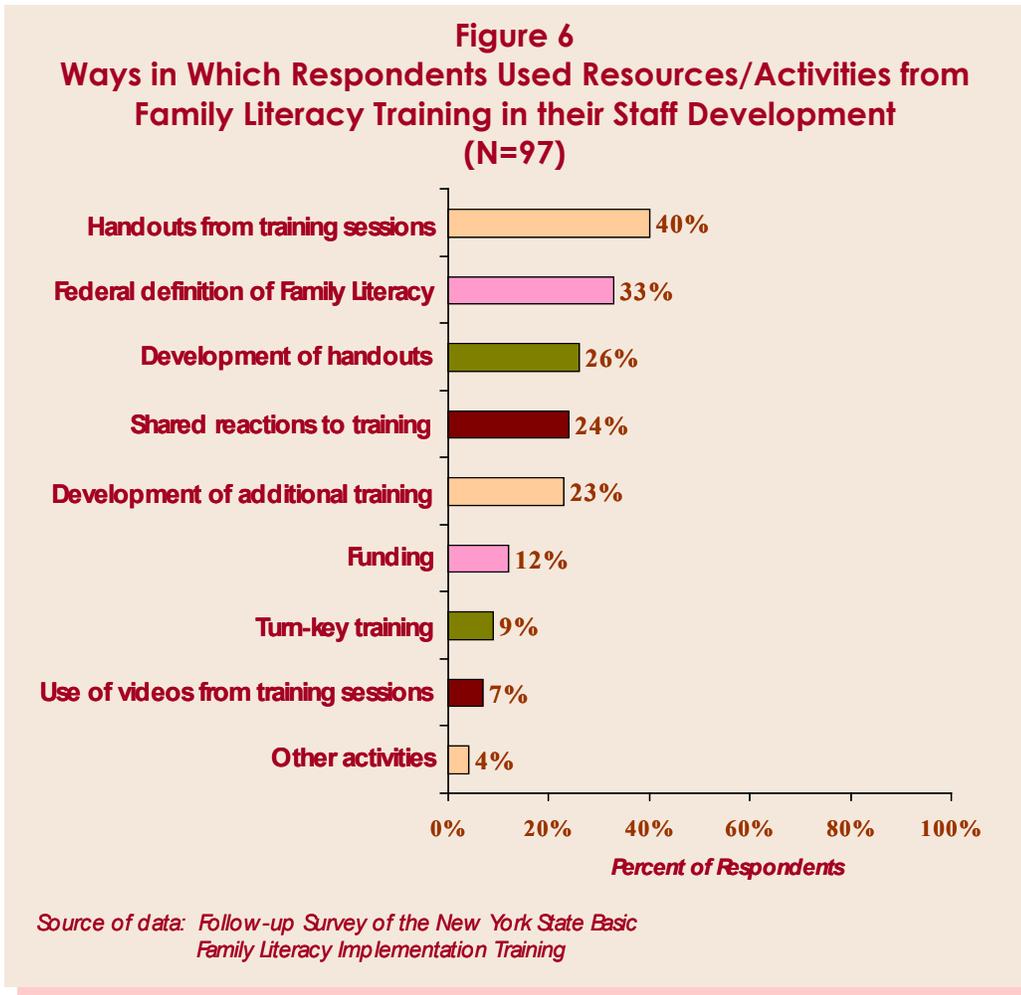
Areas of Family Literacy	% of Respondents
+ Parent-Child Interactive Literacy	71%
+ Parenting Education	67%
+ Adult Education	66%
+ Integration of the Components	61%
+ Children's Education	60%
+ Collaborations with Other Agencies	51%
+ Staff Development	35%
+ Collaborations with Schools	30%
+ Recruitment of Families	29%
+ Retention of Families	29%
+ Transition of Families	21%
+ Evaluation of Strategies	14%
+ Funding Opportunities	12%
+ Planning Future Activities	2%

**Source of data: Follow-up Survey of the New York State Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training*

- + The areas most frequently implemented by training participants included the four basic components of family literacy and the integration of those components. In addition, over half (51%) of the participants used activities, strategies or ideas in collaborations with other agencies.

An indication of the effectiveness of a training program is not only the way the new learning is put into practice but also the dissemination of learning to others who may then put their new knowledge into practice, spreading awareness of and knowledge about family literacy into a wider circle beyond the initial participants.

Results indicate that 60% of respondents shared knowledge and/or utilized resources from the training sessions to, in turn, provide staff development training . **Figure 6** provides a breakdown of the ways in which staff development activities (as an outgrowth of the Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training) were implemented:



- + Handouts were not frequently used in staff development activities (40%), followed by the use of the Federal definition of family literacy (35%).
- + 99% of respondents indicated changes in the quality and/or level of family literacy services provided as a result of their training.

Figure 7 describes respondents perceived changes in the level and quality of family literacy services provided as a result of training:

Figure 7
Perceived Changes in the Quality and/or Level of Family Literacy Services Provided as a Result of Training
(N=97)

Perceived Changes	% of Respondents
+ The training has increased my ability to provide quality family literacy services	70%
+ My agency has collaborated or plans to collaborate with other agencies in offering family literacy services	55%
+ I am a family literacy provider and my effectiveness in implementing family literacy activities has increased	51%
+ My agency thinks about literacy more comprehensively now as involving all members of the family	46%
+ My agency mandates have been changed to include family literacy services	8%
+ The training has not changed the quality of family literacy services I provided	1%

**Source of data: Follow-up Survey of the New York State Basic Family Literacy Implementation Training*

- + More than two-thirds of the respondents (70%) indicated that the training allowed them to improve the quality of family literacy series they offered.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents (72%) responded affirmatively to the question, "Has the training changed the way you provide services?" and explained:



"I am new to the program so the training was very important and necessary for

"I collaborated with another agency and culled a Family Literacy 6 week program. It was very successful and we plan on continuing to run the program in the Fall and again in the Spring."

"I have more "tools" in my "tool kit" and new and increased ways of using them."

The services I offer[now] are more comprehensive."

[I am] More alert to Family Literacy issues."

It helped me to increase the intensity of services offered and provided an excellent base for understanding and expanding Family Literacy Services."

We now know how to successfully integrate the four components to do a quality home visit."

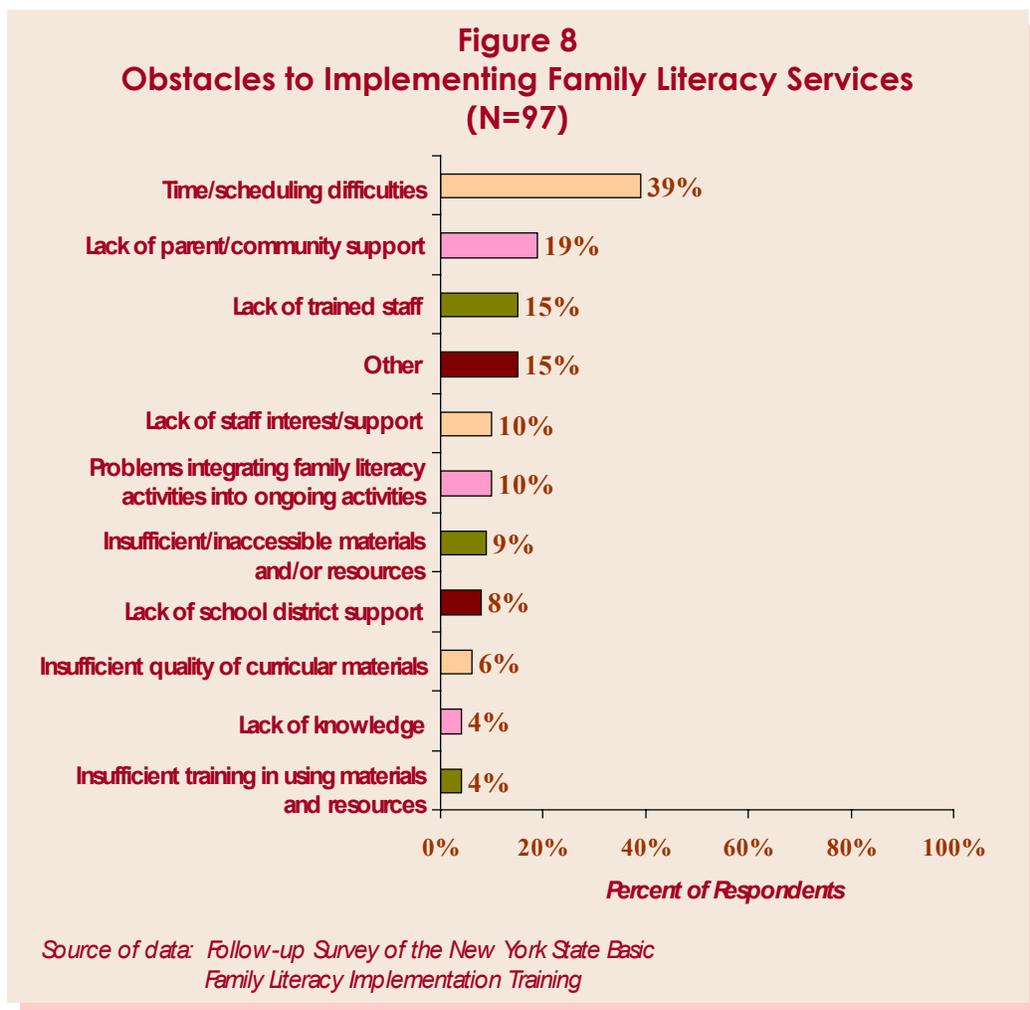
I find ways to incorporate all Even Start components whenever I plan and implement family activities."

Much more aware of the importance of literacy in all parts of life: 1) Formed a program plan for Family Literacy; 2) Formed collaborations with other agencies; 3) Wrote Fatherhood/Early Literacy Grant 4) Provided staff development and Literacy competition."

It enables us to understand the essentials and create a Family Literacy vision and plan which we were then able to fund through Even Start "

Obstacles to Implementation

In assessing factors that may have restricted or hindered usage of family literacy practices, the three most frequently cited responses included: time/scheduling problems (39%), lack of parent/community support (19%), and lack of trained staff (15%). (See [Figure 8.](#))



Respondents were also asked about areas of family literacy in which they would like to receive more training. More than half the respondents (53%) identified areas of interest for additional training. Responses reflected an interest in both theory and practice of family literacy, including ways to incorporate family literacy into a host of educational programs (i.e., GED, after school, home-based, writing, staff development, an overview of research on reading and brain development, strategies to motivate parents, teachers and administrators to participate in family literacy activities, administrative areas (i.e., record keeping, time management), strategies and procedures for evaluation, and updates on new developments.

Other suggestions included more training in working with beginning English Language Learners, ways to incorporate family literacy in the training of family child care providers, strategies for working with multiple needs families- substance abuse, domestic and community violence and ways to work with collaborators whose program requirements are in conflict with Even Start requirements.

Implementation of Performance Indicators

The performance indicators were developed by the New York State Even Start program with input from a committee from the New York State Alliance for Family Literacy. All funded Even Start programs in New York State are required to use the indicators. At the end of the program year, data is sent to the State Even Start Director. Programs are then expected to use the data in their continuous improvement plans.

II. What progress has been made in strengthening and expanding family literacy through the creation and development of local family literacy alliances?

The Need

In order to promote the coordination, expansion, and strengthening of family literacy, a cornerstone of the NYS Alliance is to fund, train and support 10 local family literacy alliances within New York State. (Syracuse, the 11th local alliance, joined after funding was awarded). Based upon activities completed during the first year of funding, the Alliance successfully identified and funded the ten local alliances. The importance of providing integrated support services to families in order to assist them has become a common and increasingly important theme in descriptions of family literacy efforts. A goal of establishing local alliances reflects findings that "collaboration among education and human service agencies in local communities has...emerged as a critical element of family literacy in part because of the realization that the process of addressing the literacy needs of parents and children is complex and requires the delivery of multi-faceted services to meet those needs" (Alamprese, 1996).

Developing Local Alliances for Family Literacy: Benefits and Challenges

In working together at the state and local levels, collaboration strategies that organizations use to foster relationships as well as the communication structures that are developed and used to sustain those relationships, are important to successful endeavors. Deciding to become a member of an alliance involves identifying the costs and benefits of involvement.

Through an analysis of focus group interviews with local alliances, the benefits and challenges of working to strengthen family literacy services, as well as working collaboratively both locally and on the state level, were identified.

Benefits Gained Through Collaboration

Based on a content analysis of focus group interviews and individual follow-up interviews, benefits have far outweighed challenges, as members participating in each of 6 focus groups unanimously expressed how much they had gained personally and professionally from the collaborations including:

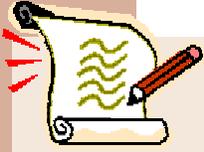
- + new networks of service providers;
- + increase the number and variety of agencies /organizations participants are able to refer clients to in regard to literacy and support services;
- + increases in understanding of the scope and availability of community resources;
- + development of new staff training opportunities;
- + collaborative programming; and
- + a wider range of people and agencies with whom to *learn, talk* and get involved in the provision of family literacy services.

Challenges and Obstacles to Collaboration

In regard to obstacles to developing a collaborative local alliance:

- + The majority of local alliances expressed difficulties in getting school districts to actively participate in advocating family literacy practices in their schools and in becoming partners in

the activities of the local alliance. Many attributed these obstacles to a lack of knowledge and understanding by the school district administration of the connection between family literacy activities and variables that impact children's literacy development and academic achievement:



"They [the principals] are all concerned not about the three and four year olds ...they're concerned about those test scores as published in newspapers...I always feel like I'm just hammering at something...we need the door to open up and we're not short of collaborators- we're not short of people with incredible energy and dying to do something – what we're short of is open doors and not just the open door but ...saying okay, we're going to make sure this is part of our staff training, we see the importance to this..."

"We're supposed to be impacting the [school] district...for whatever the reason is the districts do not seem to be making the connection between a three year old or a two year old and his parent becoming literate together and how well a child does on the ELA... It's hard to believe but they just don't seem to understand the connection."

"We need help...the burden is somehow coming down to us to change the cultures ultimately of the school districts and the school district personnel and the way they think about families and communities...I'm not really sure that from the top down people have been honest about how difficult that is...if the state doesn't take a proper role...and work with the districts...I don't know that we'll ever get there as a state..."

"We need to feel that there's more support from up there...from the state level.. we've

- + It should be noted that while participants at four of the five focus groups reported problems involving school personnel in family literacy activities, one large urban local alliance was able to build on strong school- community collaborations that were already in place. In this case, the school district was found to be an active partner in all phases of development and implementation of family literacy activities.
- + Some local alliances indicated initial confusion in the planning and development phase as to expectations of the State Alliance and felt more guidance would have been helpful in the beginning stages of their development. However, in all cases, through collaborative activity and discussion, alliances were able to reach consensus and are in varying stages of implementing strategies in progressing towards their objectives.

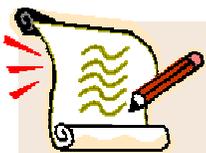
Changes: Progress Towards Goals and Objectives

The establishment of the local alliances brought to the table a far wider representation of agencies interested in becoming involved in addressing the literacy needs of families than members reported was usually the case with other initiatives in which they had been involved.

In all cases, members commented on the knowledge and networks they have gained including a deepened understanding of family literacy, broadened learning about personnel and agencies in their community and the way they work, and formalizing of their relationships in ways that allow them to continue “the conversation” at meetings in addition to the alliance.

An analysis of focus groups interviews with local alliances and follow-up individual interviews with local alliance lead members revealed patterns and themes reflecting initial changes related to the goals of the Alliance. These themes are interrelated and include:

- + increased breadth and depth of knowledge concerning theoretical and practical applications of family literacy,
- + increased communication and a formalizing of relationships between and among agencies/programs focusing on issues and activities related to family literacy,
- + establishing structures to facilitate collaborative family literacy activities where there were none before,
- + developing plans for sustainability through an ownership and “institutionalizing” of the work of the local alliance,
- + heightened awareness of the complexity of literacy development,
- + awareness of the importance of collaborative efforts in coordinating, integrating, strengthening, and expanding the resources of individual agencies, and
- + increased connections within communities.



“...it’s been fascinating to see who comes to the table and what they’re doing. When we first started off there was a lot of, ‘my agency does this, my agency does that’, ...a lot where I felt, I didn’t know that. That in itself is change... I think the information and communication is a part of the goal here.”

“We’ve always talked informally. It’s more formalized now... We go to meetings now ...I see familiar faces...from this I’ve spoken with a number of people here on a number of issues.”



"...a deepening would characterize my thinking. It's been a place to come and think specifically about ... family literacy, defining family literacy, what it means to put it into practice that's been useful...because many of us deal with a lot of different issues in our professional lives and though we may understand that there's kind of a lot behind something in particular we may not have cause to focus on it ...this formalizes some relationships. It deepens thinking about what family literacy is and what it takes to produce it.."

Local alliance members reported that all of these experiences have added to the ability of communities to better assist and engage a wider spectrum of individuals through the exchange of resources, information and/or services.

Case in Point: Progress Towards Goals and Objectives



In a small rural community, the creation of a local alliance brought together agencies and individuals who, while in some cases generally known to one another, had never worked together. As a result of the associations developed through working together in the local alliance, the annual Family Literacy Day attracted hundreds of participants and included significantly more community involvement than in previous years. A member of the local alliance

in speaking with the editor of the local newspaper, aroused his interest and he in turn contacted a band who volunteered their services to entertain. Rather than the limited number of community organizations that usually participated, 15 organizations attended.

Participants from the Migrant Education program were transported to the event with help from the participating organizations, which lowered transportation costs.

Building on new partnerships developed through the local alliance, the community was awarded a second Even Start grant. In terms of sustaining the work of the local alliance beyond the two years of funding, newly interested parties such as the newspaper editor, a local beautification group, the head of the local Rotary Club, and the Reading Council have all made commitments to continue to participate in expanding and strengthening family literacy activities by becoming members, for the first time, of the Even Start Advisory group.

While the local alliance continues to struggle to involve one of the school districts in the community, progress has been made with the other school district; the director of pupil personnel services now calls agencies she became aware of as a result of affiliation with the alliance with concerns about referrals for students' families.

Members of the local alliance have been invited to attend meetings of the

Changes in Knowledge, Strategies, Coordination and Integration of Services

An analysis of all focus groups interviews revealed a lack of coordinated and integrated services related to literacy at the local level prior to the development of the local alliances. In some cases, this was due to a lack of awareness about the work or existence of other agencies, a lack of formalized relations with other agencies, or a lack of knowledge about the components of family literacy.

As a result of the opportunity to work together and the knowledge gained from membership in the local alliance, members from a range of agencies reported that they were learning more about underlying concerns of the target population that are, at times, mistakenly regarded as resistance or lack of interest.

During focus group interviews, local alliance members gave examples of ways that each of them used their experiences and understanding of the needs of families in order to increase the quality of and expand literacy services:

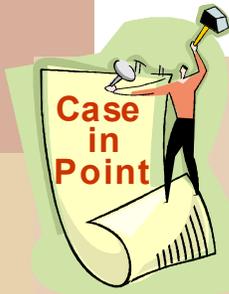
- + In an effort to expand and strengthen family literacy services, one local alliance is thinking “in terms we’ve never used before” to develop strategies that uncover parents’ “belief systems” as to what would entice them to sit down with their child and want to read and play with them. “We need to find out what’s the lure and then see if we can introduce that...it changes from [school] district to district and even within districts”.
- + Within each of the interviewed local alliances, members reported that they were directly or indirectly working to identify “missing links” in policies, procedures and/or practices that may be impacting the quality and quantity of services. For example, discussing community members who cannot read and have become skilled at not wanting people to find out, stimulated discussion on new joint programs and procedures.

These changes in knowledge and systems thinking have dovetailed into agencies beginning to practice collaborative problem-solving by raising issues at local alliance meetings to find solutions beyond one agency’s capacities as well as coordinating and integrating resources and services.

Examples include:

- + capitalizing on the knowledge of alliance members to identify the person/department with whom to speak within the school district to develop programming,
- + developing and distributing information on community resources directly to parents in addition to disseminating it to agencies and organizations,
- + planning legislative breakfasts and dinners to educate local and state political leaders about family literacy,
- + securing grants through the network of collaborations and partnerships developed through membership in the local alliance, and
- + inviting members of local alliances to attend formal staff development programs given by collaborating members of their local alliance.

Case in Point: Knowledge, Strategies, Coordination and Integration of Services



The evolution of agencies working together includes a local alliance member who, based on her knowledge and experience, has reframed for practitioners possible underlying issues in parents' non-participation in educational activities.. For example, it was pointed out that parents who appear uncooperative because they do not sign forms or homework and do not participate in parent- child activities may not be able to read the forms and instructions or sign their name.

Therefore, when home visitors in a Parent-Child Home Program noticed that mothers could not sign their names, they were able to make arrangements with a partner of the local alliance, Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA,) to provide classes for these parents. Due to the established relationships the home visitors have with families/parents, they were able to sensitively approach the subject with the parents.

Through the local alliance, an adult literacy program for parents in the Parent Child Home Program was begun. Nine mothers attended class at the LVA office in Hempstead one night each week. Members commented that these kinds of new



In a rural area in New York State, the local library happened to host the local family alliance meeting. As a result of hosting the alliance, the librarian gained useful insight from the other members into ways to redesign the children's reading corner to make it more welcoming for children and their families, reviewed the library's collection of books, reassigned some books to nursing homes, invited

the local Head Start to the library once a week, and changed the traffic flow to make it more conducive to group activities.

Dissemination of Information and Increasing Networks of Communication

Communication is clearly a critical variable both between and within organizations in developing and sustaining collaborations. The importance of changes related to enhanced communication, and the spread of information and knowledge, needs to be underscored as a developing outcome of the local alliances in creating conditions that may ultimately lead to increased services to more people.

In some cases, local alliances are developing computer based and/or brochure format directories to disseminate information about family literacy and information on resources within the community in order to increase knowledge about available services and ultimately, expand the number of people served.

Practitioners, families, community members, and educators are the intended targets to inform regarding sources of programs and services that provide components of family literacy and ways to access those resources:



"We tend to operate in silos... [through the data base we are developing as a local alliance we are able to]...get the information out to key people-front line staff in order to increase referrals and provide as much information as possible to service providers...particularly for people for whom literacy is not a presenting problem...have the front line staff understand the connections."

" In [our] full [local] alliance there are about 50 organizations. ... We created a document for agencies by asking all kinds of agencies in the community about the services they provide. For example, we're asking the courts to provide us with information about services they provide so people in the community can see the courts as maybe being able to get help ... We're also creating a directory for parents. The alliance lets us bring everyone to the same table so that agencies know what other agencies provide. If there

Focus group interviews indicate that in all cases, local alliances are interacting with the community in a multi-tiered approach, are getting community members to spread the word through posting flyers, or in the case of a Rotary presentation, encouraging employers to, in turn, promote family literacy by encouraging employees to participate in family literacy services.

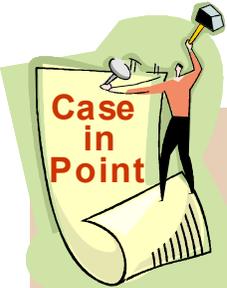
Many of the local alliances have used the Power Point presentation created through the State Alliance to inform and educate their communities about family literacy. All of the local alliances interviewed

found the Power Point presentation helpful and professional in “spreading the word”:

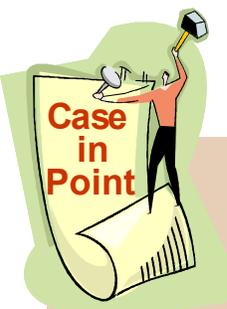


“Local business people seem to be more interested...after our presentation including the Power Point presentation, they seem to realize that they have a stake in family literacy as well... They're willing to put up posters and they've said, ‘I'm going to mention this to folks who come in.’”

Case in Point: Dissemination of Information and Increasing Networks of Communication



Rather than limit the ways that individuals in need of literacy services learn about programs, which is primarily through agencies, one local alliance is spreading the word to employers and encouraging them to become part of the network to inform employees about services. In efforts to engage more individuals in family literacy services, the local alliance is changing its outreach techniques, hoping that if employers speak positively of family literacy services to their employees, the employees might be more likely to listen, more willing to participate and less



In a similar vein, one alliance was prompted by parent members to create a pocket edition of an agency/school district directory to be disseminated directly to families in the community. Recognizing many immigrant parents' fears and concerns about contacting schools or formal agencies when faced with difficulties, the parent representatives in the local alliance explained that this pocket directory may be a way for parents to learn of resources and access information that they otherwise may never have known about. The pocket resource guide, “inspired and championed” by the parent representatives of a local family literacy alliance in a large urban school district, is available in English and Spanish and there are plans to expand it

III. What progress has been made in policy and funding areas in order to coordinate and integrate existing federal, state and local family literacy resources?

Building Networks of Relationships with School Districts

In terms of policy changes, the local alliances are working to create systems change within their communities (as reported earlier in this report), by first making changes in their own knowledge about family literacy and the policies and workings of school districts, community organizations, business, and, in some cases, local government.

Local alliances, in concert with State Alliance objectives, were particularly concerned with improving relationships between community based organizations and local school districts. Specifically, members of the local alliances called on the State Alliance to help them “to open the doors to the local school districts” that they have “always found shut” in order to create a partnership between the schools and the community.

In some communities the relationship between school and community is quite strong, while in others, members report that it is a constant struggle. Local members however, continue to forge relationships with schools and have often adopted the policy that “if one strategy doesn’t work, we’ll try another”. Some reportedly are beginning to see a crack open in the door, perhaps due to the combined strength of prior networks of relationships pushed by the current effort of local alliance members. According to local alliance members, the State Alliance’s designing of the RFP to require the inclusion of the local school district(s) as members of the local alliance has stimulated more communication and involvement than previously existed.

Case in Point: Building Networks of Relationships with School Districts



Case in Point

During the course of a focus group interview, an alliance member expressed his frustrations with not being able to coordinate his agency's services with those of the school district. A member of the school district, sitting at the same table was able to hear his concerns, express her lack of awareness of his agency and offer a joint pledge to see how they could work together.

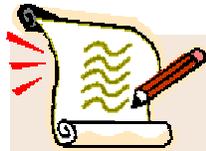
In another instance, a local alliance realized that they might have been looking too narrowly at groups they could educate about family literacy in their local school district. Due to discussions and connections made at a local alliance, members requested and were afforded the opportunity to speak with teachers in the school district about family literacy. During extended discussions, they realized that they needed to enlarge their presentation to include parents and administrators at the school, again, "widening the circle and the conversation."

In an urban local alliance, using the strength of existing school-community ties, a "Kick-off" for the local alliance was implemented through a district-wide School Leadership Team (SLT) meeting held in Spring 2002. Close to two hundred people attended the afternoon event that introduced and interactively explained the components of family literacy to the school district community, which includes 48 schools. The alliance (and the Office of Parent and Family Involvement, as Alliance host) was presented as a tool for SLTs to plan appropriate programs. It was also used to inform school leadership about the community and family supports that existed to help them ultimately meet their academic goals.

At the orientation event for SLTs, the draft of the "base" directory of community

Building Relationships and Agreements – New York State Alliance for Family Literacy Activities

An overarching goal of the Alliance is to change the way business is done in relation to family literacy policy and practices. In interviews with local alliances, the importance of policy change was identified as a critical area that needed to be tackled by the State Alliance if real progress was going to be made in strengthening local collaborations:



"This is a public sector problem and you know its wonderful to have corporate support and convince people that they need to do workplace literacy- but the fact is this is a public sector problem and unless we have major public sector commitment on the part of New York State,... the legislature. The Alliance on the State level can offer to give us marketing training but I think their role really should be... talking about us to the State

The State Alliance has recognized the importance of state level commitment to family literacy and has been actively working to build relationships with state agency policy leaders to build understanding of, and links with, family literacy through meetings and presentations.

In an effort to build agreements and work towards infusing comprehensive family literacy services into the policy, program and practice framework of state and local agencies, the State Alliance has been directly involved in addressing school districts in New York State in regard to the Reading Excellence Act grant. This has included presenting at Technical Assistance Sessions on the family literacy component of the Reading Excellence Act and the existence and availability of the local family literacy alliances to collaborate with the school districts. Through these presentations, school district personnel and state policy leaders have had the opportunity to hear and learn about the concept of family literacy. In addition, the meetings gave the management team an opportunity to build relationships with state policy leaders.

Sample outcomes involving policy and the building of relationships include:

- + development of a prioritized list of state programs/agencies and statewide organizations and identification of decision-makers,

- + jointly sponsored policy agreements/statements between the State Alliance and federal decision makers to encourage the partnering of Head Start with Even Start programs to bolster the development of comprehensive systems of family literacy,
- + creation of an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) between Even Start and Literacy Volunteers of America,
- + structuring of State Education Reading Excellence proposal to federal government and Request for Proposals to local school districts designed to include a community partnership/family literacy component,
- + selection of the NYS Alliance for Family Literacy as the agency to train reviewers of the community partnership component of the Reading Excellence Act grant,
- + Reading Excellence Act training provided to family literacy trainers will receive. Training will be reciprocal in nature and will allow for inculcating family literacy concepts into REA training,
- + Allocating \$6 million from the Adult and Family Literacy program,
- + five million dollars in state labor department funds earmarked or connected to family literacy services (FAWLS grants),
- + increased understanding of the value of family literacy in meeting educational goals and standards for children and adults as evidenced by request from state program to have all key staff, including program directors, receive family literacy training,
- + inclusion of programs that promote parental involvement and family literacy in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers proposals with the New York State Alliance for Family Literacy listed as a contact agency,
- + attendance at Even Start conferences, and
- + Family Literacy Day (November 1) proclaimed by the Governor.

Public Relations - Information Campaign

In order to convey the unique contributions of family literacy as a vehicle for literacy development and self-sufficiency, the Alliance developed a variety of public relations materials including:

- + **Overview of Family Literacy**, a fact sheet on family literacy, is available to all local alliances. Using a combination of statistics on the need for family literacy services, and state and national Even Start performance data, the **Overview of Family Literacy** is intended to help state and local alliance members convince decision makers of the benefits of investing in family literacy services. The fact sheet highlights a number of important findings to help policy makers, educators, and community members better understand the systemic approach utilized by family literacy in recognizing the family, intergenerational, and community connections and networks that impact and sustain literacy development, positive self-perceptions of oneself as a learner, teacher and parent relationships, and economic self-sufficiency. This fact sheet is a concrete outcome in response to the expressed need by local and State Alliance members for “research” to help them explain and promote the concept of family literacy to policy makers, administrators and teachers in local school districts, as well as to community-based organizations, business leaders, and employers.

- + In addition, the State Alliance has developed:
 - ◆ a State Alliance brochure, as well as customized brochures for each local consortium,
 - ◆ posters to promote family literacy and the work of the State and local alliances, and
 - ◆ a web site (familyliteracyinnys.org) – a tool for keeping people up-to-date on family literacy training and other activities. Various local alliances are reportedly at varying stages of developing their own websites.



Concluding Thoughts and

Recognizing the untapped potential for comprehensive family literacy programs to effectively address the complex issues of poverty and under education (i.e. low levels of literacy), New York State has undertaken the challenge and created the New York State Alliance for Family Literacy.

In its two years of operation, the New York State Alliance for Family Literacy has clearly progressed in its efforts to coordinate, integrate, strengthen and expand family literacy services and activities through the stimulating, funding, creation and implementation of 11³ local alliances of family literacy, and changes in federal, state, and local family literacy resources. Through this comprehensive effort, spearheaded by the management team of the New York State Alliance for Family Literacy, changes in thinking, practices, and partnerships has meant changes in the conditions that impact the quality and quantity of family literacy services.

Findings from the training and follow-up evaluation surveys indicate that participants were extremely satisfied with the training they received, that they increased their breadth and depth of knowledge and repertoire of family literacy practices and implemented what they learned at the training in a variety of ways including: changes in the way they provide direct family literacy services, increased collaborations with other agencies, and dissemination of what they had learned to other staff and community members. The reported responses are an outcome of the Alliance's objective to improve the quality of family literacy services through training. The activation and

³ Syracuse, the 11th local alliance, joined after funding was awarded.

funding of the local alliances has stimulated loose and/or isolated associations of literacy and human service providers into family literacy networks where collaborative conversations about family literacy have, in many cases, turned into collaborative family literacy actions and activities.

The combined outcomes of the State and local alliances in regard to activities related to increased knowledge, coordination, promotion, policy, and training have created conditions that are linked to the longer-term outcomes of increased quality of family literacy programs and/or greater access by families in need of services. Clearly, evaluation findings throughout this report indicate that initial outcomes⁴ that emerged as a result of the NYS Alliance are well worth pursuing and supporting in areas throughout New York State.

As the research suggests, and as local alliance members can attest to, changes in thinking, strategies and systems that are required to effectively address the complex issues of poverty and low levels of literacy come through sustained, long term support of collaborative initiatives such as the New York State Alliance for Family Literacy. Such initiatives bring together diverse segments of the community to work together to create a culture that fully supports literacy development for all family members. In pursuing that end, the following activities are recommended:

- + sustaining of support and technical assistance to established local family alliances, as needed,
- + funding additional alliances in high need areas in New York State,
- + creating a network of reciprocal support and information sharing for local alliances,
- + incorporating theory and practice of family literacy in pre service training for teachers, administrators and related fields/professionals, and

⁴ It is important to note that often during interviews, when members were asked to discuss changes related to the creation of the local alliances, many responded that they are a work in progress. Some changes may be tacit in nature and less conducive to direct measurement/observation such as conversations that plant seeds in the present that eventually lead to new collaborations, funding and programs, or conversations that encourage someone to seek or provide services in the future.

- + promoting and ensuring compliance of partnerships between school districts and community based organizations in literacy and other funded initiatives to increase collaborations.



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