



(2-3-05)

The U.S. Department of Education cites compelling statistics to show that Even Start serves our most-in-need families.

- Even Start serves over an estimated 113,000 parents and children nationwide in 1,083 state-administrated projects¹.
- 84% of Even Start's families are at or below Federal poverty levels.
- Further, 84% of Even Start adults have no high school diploma or GED; 44% of the parents have not gone beyond the 9th grade.
- Even Start families are significantly poorer than Head Start families. Nearly half of Even Start families have an annual household income under \$6,000 contrasted with only 13 percent of Head Start families.
- Even Start adults are more economically disadvantaged than adults in regular adult education programs. Indeed, 90 percent of Even Start families are living below the poverty line compared to only 25 percent of adults in regular adult education programs.

Participation in Even Start helps parents acquire the skills they need to be their child's first and most important teacher. It ensures that their children enter school ready to learn and continue to do well in school. Without Even Start, many parents would be unable to read to their children or support their education. Even the best instruction in school cannot make up for a lack of parental support.

- Reading to a child increases their vocabulary and helps them prepare for school. Only 39% of children ages 3-5 whose mothers lack a high school diploma were read to daily. In contrast, 71% of children of college-graduate mothers were read to daily.
- Children's literacy levels are strongly linked to the educational level of their parents, especially their mothers. The higher the mother's educational level, the better the child performs in school and on tests.

¹ 2002-2003 Dept. of Education national data reported through the Consolidated Title I Report, Even Start. Programs served 47,051 parents and 66,515 young children, for a total of 113,000 participants from 43,709 families, in 1,083 sub-grants nationally (latest national numbers available).

- Also, the PA statewide Even Start evaluation has consistently found that parents who participate in Even Start make significant gains in the amount of time they read with their children. The fact that these gains are statistically significant indicates that the gains can be attributed to participation in Even Start and are not by chance.

The admirable goals of *No Child Left Behind* can never be achieved if we leave the parents behind.

Recent evaluations have been critical of Even Start, but occurred before key changes that I required in 2000 with the *Literacy Involves Families Together* (LIFT) Act and which were also added in 2001 with *No Child Left Behind*.

These changes include:

- Instructional activities based on scientifically-based reading research.
- Stronger staff qualification requirements.
- Programs being built on existing *high quality* community-based services.
- The Administration is suggesting increase funding for reading programs -- such as “Early Reading First”, “Reading First”, and the “Striving Readers” high school program. “Striving Readers” funds would increase to \$200 Million. None of these new programs have been scrutinized by any research-based analysis to determine their effectiveness.
- Head Start continues to grow yet annual evaluations and performance indicators demonstrate continuing poor results.

Eliminating or even reducing funding for Even Start will leave over **43,000²** families without vital literacy services.

Many of those will be our newest citizens, in search of the English language skills they need to obtain a job and support their children’s education. Research does show this population is gaining the most from Even Start programs.

We cannot leave these families behind.

² Ibid.