At-a-Glance

The Parent and Family Literacy (PFL) program, formerly known as Even Start, promoted family literacy and parent education. Families with children ages two through five and who lived in the Dallas ISD attendance zone were eligible to participate at one of three district facilities located in South Dallas. The PFL program received federal funds and local support to operate a program designed to build school readiness skills among young children.

Program Implementation

The PFL program had three components: adult literacy education, early childhood education, and parent education. Integration of family literacy and education provided low income families the opportunity to develop the skills needed to support their child’s education. In addition, adults became better prepared to be successful in the workplace.

Participation was free to low income families who met the eligibility criteria. However, adults eligible to attend the John Leslie Patton Jr. Academic Center were not eligible to participate in the PFL program. Families who participated in the PFL program had to maintain regular attendance for both adult(s) and child(ren), participate in all three components of the program, and adults were required to set personal educational goals.

Friends and family members referred about 81 percent of participants to the program. About 94 percent of participants were mothers who participated in the PFL program with their child(ren). Families were eligible to participate with more than one child, as long as the child met the age requirement. Three district locations in South Dallas provided the PFL program: Arcadia Park, Barbara Jordan, and Titche Annex. The Titche Annex location had the most classrooms and served all children ages two through five. Participants at Barbara Jordan were served in portables at the elementary school. Each location had a lead teacher in charge who was responsible for communicating any problems or concerns to the program manager.

Families enrolled during September 2010 and elected to attend a morning or afternoon session Monday through Thursday.

Adult Literacy Education

The PFL program held a partnership with the district’s Adult Basic Education (ABE) program and the Wilkinson Center of Dallas to provide adult education classes. Adult participants could attend General Education Development (GED) classes or English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Classes were approximately two-and-one-half hours long Monday through Thursday and completed in a manner that helped participants meet their personal goals. For example, some participants worked toward obtaining a GED before the end of the year, while others wanted to progress in the ESL program from beginning learner to a more advanced learner.

Early Childhood Education

Children were separated by age into classrooms at each location. Each classroom had at least one paraprofessional staff member who conducted the classroom in a manner that was very similar to a half-day prekindergarten program. Children were in the classroom for approximately three hours Monday through Thursday. Staff used the Letter People curriculum, Creative Learning curriculum, and developed themes in each classroom that introduced a letter, shape, and color each week.

Parent Education

In addition to attending adult literacy education classes, adult participants attended parent education classes provided by the PFL program. The early childhood staff conducted the meetings two days a week during the parent/child engagement activity at the beginning of class or at a separate time in the evening. A variety of topics were covered, and families had the opportunity to participate and complete forms to obtain housing vouchers, bus passes, and social and medical services.

Participants

The evaluator obtained participant characteristics from a survey administered at all three program locations. Among the 450 surveys distributed, approximately 229 surveys were completed (about a 51% response rate). Surveys were distributed to all parents/guardians at each location during the parent/child engagement activity at the beginning of class or at a separate time in the evening. Results indicated the majority of adult participants were Spanish speaking, Hispanic females who were more likely to stay at home. The age of participants varied, with two-thirds (66%) in the age range of 26-35 and almost a quarter (23%) in the age range from 36-45. Although the characteristics varied at each location, all three PFL program locations served adult participants with similar characteristics.

More than half (60%) of families were in their first year of participation and about one-third (34%) of families were in their second year of participation. Barbara Jordan participants had a higher percentage of...
families in the third or fourth year of participation, with 11 percent compared to Titche Annex and Arcadia Park with five and one percent, respectively. Additional survey results showed about 90 percent of participants received financial assistance from local and state programs.

**Survey Results**

The PFL program did not track whether or not adult participants were parents of current Dallas ISD students. The evaluator used surveys to determine if adult participants in the PFL program had any children currently enrolled in a Dallas ISD elementary, middle, or high school. Results showed almost two-thirds (65%) of PFL participants had a student currently enrolled at a Dallas ISD school. Arcadia Park and Barbara Jordan locations served more parents of current Dallas ISD students, with 73 percent and 71 percent, respectively, compared to about 57 percent of adult participants at the Titche Annex location. The participation of parents in the PFL program could offer many benefits to current students in Dallas ISD. Since 89 percent of participants were enrolled in ESL classes, it can be assumed that parents/guardians may have been able to help their children with their homework or become involved in their child’s school work. These assumptions have been untested because current Dallas ISD students of PFL participants were not identified for the 2010-11 evaluation.

The district’s early childhood department provided a variety of programs to serve eligible children ages zero through five. Unfortunately, all early childhood district programs did not have the capacity to serve all eligible children. The evaluator administered surveys to determine if PFL families utilized other early childhood programs provided by the district and their community. Survey results indicated more than three-fourths (84%) of PFL families did not have a child who participated in Head Start, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters, or a Dallas ISD prekindergarten program. About 24 percent of Barbara Jordan families had a child enrolled in the district’s prekindergarten program. Barbara Jordan elementary offered a full-day prekindergarten program to eligible four-year-olds. Although these children were not eligible to participate in the PFL program, other eligible siblings could attend. It was possible that some PFL students could have progressed into the district’s prekindergarten program and enhanced their school readiness skills further. These students were not identified to determine if PFL participation enhanced their school readiness skills at the beginning of prekindergarten. It was a possibility that some current Dallas ISD prekindergarten students at Barbara Jordan had participated in the PFL program at ages two and three. Again, students were not identified to confirm this possibility.

**Summary and Recommendations**

There were three components of participation families had to complete: adult literacy education, early childhood education, and parent education. Many families participated because they wanted to improve their literacy skills in order to help their children with their homework, get a better job, or to make a better life for their family.

Some recommendations include:

- Identify students of PFL families to determine if student achievement increases when a parent/guardian participated in the PFL program.
- Identify PFL student participants as they enter the district to determine their school readiness skills. PFL student participants should complete the same assessment as district prekindergarten students to compare performance.
- Develop a more cohesive partnership with the district’s Early Childhood department to align the literacy skills developed from the PFL program with the district’s prekindergarten program to enhance school readiness skills received among eligible children.
- PFL early childhood staff should have access to similar professional development opportunities available to staff at School Readiness Integration sites.

As the Dallas ISD continues to focus on early childhood education and preparing children with skills needed to succeed in school, district support should continue for the PFL program. As two-thirds of PFL participants were current Dallas ISD families, the potential exists for improved student academic achievement at various grade levels. Although more research is needed to determine the benefits of program participation to district students, additional program enhancements should be made to ensure program quality and sustainability. Finally, district schools should ensure that core classes at all grade levels should be placed inside the building and reserve the use of portables for noncore classes.

Additional information may be obtained by consulting EA11-147-3, which can be found at www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/.