



## The Importance of Parents in Preparing their Children for Success in School

### The Achievement Gap Starts Early

The achievement gap appears well before children enter kindergarten.<sup>1</sup> Cognitive test scores of children from the lowest income families are 60 percent lower than those of children from more affluent households.<sup>2</sup> Children who begin school having missed critical early learning opportunities are already at risk for failure in school.

### Parents Matter: The important role of parents in preparing their children for school.

The research is clear; engaging parents early in their children's learning activities can close the achievement gap before school begins.

- Shared parent-child reading in preschool leads to higher achievement in elementary school.<sup>3</sup>
- Reading to young children helps them develop larger vocabularies and higher levels of phonological awareness.<sup>4</sup>
- Children whose families read to them and engaged in other literacy activities have higher mastery of the skills needed for school than do other children and have an easier transition to kindergarten.<sup>5</sup>
- Stimulating home learning environments and parental responsiveness were significantly related to motor and social development, language competence, and achievement test scores across poverty levels and different ethnic groups for children birth to thirteen.<sup>6</sup>
- Parent engagement in child learning at home predicted greater academic achievement in children than any other form of parent involvement.<sup>7</sup>

### Early Parent Engagement Programs are Effective

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is an evidenced-based family support model that works directly with parents in their homes to give them books, activities and skills needed for them to take responsibility for preparing their children for school. Peer parent educators deliver 30 weeks of high quality school readiness curriculum activities and books directly to parents, who then work each day with their own three, four and five year old children. HIPPY is designed to remove barriers to participation such as social isolation, lower levels of education or limited English proficiency. The mission of HIPPY USA is to partner with parents to prepare their children for success in school.

## Early Interventions are Effective



Twenty years of research conducted in the United States and eight countries have shown the HIPPIY model to be effective in improving school readiness, parent involvement, school attendance, classroom behavior and standardized test scores and academic performance by children participating in HIPPIY.

- Children participating in HIPPIY have demonstrated statistically significant higher achievement scores in reading, math and social studies in third, fifth and sixth grades based on multiple measures used in Arkansas, Texas, Florida and Colorado.<sup>8 9 10</sup>
- Home literacy environments improve and parent involvement in children’s academic learning increase.<sup>11 12 13</sup>
- Parents participating in the HIPPIY program report spending more time reading to their children; teaching them letters, words and numbers; visiting the library and monitoring their child’s TV use.<sup>14 15</sup>
- Nine out of ten HIPPIY parents credit the program with motivating them to check that their school-age children have completed their homework.<sup>16</sup>
- Teachers report higher levels of participation in parent-teacher conferences and other school events among HIPPIY parents compared to their non-HIPPIY counterparts.<sup>17</sup>

## Workforce Development

The HIPPIY model employs, recruits, and trains home visitors who are cultural and socio-economic peers of the parents. This peer home visitor system enables parents—who may be hard to reach due to poverty, language issues, and social or geographic isolation—to feel comfortable participating in the program. HIPPIY home visitors share the language, culture, and life experiences of the families they serve, and are frequently parents who have participated in the HIPPIY program with their own children. Working for HIPPIY is the first professional level job for many home visitors (most are women), highlighting the strong workforce development element of the model.

## Policy

School districts trying to close the achievement gap between low income children and their middle income peers increasingly recognize that the gap begins well before children enter kindergarten. Schools choose to use the HIPPIY model, and other evidenced based home visiting programs as a way of diminishing the skills gap in young children. Policies that promote parental involvement in early learning pay off for schools, for families and most importantly for the children.

## Information

For more information about the HIPPIY model and impact, please contact Donna Kirkwood, Ph.D., HIPPIY USA National Program Director at 501.537.7731 or [dkirkwood@hippyusa.org](mailto:dkirkwood@hippyusa.org).



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## The HIPPY Model

HIPPY programs implement the model with these key components.

- **A cognitively based curriculum for 3, 4 and 5 year olds** incorporates 30 weeks of school readiness activity packets and 9 books each year. The scripted curriculum, written on approximately a 6<sup>th</sup> grade level, guides parents on how to teach key early learning skills. Literacy lessons feature shared reading techniques and reading comprehension activities, such as songs, puppets, dramatic play and matching games. Weekly math and science activities encourage observation, introduce new concepts and build vocabulary, while motor activities improve muscle control and fitness. The HIPPY curriculum helps parents understand their important role as teachers, by giving them scripts and prompts to teach to their children.
- **Peer parent educators who share the language and culture of the families they serve.** HIPPY parent educators are paraprofessionals – preferably mothers who have been through the program. It's a peer-to-peer program. Every week, the parent educators receive training in the curriculum being delivered and they role play the entire packets with each other, so they know exactly how to complete the activities and how to explain them to the parents.
- **Weekly home visits to deliver the curriculum and coach parents in its use.** The 30-week program corresponds with a typical school year. In the weekly home visits, parent educators model with the parents on how to read the books and complete the activities to help the parents understand how to work with their children. In addition, parent educators support the parents and address concerns they may have. Many programs also conduct assessments and screenings to identify the need for other services.
- **Parents spend time each day, working one-on-one with their children to complete the activities.** This is quality time – talking, teaching, reading, singing, listening, and most importantly, enjoying sharing together. The scripted activities give parents the structure to teach and talk with confidence. Extension activities are included for parents to take advantage of other learning opportunities and conversations throughout the day that build on the lessons provided.
- **Children learn from their parents.** As children work through the activities with their parents, they are developing skills related to early literacy and numeracy, observation, prediction and critical thinking. They also acquire soft skills such as memorization, following directions, listening and taking turns – abilities which contribute to school success.

## Citations

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