
Giving Literacy Wings

Building a Comprehensive Early Literacy System in Evansville and Vanderburgh County

Recommendations to the Welborn Baptist Foundation

Presented by the National Center for Family Literacy

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Executive Summary

In July 2005, the Welborn Baptist Foundation announced an ambitious initiative to improve early childhood development in Evansville-Vanderburgh County, Indiana. Called “BetterMorphosis,” this multidisciplinary project encompasses health, education and social outcomes for the community’s youngest children.

To date, the foundation has disseminated critical information to the community on brain development and launched the “Paths to Quality” with Community Coordinated Child Care (4C) to improve early care and education opportunities. Recognizing the interdependence of numerous outcomes for children, the foundation asked the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) to provide recommendations for building a comprehensive early literacy system in Evansville and Vanderburgh County. The goal is to engage the community so that:

... all persons who interact with young children regularly are prepared to make a meaningful contribution to children’s future reading skills and school readiness.

Beginning in April 2006, NCFL staff met with Welborn Baptist Foundation staff and community partners to identify assets and gaps in the area of early literacy. To date, NCFL staff have made seven trips to Evansville to meet with key groups and individuals who have an impact on early care and education in the community. In addition, phone interviews were conducted with 15 community and agency leaders and surveys were completed with 35 child care staff and 81 parents.

These local data, reviewed in light of national research, led to a series of recommendations that will help give wings to Evansville’s early literacy aspirations.

Key Discoveries–Assets

In preparing a communitywide early literacy action plan, NCFL staff discovered several assets on which to build:

- 1) **The leadership of Evansville-Vanderburgh County has embraced increased educational attainment as a strategic community goal.** Not only

are there resources from both the Welborn Baptist Foundation and the Lilly Endowment Inc., but there is community momentum to tackle the goal. The Mayor's Education Roundtable originally identified the need to increase the number of citizens with postsecondary degrees, certificates and diplomas. The recently organized Early Childhood Development Coalition shares this overall goal and has put forward four, related objectives: high school graduation rate of 100% by 2025, be in the top 10% of postsecondary education, increase the per capita income of the community and have children start school ready to learn. The two groups share some membership and are coordinating efforts.

- 2) **Evansville and Vanderburgh County have strong educational and non-profit leaders who have the capacity and willingness to implement the initiative.** Within local non-profits and the school district (public and Catholic) exists the leadership to move from ideas to action. Local leaders are enthusiastic and interested in applying research-based best practices.
- 3) **Local educational and social services agencies are willing to collaborate to make things happen.** Collaboration is a habit that appears to be regularly practiced. The School-Community Council of the Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation boasts 70 members representing social services agencies, faith based organizations and businesses. A committee with representatives from private child care, Head Start, faith-based programs and the school corporation have begun a process to improve transition planning. Other agencies and non profits are eager to take part in the initiative.

Key Discoveries—Gaps

- 1) **The lack of state funding for preschool and full day kindergarten creates a gap in services for early childhood education, especially for low income families.** Head Start currently has a waiting list of 300 children. Private child care is an option, but comes with a cost for many families. Although there are 331 facilities serving children birth to five according to the *Mayor's Education Round Table Asset Inventory*, the vast majority of children are cared for in legally license-exempt provider programs. Hispanic families reported a lack of affordable child care available during their work hours.
- 2) **Parent outreach is a challenge.** Interviewees acknowledged the critical role parents play in children's literacy development. Most expressed frustration at finding effective ways to reach busy parents, particularly those who need the most support. Community leaders at the Mayor's Education Roundtable and the School-Community council were unsure if parents were aware of the priority placed on education attainment and literacy development. Parents interviewed through 4-C were interested in providing a strong foundation for their children's literacy development, but were unsure what to do beyond reading to their children.

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- 3) **There is no common definition of “school readiness.”** Everyone interviewed agreed that school readiness is important, and that literacy development is a component of school readiness. However, parents and professionals were unsure what exactly constituted readiness within the Evansville public and private schools. While emerging research points to the need for some academic skill development in young children, many educators fear an over-emphasis on literacy skills at the expense of social-emotional and physical development. Even if the vehicle existed to reach all parents and educators with a message about literacy development and school readiness, there is not yet agreement on what that message would be.
 - 4) **There are no measures or indicators in place to track progress towards the goal of all children starting school ready to learn.** This gap is not surprising, since there is no common agreement on what readiness means. Not only are there no indicators in place, but there is no system for collecting the data and reporting to the community on progress.
 - 5) **Early childhood educators lack information on current early literacy research and how to apply it.** Of the 53 early childhood educators interviewed in meetings or through surveys, most expressed interest in enhancing the literacy components of their programs, but wanted more information on what they should do in their classrooms, centers or homes.
 - 6) **Professionals outside the educational community who touch young children and families are willing to collaborate, but are not currently being asked to provide early literacy information to the families they reach.** Such programs as Healthy Families, Aurora Inc., Adult Education (SINE), the Vanderburgh Health Department WIC clinic and Public Health Nursing Outreach Services have contact with families that could benefit from early literacy information and resources, but do not have a coordinated way to provide the information.
 - 7) **The medical community is an untapped resource for reaching parents of newborns and young children.** Many interviewees felt that the medical community could contribute towards building awareness for early literacy, but would need to be engaged in the effort as they are not well represented in the current activities and committees.

Recommendations

Seven essential recommendations comprise the early literacy agenda for Evansville-Vanderburgh County. More detail on each recommendation follows in the body of the report. *(Note that the need for more high quality, affordable child care and preschool opportunities has been documented already and is being addressed by 4C through the Pathways to Quality initiative.)*

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- 1) **Create an infrastructure.** To avoid confusion or the appearance of competing agendas, clearly position the early literacy initiative within the existing BetterMorphosis and Early Childhood Development Coalition (ECDC) initiatives. Identify a champion for the early literacy initiative, who is part of the larger initiative, but can focus more directly on early literacy, mobilize partners and the public and keep the project on track.
 - 2) **Agree on outcomes.** Engage in a structured community conversation on what readiness means. Include parents, kindergarten teachers, Head Start and the private child care community as well as the leaders already involved in the ECDC and BetterMorphosis. Provide information on current research and seek input from the public through community forums. Identify a few key indicators and develop a way to track their progress for all children.
 - 3) **Reach the public.** Beginning with the community forums, provide consistent messages about the importance of early literacy development. Once school readiness outcomes are outlined, share them with every partner. Create and disseminate inexpensive materials that give parents and volunteers concrete ideas on what to do to help children develop literacy.
 - 4) **Start an Early Literacy Training Consortium.** To reach educators, home visitors and other partners who work with families and children in the community, create a cadre of trainers from several organizations: 4-C, Head Start, Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation, Evansville Catholic Schools, Evansville Christian School, Joshua Academy, Evansville Day School, Ivy Tech, University of Southern Indiana, University of Evansville, Evansville Public Library, Healthy Families, the Health Department and the CAPE Hispanic Center. NCFL could provide an intensive program of research-based training for the cadre leading to a community certification in early literacy. Once trained, members of the cadre could offer the trainings to other partners throughout the community.
 - 5) **Meet parents where they are.** Set ambitious targets to reach as many parents as possible by partnering with organizations that already engage parents. Link parent information sessions to other fun activities of interest to families. Provide parent workshops in English and Spanish on specific, research-based strategies for building children's literacy. Train members of the training consortium to present the workshops. Utilize the mobile unit donated to the Initiative to take the workshops to neighborhoods.
 - 6) **Screen four-year-olds for literacy development.** Using the *Get Ready to Read!* screening tool developed by National Center for Learning Disabilities, work with child care homes and centers as well as parents and

home visitors to screen as many four-year-olds as possible. Make the pre- and post-screening results a part of the child's materials shared with kindergarten teachers.

- 7) **Engage the medical community.** Ask the medical community to identify a champion to participate in the community effort. Encourage all pediatric offices and the Health Department Child/Teen Health Clinic to participate in Reach Out and Read, a national program that links literacy information for parents with well-baby check ups. Two offices in Evansville currently participate (Hebron Pediatrics and St. Mary's Pediatric Clinic).

Guiding Research & Assumptions

What is Early Literacy?

Literacy and early literacy are terms that can mean many things to many people. For the purposes of this report, the definition of emergent literacy adopted by the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) will be used:

“Emergent literacy involves the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing” (Whitehurst & Lonigan, p. 848, 1998).

It is important to make the distinction that when talking about children ages birth to five, we are concerned with the *building blocks* for learning to read and write rather than actually teaching children to read.

Research underscores the importance of children's early language and literacy development in their later reading and school success. The authors of *Starting Out Right* write that “During the first months and year of life, children's experiences with language and literacy can begin to form a basis for their later reading success.” (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, p. 8, 1999).

The preliminary results of the NELP research synthesis, shared at the 2006 National Conference on Family Literacy, also provide evidence for building children's language and literacy skills in the preschool period. The NELP analysis of 280 scientific research studies indicates that efforts to teach code-related skills are highly successful with preschool children, specifically in the areas of:

- Phonological awareness skills
- Alphabetic knowledge
- Concepts about print

In addition, the NELP review found evidence for the impact of shared-book reading and parent and home programs on the promotion of oral language skills (Westberg, Lonigan and Molfese, 2006).

What is school readiness?

The concept of school readiness came to prominence when it was set as the first of eight goals by the National Educational Goals Panel (NEGP) in 1990. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) quickly responded with a position paper raising concerns that, “The traditional construct of readiness unduly places the burden of proof on the child” and calling for community and parental supports to ensure children’s readiness (NAEYC, 1995).

While “readiness is nearly always defined in terms of children’s skills or characteristics” (LaParo and Pianta, 2000), there has been a widespread recognition that the responsibility for readiness does not rest with the child.

Both the NEGP and the NAEYC promote the concept of “ready schools”—calling attention to the school’s (and community’s) responsibility to receive children and provide them the opportunity for academic success. This concept of shared responsibility for children’s readiness is further supported in *Getting Ready*, the 2005 report of the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Kauffman Foundation and the Ford Foundation:

“Children will not enter school ready to learn unless families, schools and communities provide the environments and experiences that support the physical, social, emotional, language, literacy and cognitive development of infants, toddlers and preschool children” (p.2).

Regardless of where the responsibility lies for ensuring readiness, however, research points to the dire consequences for children who enter kindergarten lacking certain skills. A key finding in the 2004 research synthesis, *Readiness: School, Family and Community Connections*, is that:

“Young children enter kindergarten with a range of cognitive and social skills that appear to make a difference in their achievement during the kindergarten year. This seems to be of long-term importance; children who get off to a good start in kindergarten tend to maintain that advantage as they progress through school” (Boethel, p. 13, 2004).

Conversely, research also suggests that lack of school readiness at kindergarten entrance begins an achievement gap that is difficult to close and costly to correct (Bruner, Floyd & Copeland, 2005).

It is important to recognize that most definitions of school readiness include multiple dimensions—social, emotional, physical and cognitive. Within the cognitive dimension, literacy skills are generally considered to be one of the critical components in a child’s readiness for school. The NEGP (1995), NAEYC and the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative all support five distinct, but connected domains of school readiness:

- Physical Well-Being and Motor Development
- Social and Emotional Development
- Approaches to Learning
- Language Development
- Cognition and General Knowledge

In summary, NCFL’s recommendations for developing a comprehensive early literacy system for Evansville are based on the following assumptions about school readiness:

- Early literacy is an important component of school readiness, but not the *only* component of school readiness.
- Families, schools and communities bear the responsibility for ensuring school readiness without penalizing children.
- Many families need support in developing their children’s school readiness.
- School readiness has been connected to later school success.

Who is responsible for early literacy development?

Any person who spends time with a child has an impact on his literacy development. With this belief in mind, Heather Weiss of the Harvard Family Research Project has proposed a concept called “complementary learning” to recognize that:

“ . . . from birth onward, learning happens across multiple contexts—in families, early care and education programs, schools, out-of-school time and youth programs, and community settings and institutions, including libraries, museums, and faith-based organizations” (Weiss, Introduction, 2005).

Therefore, a comprehensive plan for early literacy development in Evansville-Vanderburgh County needs to include everyone who touches children.

How does community change occur?

In developing recommendations, NCFL draws from influential research in community development from Northwestern University that first suggested looking at “capacity inventories” rather than “needs assessments” (Kretzmann, McKnight, 1993). Asset-based community change models build capacity and sustainability at the local level, even when outside perspectives and assistance are sought.

Therefore, local leadership and the development of existing capacity within the Evansville-Vanderburgh community are central to NCFL’s recommendations.

Recommendation 1—Create an Infrastructure

Over the past year, a great deal of planning around goals for education attainment has taken place in the Evansville-Vanderburgh community, with exemplary involvement from many partners. Investments by the Lilly Foundation and Welborn Baptist Foundation are a positive catalyst to spurring interest and activity. Significant work on the initiative, such as the Paths to Quality project to develop a quality rating system for child care facilities, has already begun.

While the complementary nature of the community’s educational objectives should ultimately provide the kind of coherence needed to achieve meaningful change, it can also create a degree of “who’s on first” confusion as the community organizes to reach the goals.

To avoid confusion or the appearance of competing agendas, NCFL recommends clearly positioning the early literacy initiative within the existing “BetterMorphosis” and Early Childhood Development Coalition (ECDC) initiatives. Identify a champion for the early literacy initiative who is part of the larger initiative, but who can focus more directly on early literacy, mobilize partners and the public and keep the project on track. Some of the responsibilities of the champion might be to:

1. Form teams to implement the recommendations, goals and activities.
2. Coordinate the activities of the teams.
3. Recruit new participants, especially among underrepresented groups, such as parents, business people, the medical community and minorities.
4. Keep the process moving by setting meeting schedules, agendas and reporting processes.

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5. Create a consistent description and message about the early literacy initiative.
 6. Coordinate a process to set measurable indicators and collect data towards the indicators.
 7. Publicize progress and success.

In recent weeks, the ECDC has solidified its structure and membership, which should help fulfill this recommendation. The ECDC has also worked to identify four goals:

1. High school graduation rate of 100% by 2025.
2. Be in the top 10% of post-secondary education.
3. Increase the per capita income of the community.
4. Have children start school ready to learn.

A comprehensive system for early literacy development should be positioned as a subset of Goal 4. Again, to promote excitement about the early literacy goal, it is important to let people know that it is part of an existing project, not a new project that might be competing for resources, attention and participants.

Recommendation 2—Agree on Outcomes

As noted in *Readiness: School, Family and Community Connections*, research supports a contention that “Differences among children’s skills and performance at entry to kindergarten appear to be related to their future prospects in school; children who do better in kindergarten tend to maintain that advantage as they move into first grade and beyond” (Boethel, p. 25, 2004).

By setting a goal to have all children start school ready to learn, the ECDC has confirmed a belief that school readiness plays a part in future academic success. However, the ECDC’s Goal 4 does not yet articulate a definition of school readiness, nor does it say how the public will know if the goal has been met.

NCFL is recommending that the ECDC lead a structured community conversation on what readiness means. Include parents, kindergarten teachers, Head Start and the private child care community as well as the leaders already involved in the ECDC and BetterMorphosis. Provide information on current research and seek input from the public through community forums. It will be important to identify a few key, measurable indicators and develop a way to track their progress for all children.

In specifying readiness outcomes, NCFL recommends considering Mark Friedman’s guidance on developing indicators. In his publication, *A Guide to Developing and Using Performance Measures in Results-based Budgeting* (1997), Friedman advises limiting the number of indicators tracked to three or four. He also suggests choosing indicators that meet three criteria, or “powers”:

Three “Powers” of Indicators

Communication Power: Does the performance measure communicate with both internal and external/public constituencies about “how we are doing”?

Proxy Power: Indicators tend to run in herds. If one is going in the right direction, chances are that many of the rest are as well. You do not need 20 performance measures telling you the same thing. Pick the ones that have the greatest proxy power (i.e., those which are most likely to match the direction of the other measures in the herd.)

Data Power: And last, but not least, it is important that the performance measures we choose are ones for which we have quality data and which allow us to see progress—or lack thereof—on a regular and frequent basis. (Friedman, p.17, 1997).

The National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, (2005) has identified potential indicators for school readiness in working with 17 states. These indicators might be a starting point for a community discussion. In addition, the recommendations from a local committee on transition to school (Ready to Learn, Ready Schools) should also be considered.

Once the indicators are decided upon, a process will need to be developed to collect and report initial baseline data. Subsequently, the ECDC would need to put a process in place to collect data and report results on a regular basis.

Recommendation 3—Reach the Public

The process of setting indicators will be one step in raising awareness of the early literacy and school readiness goals.

Beginning with the community forums, it will be important to provide consistent messages about the importance of early literacy development. Once school readiness outcomes are outlined, it will be critical to share them with every partner so they can buy into and participate in achieving the goals.

The ECDC should then place messages about early literacy in every feasible place where parents might receive them. Depending on the final organization of the ECDC, one team might be responsible for awareness and community engagement. Working with the partners, the team could disseminate inexpensive materials that give parents and volunteers concrete ideas on what to do to help children develop literacy.

A community-wide awareness campaign would help inform people of the importance of language and literacy development for children beginning at birth. This could involve the local newspapers, including free publications that reach different segments of the population whether they have children or not. The *Evansville Courier & Press*, as a community partner, might be able to run periodic articles with parent tips at no cost. The *Evansville Parent* could also run articles on literacy-building activities for families. Local television and radio stations might agree to hold call-in shows for parents with experts from 4-C, the library or the school systems, answering questions about literacy development and school readiness.

Each year, the release of progress towards the indicators presents an opportunity to report back to the community and gain more awareness for the initiative. Every event—whether for parents, children, educators or city leaders—provides a chance to remind participants of the initiative and the community’s goals.

Recommendation 4—Start an Early Literacy Training Consortium

To reach educators, home visitors and other partners who work with families and children in the community, NCFL is recommending that the ECDC create a cadre of trainers from several organizations: 4-C, Head Start, Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation, Evansville Catholic Schools, Evansville Christian School, Joshua Academy, Evansville Day School, Ivy Tech, University of Southern Indiana, University of Evansville, Evansville Public Library, Healthy Families, the Health Department and the CAPE Hispanic Center.

Interviews with agency partners who work with families revealed an interest and willingness to infuse literacy information and activities into their ongoing programs. For instance, CAPE adult education suggested providing workshops for students who are parents on supporting their child’s reading. The Health Department requires training sessions for mothers receiving WIC vouchers and would be interested in adding early literacy as a topic. Health Department and Healthy Families home visitors could inject literacy into the information they disseminate, but would appreciate materials and training on the topic.

In surveys and meetings, 53 child care directors and teachers reported that they already worked to build literacy opportunities into their programs, but that they were interested in adopting more research-based ideas and creative activities. Of

the 81 parents who participated in focus groups or responded to the 4-C survey, most also expressed an interest in learning more about ways to support their children’s reading.

NCFL proposes providing an intensive program of research-based training for the cadre which would lead to a community certification in early literacy. Once trained, members of the cadre could offer the trainings to their own agencies and to other partners throughout the community.

The trainings offered would be designed for parents, educators and partners and would include templates for handouts and accompanying PowerPoint presentations. All NCFL trainings would be based on the findings of the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) and would be interactive, fun and informative. Each training would provide participants (teachers, parents or agency partners) with activities to implement immediately.

Based on the goals of the initiative, the following trainings are recommended.

Topic	Description	Audience
Findings from the National Early Literacy Panel	An overview of the research on predictors of early literacy and interventions that work.	Training Cadre and interested members of the ECDC only.
Building Literacy into Daily Routines for Infants and Toddlers	Practical, fun, research-based activities to support language development for infants and toddlers.	Parents, staff in child care centers and homes, home visitors.
Building Literacy into Classroom Routines	Practical, fun research-based activities to implement in a preschool or child care setting for 3- and 4-year-olds	Teachers and directors in preschool and child care homes and centers as well as faith-based programs.
Infusing Literacy into Home Visits	Practical, fun research-based activities for parents of infants, toddlers and preschoolers that can be used to support home visits.	Healthy Families, Health Department, Even Start and other agencies providing home visits to families.
La Lectura en Familia/Families Reading Together	Train-the-trainer session offered in English and Spanish focusing on techniques to use with parents to help them support their children’s school readiness.	Preschool staff working with parents of three- to five-year-olds; volunteers for Reach Out and Read project in medical offices; other community volunteers.

Topic	Description	Audience
Setting the Stage for Your Child to Read	One-hour parent workshop with simple and fun activities for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.	Parents, child care staff
Dialogic Reading Workshops (Train the Trainer)	A train-the-trainer workshop for a series of 6 to 8 one-hour workshops for parents based on the research-based approach proven effective with parents of all income levels.	Parents, preschool and child care educators
Using the <i>Get Ready to Read!</i> screening tool	One hour workshop on administering the screening tool as well as activities and resources to use in conjunction with the tool.	Parents, preschool and child care educators, agency partners.
Head Start Parent Mentor Workshop	Geared to Head Start parents, this workshop can be delivered in Spanish and English as a one-day event or series of 2 to 6 one-hour workshops. Covers the components of early literacy such as phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge and print awareness and provides tips on ways to build the components in daily routines.	Head Start parents, teachers and Family Service Workers.

It should be noted that participating in joint professional development has proved to be an effective way to build collaboration among multi-organization initiatives. The partners learn a common vocabulary and become sensitized to the issues and challenges faced by their partners. Therefore, it is expected that the Early Literacy Training Consortium will create additional synergies leading to improved outcomes of the overall early literacy initiative.

During the first year, a schedule would be set that meets the needs of the training cadre. NCFL is proposing three two-day Academies to train the cadre—in

November, 2006 and February and June, 2007. Cadre participants could choose to specialize in some or all of the trainings, depending on their interest and expertise. The Head Start Parent Mentor training would be offered to the Head Start program as a separate training, since it is specific to Head Start.

Another suggestion is to consider incorporating the new research-based American Library Association parent workshop, *Every Child Ready to Read*. Evansville Public Library children's staff have recently completed the training from the ALA and are eager to share it with partners. Based on a review of the training, it appears to be research based and very complementary to the goals of the initiative.

Recommendation 5—Meet Parents Where They Are

“Without insulting people, you must tell them the truth. This is not a game, people. Your child must learn to read. It’s scary—it impacts kids before they walk in the school door, before they’re three. If the parents won’t come to hear the message, we’ve got to take it to them.” (Pam Decker, Principal, The Joshua Academy and chair of the Minority Student Achievement Initiative. From an interview on 6/2/06.)

Ms. Decker's comments communicate the sense of urgency among many members of the community who are concerned about achievement gaps that begin before children begin school. Research continues to support the importance of home environment, family support and parent's education level as an indicator of children's later academic success (Demo & Cox, 2000; West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000; Weiss, 2005). However, interviews with educators and community members expressed a degree of frustration in finding ways to reach busy, stressed or low educated parents and caregivers.

Dialogic Reading: An Effective Strategy for Parents

The good news is that recent research syntheses confirm the effectiveness of training parents on specific strategies, such as dialogic reading, regardless of economic or educational levels. Both the National Early Literacy Panel synthesis and the 2004 *Readiness: School, Family & Community Connections* synthesis referenced earlier in this report found significant experimental research showing the promise of dialogic reading as an intervention. Based on the research of Grover Whitehurst, dialogic reading is best described as a technique of reading “with” a child rather than “to” a child. The dialogic reading method is based upon an adult sharing a story book with a child so the child becomes an active participant in reading. The adult asks the child questions about the story and serves as a supportive audience. Dialogic reading can be implemented by adults with

low literacy skills because it is based largely upon verbal communication; a wordless picture book can be used.

Specific literacy development skills gained through dialogic reading practices include:

- Vocabulary
- Sound structure
- Print awareness and meaning
- Structure of stories and language
- Sustained attention
- Ability to experience the pleasure of reading

A key technique in dialogic reading is following the PEER sequence, a repetitive method of interaction between the adult and child. The adult:

- P**rompts the child to say something about the book
- E**valuates the child's response
- E**xpands the child's response by rephrasing and adding information
- R**epeats the prompt and encourages the child to expand the response

In developing Evansville's comprehensive early literacy system, NCFL recommends that the community make a significant commitment to implementing this research-based strategy with as many teachers and parents as possible. The Early Literacy Training Consortium will be certified as trainers for dialogic reading and can disseminate it to public and private preschools, child care centers and homes, parents who visit the library and parents who receive home visits from Healthy Families and the Health Department. It is recommended that the ECDC consider evaluating this component of the initiative to track the impact on children's literacy development and school readiness.

NCFL also recommends that the ECDC set ambitious targets to reach as many parents as possible by partnering with organizations that already engage parents. To get parents to come, link parent information sessions to other fun activities of interest to families. Where possible, provide parent workshops in English and Spanish on specific, research-based strategies for building children's literacy.

While some parent events may be well attended at schools, centers or libraries, the Evansville Vanderburgh County Public Library's bookmobile might be utilized to take the workshops to neighborhoods in combination with other programs of interest to parents. Currently, the bookmobile serves local childcare centers and targets children. Additional funding and/or staffing might be required to expand services to include outreach to parents.

Recommendation 6—Screen 4-year-olds for Literacy Development

NCFL is recommending that the ECDC promote a communitywide implementation of the *Get Ready to Read!* (GRTR!) screening tool with teachers, parents and home visitors. This simple tool was developed by reading researchers Grover Whitehurst and Chris Lonigan for the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) to help prepare all children to learn to read and write. NCLD recommends administering the screening twice during a child's fourth year. It takes just 10 minutes to administer and is available free online (<http://www.getreadytoread.org>), or can be purchased for approximately \$1.75 per assessment.

NCFL recently implemented the GRTR! tool in a project with Spanish speaking children. The children found the booklet fun and the teacher reported that the time involved was very manageable.

GRTR! also provides parents, educators, health-care professionals and advocates information to help build early literacy skills by integrating the emergent literacy screening and learning activities into routine early childhood education, child-care and parenting practices. Both the screening tool and the supporting resources are available in English and Spanish. NCFL would train the Early Literacy Training Consortium on ways to use the screening tool and supplementary materials.

In addition, NCFL recommends that the ECDC promote the inclusion of the pre- and post-test results in the child's materials shared with kindergarten teachers.

Recommendation 7—Engage the Medical Community

During meetings and interviews, several participants remarked that the medical community was a relatively untapped resource for meeting the goals of the initiative. NCFL recommends seeking a literacy champion among the medical community who could participate in the ECDC and recruit other physicians and medical personnel to join in.

NCFL also recommends that all pediatric offices and the Health Department Child/Teen Health Clinic be encouraged to participate in *Reach Out and Read*, a national program that links literacy information for parents with well-baby check ups. Two offices in Evansville currently participate (Hebron Pediatrics and St. Mary's Pediatric Clinic).

Reach Out and Read follows a three-part model, as described on their website (<http://www.reachoutandread.org>):

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1. At every well-child check-up, doctors and nurses encourage parents to read aloud to their young children and offer age-appropriate tips and encouragement. Parents who may have difficulty reading are encouraged to invent their own stories to go with picture books and spend time naming objects with their children.
 2. Providers give every child between the ages of six months and five years a new, developmentally appropriate children's book to keep.
 3. In literacy rich waiting room environments, often with volunteer readers, parents and children learn about the pleasures and techniques of looking at books together.

In Indiana, a state coalition, Reach Out and Read Indiana, is a collaborative effort between the Indiana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, MDwise and Riley Hospital for Children. Currently, 107 sites are active in Indiana giving out over 150,000 new books each year.

Dr. Anthony L. Schapker of Hebron Pediatrics shared that his four-physician practice has been pleased with the impact of Reach Out and Read during their first year of implementation. Hebron received a \$2,800 initial grant, which has been mostly expended in purchasing books. Dr. Schapker did express concern about the additional fundraising the office will need to do to sustain the project. He estimated that a yearly cost of \$4,000 will be required for his practice to continue with Reach Out and Read.

The Reach Out and Read program is recommended as a strategy both to engage the medical community as well as to involve volunteers, who participate by talking to parents and reading to children in waiting rooms.

Implementation Priorities

With the organization and staffing of the Early Childhood Development Coalition, work can proceed on several fronts. Ultimately, the ECDC will need to decide if all or some of the recommendations are viable. However, the following are suggested as priorities in moving forward with the initiative.

1. Evaluate the recommendations and decide whether to implement all or some of them.
2. Solidify membership on the ECDC. Consider naming a chair to be the point person for each of the seven recommendations.

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- Have each chair organize a subcommittee to outline goals, schedules and deliverables for the next two years.
3. Review expertise needed to chair each committee (based on the seven recommendations). Identify gaps in expertise and recruit accordingly. For instance, is there a member currently with expertise in public awareness, such as an advertising executive, to advise the ECDC on the public awareness campaign?
 4. Identify a high profile champion from the community to be the face of the initiative. This might be a physician, business leader or civic activist who can be a public cheerleader, ambassador and fund raiser. This person would act as an honorary chairperson, working with the paid coordinator of the ECDC.
 5. Organize the Early Literacy Training Consortium of the ECDC and hold the first training academy in November 2006.
 6. Map out a plan for engaging the community through discussions and forums on school readiness indicators.
 7. Take advantage of Sharon Darling's visit in December to make a big announcement about the initiative—either the community forums or the Reach Out and Read initiative, depending on progress in the implementation.
 8. Begin implementing the *Get Ready to Read!* assessment with pilot sites.

Timeline

Activity	Who Responsible	When
1. Evaluate recommendations, set priorities	ECDC Board	9/06
2. Based on recommendations, recruit additional members to the ECDC for their expertise	ECDC Board and Director	9/06
3. Name committee chairs and committees for each of the recommendations	ECDC director	9/06
4. Send invitations for Early Literacy Training Consortium for introductory meeting in October	ECDC director and committee chair for Recommendation 4	9/06
5. Recruit high profile honorary chair	ECDC Board	10/06
6. Hold first meeting of the Early Childhood Training Consortium to explain the concept and introduce the trainings offered.	ECDC with NCFL	10/06

Activity	Who Responsible	When
7. Hold first Early Literacy Training Consortium Academy offering five trainings over two days: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings from the National Early Literacy Panel • Building Literacy into Daily Routines for Infants and Toddlers • Building Literacy into Classroom Routines • Infusing Literacy into Home Visits • Using the <i>Get Ready to Read!</i> screening tool 	ECDC director, committee chair for Recommendation 4, NCFL	11/06
8. Identify 2-3 centers to use the <i>Get Ready to Read!</i> screening tool as a pilot	ECDC chair and committee chair for Recommendation 6	11/06
9. Sharon Darling’s visit to Rotary, ECDC and Mayor’s Roundtable—consider announcing community forums, Reach Out and Read or dialogic reading project plans depending on which is farthest along.	Sharon Darling, Welborn Baptist Foundation staff	12/19/06
10. Hold second Early Literacy Training Consortium Training Academy, offering 3 parent-oriented trainings and one screening training over two days: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • La Lectura en Familia/Families Reading Together • Setting the Stage for Your Child to Read • Dialogic Reading Workshops 	ECDC director, committee chair for Recommendation 4, NCFL	2/07
11. Hold Community Forums to discuss readiness indicators	ECDC director and chair for Recommendation 2	2/07-3/07
12. Announce and promote citywide parent event, sponsored by ECDC, tied to summer reading	ECDC director, committee chair for Recommendation 5	3/07
13. Citywide parent event with dialogic reading sessions etc.	ECDC director with chair for Recommendation 5	6/07
14. Follow up <i>Get Ready to Read!</i> screening for pilot center	ECDC director with chair for Recommendation 6	5/06-7/06

Activity	Who Responsible	When
15. Present final recommendations for readiness indicators	Honorary Chair, ECDC director and chair for Recommendation 2	6/07
16. Early Literacy Training Consortium—2-day training academy with repeated sessions based on requests (note: assume new participants as well as repeat participants)	ECDC director, committee chair for Recommendation 4, NCFL	6/07
17. Progress Report to the Community (timed with back to school)	ECDC	8/07
18. Year Two: ongoing work with Indicators, Awareness, Dialogic Reading, <i>Get Ready to Read!</i> Screening, and Reach Out and Read.	ECDC	8/07- 8/08

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