

Even Start Family Literacy Program (CFDA No. 84.213)

I. Legislation

Title I, Part B of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, (20 U.S.C. 6361-6370) (expires September 30, 1999).

II. Funding History

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Appropriation</u>
1989	\$ 14,820,000
1990	24,201,000
1991	49,770,000
1992	70,000,000
1993	89,123,000
1994	91,373,000
1995	102,024,000
1996	101,997,000

III. Analysis of Program Performance

A. Goals and Objectives

The goal of the Even Start Family Literacy Program is to demonstrate that comprehensive programs of two-generation literacy, parenting, and early childhood education can improve educational opportunities and life chances of disadvantaged families in local communities throughout the United States. The program supports family-centered educational programs for parents and children from birth through age seven, to help parents become full partners in the education of their children and to help children reach their full potential as learners.

Even Start projects must provide participating families with an integrated program of early childhood education, adult literacy or basic education, and parenting education. The program's design is based on the notion that these components build on each other and that families need to receive all three services, not just one or two, in order to effect lasting change and improve children's school success.

B. Strategies to Achieve the Goals

The Department awards formula grants to state education agencies that, in turn, make competitive discretionary grants to partnerships of local education agencies and community-based organizations for Even Start Family Literacy projects. In addition to the state grant programs, funds are set aside for federal discretionary grants for projects serving families of migratory workers and families in Indian tribes and tribal organizations, and in the outlying areas. The statute also requires that funds be set aside for a grant to a prison that houses women and children and authorizes a reservation of funds for statewide family literacy initiatives.

To be eligible for Even Start, a family must have a parent who is eligible to participate in an adult

education program under the Adult Education Act or who is within the state’s compulsory school attendance age range, and one or more children less than eight years of age. Projects must serve eligible families who are most in need of services, and provide high-quality, intensive instructional programs for adults and their children, including some instruction through home-based services and some joint activities for parent and child. Projects are required to form cooperative projects to use, rather than duplicate, existing community resources.

**Table 1
Even Start Projects and Participants: 1989–1996**

Fiscal Year of Funds	School Year of Operation	Number of Projects	Number of Families	Number of Children	Number of Adults	Total Participants
1989	1989-90	76	2,450	2,760	2,900	5,660
1990	1990-91	122	6,600	8,580	7,560	16,140
1991	1991-92	239	14,900	20,890	17,920	38,810
1992	1992-93	340	16,518	22,429	18,586	41,015
1993	1993-94	439	29,400	38,220	28,224	66,444
1994	1994-95	476	28,500	37,619	27,227	64,846
1995	1995-96	560	31,000	45,103	34,440	79,543
1996	1996-97	637	36,309	50,833	39,940	90,773

Note: Because no family data were collected in FY 1993, estimates of participant data for that year are based on established patterns. All participant and project data for FY 1996 are also estimated on the basis of prior patterns.
Sources: ED program data for funding and number of local grants; evaluation contractors (Abt Associates, Inc., Pelavin Associates, Inc., and Fu Associates, Ltd.) for participants.

C. Program Performance—Indicators of Impact and Effectiveness

The Even Start legislation requires an independent evaluation of the program. Although program performance indicators are now being developed, objectives of the program provide a framework for assessing available information on the progress of the Even Start Program.

Objective 1: Participating families improve their literacy level and self-sufficiency.

Even Start has helped many adults attain a GED. The first evaluation covering the first four years found that, across all projects, 8 percent of adults who entered Even Start without a GED or diploma achieved one. In a randomized experimental study of five projects, 22 percent of Even Start adults attained a GED, compared with 6 percent of adults in a control group. About 8 percent of all adult participants in 1994–95 attained their GED (V.2).

Also, Even Start children learned school readiness skills earlier than control group children, but control group children caught up once they entered preschool or kindergarten (V.2). In 1994–95, although there was no control group, Even Start children gained statistically significant amounts on tests of school readiness and language skills (V.3).

A consistent finding from year to year is that intensive Even Start interventions resulted in improved adult and child performance on literacy tests. Adults and children who participated actively in Even Start's core services gained more on literacy tests than adults and children who did not (V.3).

A finding of the first national evaluation is that the extent to which parents took part in parenting education is positively related to children's vocabulary. Children of adults who participated actively in parenting education classes had higher scores on a vocabulary test than children of adults who did not (V.2).

The first national evaluation found that Even Start participants showed only moderate gains in literacy - no different from those of adults in a control group. (V.2) However, in 1994–95, participating adults achieved significant gains on all four measures of adult literacy (V.3).

Although the first national evaluation did not show significant gains for adults on any important parenting education measures during the first four years, in 1994–95, parents achieved significant gains on the HOME screening questionnaire used to measure the home environment (V.3).

In summary, the Even Start model has positive short-term effects on families. Furthermore, the greater the intensity of services offered and used by families, the more the families benefit.

Objective 2: Even Start projects provide high-quality instructional and support services to families most in need.

The first national evaluation of Even Start showed that, during its first four years, Even Start served its intended population. Of all Even Start adults served, 79 percent had not completed high school. The typical adult entered Even Start with the literacy skills of a high school student, while the typical 3- or 4-year-old child who entered Even Start scored at the ninth percentile on a nationally normed vocabulary test (V.2). Similarly, in the 1994–95 program year, 84 percent of adults in Even Start had not completed high school (V.3).

The first national evaluation showed that 66 percent of Even Start families had total annual incomes under \$10,000 (V.2). Similarly in 1994–95, 57 percent of families had total annual incomes of less than \$9,000 (V.3).

During its first four years, 46 percent of Even Start families reported job wages as their primary source of financial support, while 49 percent reported government assistance as their primary source of support (V.2). In 1994–95, these figures remain the same. However, about three-quarters of Even Start parents are not employed at time of intake: 76 percent in 1992–93 and 73 percent in 1994–95 (V.3).

The ethnic composition of Even Start families has changed strikingly since 1989–90 when Hispanic parents represented 22 percent of all Even Start parents. In 1994–95, Hispanic parents constituted the largest ethnic group (36 percent). The percentage of white parents decreased from 40 percent in 1992–93 to 34 percent in 1994–95. The percentage of African Americans also decreased, from 36 percent in 1989–90 to 23 percent in 1994–95. Asians and American Indians each account for less than 10 percent of the parent population (V.3).

Chapter 104-4

Not surprisingly, the language needs of Even Start families are increasing as the number of families with limited English proficiency increases. The percentage of primarily Spanish-speaking parents in the program rose from 15 percent in 1989–90 to 29 percent in 1994–95. In 1994–95, 37 percent of the parents did not speak English in the home.

Since 1989–90, about half of all Even Start families have been two-parent families, between 37 and 39 percent have been single-parent families, and 12 to 13 percent have been extended families. Furthermore, in 1994–95, 57 percent of Even Start families had three or more children age 15 or younger (V.3).

On average, 55 percent of 1994–95 Even Start families across all projects had three or more types of extreme needs including: an annual income of less than \$9,000, a single-parent family, a parent who has completed only the eighth grade or lower, English as a second language (V.3) or at least three children under 16.

The first national evaluation established that a high level of exposure to program services is important. Adults and children who participated actively in Even Start's core services gained significantly more on tests than adults and children who participated less actively (V.2).

In 1994–95, Even Start projects offered educational services for an average of 10 months out of the year. Projects offered, on average, 31 to 36 hours per month of adult education, 10 hours per month of parenting education, and 35 to 39 hours of early childhood education each month. These amounts are slightly higher than the amounts offered in 1993–94. Also, projects offered, on average, 10 hours per month of education for parents and children together in 1994–95 (V.3).

During the first four years, the average Even Start family participated in the program for 7 months and received 13.5 hours of adult education, 6.5 hours of parenting education, and 26 hours of early childhood education each month. (V.2) In 1994–95, the hours of annual participation (for participating parents) in adult education averaged 100. The hours of annual participation (for participating parents) in parenting education averaged 32 hours. On average, families received 8 or 9 home visits in the 1994–95 program year (V.3).

Objective 3: Even Start will be cost-effective in its operations.

The first national evaluation showed that cost-effectiveness is likely to be achieved only after a project is fully implemented. Projects routinely required at least a year to establish a fully operational program, and several years to develop good participation and recruitment rates. As projects gained more experience over the years of their grant, the costs of service per family went down (V.2).

The average federal cost per Even Start family declined over the first four years of the program, from \$5,894 in 1989–90 to \$3,669 in 1990–91, and again to \$2,503 in 1991–92. These figures do not differentiate among project cohorts, however. The decline in cost reflects increases in the average number of families served each year as projects have matured and become more efficient. Even Start projects also are required to assume an increasing share of project costs over a four-year period, beginning with 10 percent in the first year and increasing to 40 percent in the fourth year. Some projects obtain substantial resources (e.g., matching funds, in-kind contributions, and the value

of referred services), in addition to their federal Even Start funds, in order to expand services to participating families (V.2). For all projects in 1994–95 (including a substantial number of newer projects), the per-family cost is slightly higher than \$2,700 per year (V.3).

In 1991–92, the average of \$2,503 in federal funding per family was augmented by an average of \$1,352 in other resources, to arrive at total resources of \$3,855 per Even Start family. Thus, federal Even Start funds accounted for 65 percent of the total resources used per family, and other funds accounted for 35 percent in 1991–92 (V.2). Similarly in 1994–95, the federal contribution of \$2,700 was augmented by an average of \$1,334 in other resources (V.3).

Objective 4: Even Start builds the capacity of states and local communities to develop and operate family literacy programs.

Even Start projects usually receive grant funding in four-year cycles. Projects are eligible for only two such cycles, or eight total years of Even Start funding. Even Start projects also are required to assume an increasing share of project costs over a four-year period to help projects prepare for financial independence. The national evaluation provides information on projects' plans to continue after their current multiyear grant expires. Ninety percent of projects in 1993–94 and 1994–95 planned to continue. Of these projects, most planned to do so at least in part by reapplying for another Even Start demonstration grant. However, in 1993–94, only 25 percent of the projects planned to depend solely upon another Even Start grant to continue services (V.3).

IV. Planned Studies

1. Second National Evaluation of Even Start. Currently in its second four-year cycle, the national evaluation of Even Start uses the Even Start Information System (ESIS) to measure the results of the program. The ESIS consists of four universal sets of data collection instruments (plus one set for the sample study) designed to provide data that will allow the Department to address the implementation and outcomes of Even Start. ESIS is designed to collect a common set of data from each Even Start project and from all Even Start participants. The universe study reports out data on all projects and participants. A sample study collects and reports program effectiveness data based on 60 randomly selected projects and up to 50 new participant families in each project. Case studies of migrant and tribal projects capture the details of program implementation and operations of those programs. The third annual interim report is due in 1997. The final report is due in 1998.
2. Special Analyses of Migrant Education Even Start Projects (MEES) and Projects for Indian Tribes and Tribal Organizations. These special studies are produced from the ESIS national evaluation data. These studies provide a descriptive analysis of the MEES projects and projects that serve Indian tribes and tribal organizations. These reports are due in 1997.
3. Case Studies of Even Start Infants and Toddlers Programs. This study will examine Even Start Family Literacy projects to identify those that implement promising strategies for parents who participate in programs with their infants or toddlers. The study will focus on how projects encourage children's cognitive and motor development, encourage age-appropriate behavior and responses, and prepare parents for certain milestones in their children's lives. It will also examine healthy parent-child interactions in a variety of circumstances and situations. The report is due in 1997.

Chapter 104-6

4. Observational Study of Even Start Family Literacy Projects. This study, now being designed, will examine several successful Even Start programs that combine multiple indicators of program quality and successful outcomes for families and children. The study will provide well-integrated quantitative and qualitative data on how Even Start programs generate positive results, in order to develop information that will help practitioners examine their own projects for improvement. The study will be used to update the program's quality indicators by benchmarking against successful programs.
5. Early Childhood Transitions in Even Start and Title I. This study will examine the extent to which Even Start provides a bridge between early childhood education and the early primary grades, and the extent to which the program makes a difference in the success of young learners. It builds on earlier analyses and case studies that suggest that Even Start can facilitate children's progress through formal and informal collaboration between Even Start and Title I in schoolwide programs and through encouragement of parental involvement and the school's acceptance of that involvement. It will also assess the extent to which there is coherence between the curriculum used in the early childhood education component of Even Start and the content of instruction in the primary grades.

V. Sources of Information

1. Program files.
2. National Evaluation of the Even Start Family Literacy Program, Final Report (Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates, Inc., January 1995).
3. National Evaluation of the Even Start Family Literacy Program, 1995 Interim Report (Arlington, VA: Fu Associates, Ltd., January 1997). No ERIC access number.

VI. Contacts for Further Information

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